Getting the Message:

Development Communication Strategies in

the Kingdom of Tonga

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Abstract

All development initiatives comprise a communications component, whether a public notice in the local newspaper, community meetings or a mass media public awareness campaign. But communication within development involves more than simply informing recipient populations of initiatives, events and targets. Communication is central to eliciting buy-in and creating a sense of community ownership; it is integral to maintaining public trust through the transparency and accountability it encourages; and, most importantly, it allows target populations to have their say in development initiatives that impact on their lives.

Different countries, cultures and socio-political conditions will suit different communication types. Determining factors include, literacy rates, geographic distance, telecommunications infrastructure, religion, culture and politics.

This thesis examines the communication strategies deployed by NGOs working in the Kingdom of Tonga. These strategies are analysed in the context of wider political, cultural and mass media conditions, with particular reference to the state of Tonga's news media.

In-country research for this thesis was conducted at the culmination of a tumultuous period for the Pacific's only Constitutional Monarchy. Tonga has experienced rapid socio-political changes in recent decades with an increasingly dependent economy, growing challenges to traditional institutions and the crowning of a new King in 2006. In November 2010, the nation elected the first Parliament in 135 years to give commoners, rather than nobles, the majority in the Legislative Assembly. The General Election was conducted under an amended constitution, and was the first since riots destroyed much of the capital of Nuku'alofa four years earlier.

With these events as a backdrop, this research asks what forms of communication work best in Tonga? Are these as effective on the relatively developed main island of Tongatapu as remote, outer islands? And what role does mainstream media play in keeping the population informed of development issues?

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Acknowledgements

Preface

As all researchers will be aware, our discoveries and conclusions are inevitably coloured by our own backgrounds. Prior to embarking on this thesis I had been a journalist for 15 years, working as a reporter, sub-editor and editor, both in New Zealand and overseas. When I returned to study in 2009 and began thinking about a thesis proposal, I hoped to somehow marry my work experience in journalism with Development Studies and looked for where the two might converge. The most obvious, it seemed, was in the promotion and maintenance of good governance.

Poor governance – corruption, political instability, violence, absence of the rule of law and ineffective government among others – undercuts even the best-planned and executed development interventions. Good governance therefore rates alongside other fundamental development issues, such as gender, funding, sustainability and so on. In fact, governance features prominently in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (OECD, 2005), and is Goal 8a of the Millennium Development Goals 2000 (UNDP, 2000). Goal 8a describes good governance as a key objective in establishing a fair, rule-based global financial and trading system.

The news media has a central role to play in promoting good governance by shining a light on corruption, nepotism, abuse of power, violence, negligence and plain ineptitude.

> "The power of the media in a democracy comes from it being the 'watchdog' of society, the 'fourth estate', supplementing the other three pillars of democracy – the executive, the legislature, and the judiciary – by providing the necessary checks and balances on issues that concern the masses" (Saeed, 2009).

But what happens when the news media is not free and independent? How do people get information when government, powerful business interests, or their own culture act muzzle journalists and editors? I had experienced just such a stifled media first hand. From 1999 to 2001, I worked as a sub-editor for Viet Nam's English language daily, *Viet Nam News.* Each night we expatriate employees witnessed the newspaper's copy go to censors at the Ministry of Information and Communications before finally

being passed on to the printers. This heavy interference made us realise how valuable and central a free press is to a society that hopes to keep abuses of power in check.

Of course communist governments have no monopoly on censorship: I saw similarly sanitised newspapers in the constitutional monarchy of Dubai. The newspaper format there was almost identical to *Viet Nam News*: daily front-page photo stories of visiting Emirs espousing lifelong fraternal devotion to their Dubai opposites. The plight of South Asian guest workers who daily died from heat exhaustion while working on building sites never made the news pages.

Neither nation scores well in international press freedom ratings. The UAE, to which Dubai belongs, and Viet Nam are both rated 'Not Free' by Washington-based NGO Freedom House (Freedom of the Press 2010 Global Rankings). Meanwhile, Reporters Without Borders relegated the UAE to 87th in its 2010 ranking of 178 nations for global press freedom. Viet Nam climbed to 165th in its ranking, but was still among the 15 least free nations in the world (Reporters Without Borders, 2010).

What interested me most was the knowledge that censorship and other media controls can never completely control the flow of information within a country. I saw this in 2001 as discontent over official corruption and forced internal migration sparked a violent uprising among ethnic minority groups in the Central Highlands of Viet Nam. Protesters attacked police stations and killed party officials. The government responded by closing Central Highland provinces and airlifting in over a thousand troops aboard commandeered Viet Nam Airlines passenger jets. None of this was reported officially, but it seemed all of Viet Nam knew about the reaction within hours. This information came to us by word of mouth. There were wild rumours too, but on the whole the information was accurate and timely.

News media in the Pacific region is often less than completely free. Fiji is the obvious example, where coup authorities arrest and intimidate journalists, as well as strictly censor the news media (Amnesty International Fiji report 2009). In another constitutional monarchy, this time in the Pacific, Tonga's first independent newspaper, *Taimi 'o Tonga*, was banned in 2003 under the Media Operators Act 2003, Newspaper Act 2003 and Act of Constitution of Tonga (Amendment) Act 2003. This concerted effort by Parliament to control the news media was later overturned by Tonga's Supreme Court. But as Kalafi Moala, editor and owner of *Taimi 'o Tonga,*

later explained, such draconian attacks are rarely needed in most Pacific Island nations:

> "At the end of the 1980s, the state and church institutions predominately owned media in Tonga. For many years, the government was the only institution that had money to operate its own newspaper, radio, and even television.

> "In a position of domination, **island governments** [my emphasis] often use the media they own to cover up their mistakes, misinform the public in regard to state intentions and policies, and effectively quash any attempt to bring them to accountability" (quoted by Papoutsaki and Harris, 2008. p176).

I wanted to find out how communities find and pass on information where the news media is prevented from doing so. How do popular movements, such as the one that led to an uprising in Viet Nam or Tonga's democracy movement, communicate and gain popular traction? I hoped to document these alternative information conduits so they might also be employed by development agencies to communicate their aims.

Tonga seemed the perfect case study for my thesis. Not only did the literature confirm Tonga had a tightly controlled mainstream news media, it also provided:

- a dense urban population on the main island of Tongatapu with isolated rural populations on outer islands

- the predictability of a single news event – the November 2010 election – that would allow me to easily track news and analyse how Tongans got their information

- 98 per cent literacy and high level of English spoken

- direct relevance to New Zealand's aid priorities.

A preliminary trip to Tonga in May 2010 taught me my first thesis lesson – don't believe everything you read. Much had changed since *Taimi 'o Tonga* had been banned in 2003. In seven years, independent print media had blossomed with at least four weekly newspapers and a news website all operating out of the capital. Television had grown from one state-controlled, black and white channel to multi-channel satellite, as well as private terrestrial broadcasters. Radio had also flourished

with independently owned commercial FM stations broadcasting on Tongatapu and beyond.

That is not to say Tonga had become a journalist's paradise of openness and free-flowing official information. There remains no freedom of information legislation (nor within any Pacific nation) (Rodrigues, 2008), ministries and Parliament remain parsimonious with public information and the government still talks about reigning in the news media (Pacific.Scoop, 2010).

It became clear that my original thesis question was not supported by Tonga's 2010 media reality. What did reveal itself, however, was that information on development projects within Tonga was often patchy if not completely non-existent. It remains the case that many projects (not only in Tonga, but around the world) are merely presented to communities by donors and government as a fait accompli. There is little or no consultation or opportunity for local input (Flore-Smereczniak, 2008).

Development projects are not well reported or communicated to the population, as Kalafi Moala explained during a 2010 interview for this thesis. He partly blamed this on the Ministry of Information failing to do its job, but also said that NGOs had become too closely linked to institutions, and had forgotten the fundamental tenets of Tongan culture – family, extended community and village. This sentiment was echoed by many of the news editors I interviewed during that first May 2010 visit to Tonga, and by Rodrigues (2008).

These complaints led to my discovery of a rich vein of development discourse – development communication. This field of research is not only concerned with the role of journalism or the news media in development, but the whole process of communication as it relates to development. This then would form the basis of my thesis *Getting the Message: Development Communication Strategies in the Kingdom of Tonga.*

Ken Lewis

Wellington, 2011.

Chapter one: Introduction

Introduction

> "I have consistently preached the gospel, which I expounded at the 1972 South
> Pacific Editor's Conference, that if government by the people for the people is
> to mean anything more than a catch-phrase then the people concerned must be
> fully informed. That is the only way in which they can make intelligent
> judgements" (Usher, 1976).

Sir Len Usher, a former editor of the *Fiji Times*, made the above statement during a
Communication in the Pacific Conference held at the East West Center in Honolulu in
1975. While Usher was speaking about his own role as a newspaper editor, his
declaration can just as easily be applied beyond journalism to society in general and
to the development industry in particular. To make "intelligent judgements" requires
people first to be fully informed, and that requires effective communication.

Communication has always played a part in development efforts, as
Inagaki (2007) states:

> "Throughout the trajectory of international assistance practices in the last 60
> years, communication has always played important roles, albeit mostly in the
> background" (p 46).

This particular form of interaction has been dubbed by development and
communication scholars to be 'development communication', 'participatory
communication' and 'communication for social change' to name a few.[1] But whatever
the term, the key aims of this form of dialogue is to mobilise support, create
awareness, foster norms, encourage behaviour change, influence policy makers, and
shift frames-of-reference for social issues (Wilkins and Mody, 2001).

Alfonso Gumucio-Dagron (2009) states it even more strongly:

> "Communication for social change is about people taking into their own hands
> the communication processes that will allow them to make their voices heard,
> to establish horizontal dialogues with planners and development specialists, to

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[1] Development-related communication practices will herein be termed development communication.

take decisions on the development issues that affect their lives, to ultimately achieve social changes for the benefit of their community" (p 453).

As stated in the *Preface*, several newspaper editors in the Kingdom of Tonga interviewed for this thesis complained about the lack of information available on development issues and projects. This lack of transparency speaks to wider issues of governance – or rather a lack of 'good governance'. The World Bank's Kaufmann-Kraay-Mastruzzi Worldwide Governance Indicators uses six dimensions to measure good governance. They are: Voice and Accountability, Political Stability and Lack of Violence, Government Effectiveness, Regulatory Quality, Rule of Law, and Control of Corruption (World Bank).

In recent decades, Tonga has fallen somewhat short in several of these criteria. It has suffered a succession of scandals over financial mismanagement, nepotism and corruption involving government ministers and senior civil servants, as well as the nobility and royal family. The government has in the past attempted to silence the nation's nascent independent news media, which had been highlighting these failures, and it had procrastinated over popular demands for greater democracy. This intransigence was a primary cause of the violent and devastating 2006 riots in the capital, Nuku'alofa (Campbell, 2008). While the government has since backed away from controlling the media and has moved to steadily towards greater democracy culminating in the November 2010 General Election, it seems information on development issues has remained relatively inaccessible.

This raises important questions for development in Tonga, and in general: Without the mainstream media reporting and informing populations on development initiatives, how do agencies communicate their plans and goals to target populations? How do they evaluate needs, select communities and initiate contact? And importantly, how do they create a sense of ownership of development initiatives within communities in order to achieve sustainable results?

Research Aim

The aim of this thesis is to find out how local development agencies communicate with target populations. The intention is to uncover and highlight communication

strategies proven to be effective on the ground so that these might be used by development agencies wishing to work in the Kingdom of Tonga.

Research objectives

To achieve that aim, the thesis will be guided by the following objectives:

1. To research and understand the history, trends and current discourse on development communication and identify its key themes

2. To understand the history of Tonga in relation to its political landscape, especially issues that led to the calls for democracy and the historic November 2010 election under an amended constitution

3. To understand the background to, and provide a snapshot of, the contemporary mainstream media landscape in Tonga

4. Establish what communication strategies are used by NGOs in Tonga and ascertain which are the most effective and why

Chapter outline

Chapter Two discusses the methodology used to gather information for this research and considers wider ethical implications and constraints encountered in the field.

Chapter Three addresses objective 1 by providing an overview of academic literature concerned with development communication, outlining the main debates and highlighting how these have impacted on development initiatives.

Chapter Four charts the political and mass media landscapes of Tonga as specified in objective 2. This will provide context to the activities of local NGOs and the communication strategies they have adopted.

Chapter Five backgrounds the NGOs studied in Tonga, detailing their aims and target audiences.

Chapter Six analyses the results of the research identifying communication strategies that are used, are effective and relating these to the themes identified by objective 1.

Chapter Seven concludes by reiterating the main findings and detailing four main conclusions to be drawn from the research.

Chapter two: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter provides a brief explanation of how this topic was chosen and how this research fits with wider development issues and within development communication in particular. It then outlines the design of the research and explains why a qualitative method was selected. Some of the challenges of making contact with the main participants are then detailed and an explanation is provided of how these were overcome. The chapter concludes by detailing some of the ethical constraints encountered.

Media, Tonga, communication

As stated in the *Preface* to this thesis, my original intention was to research the mechanisms through which populations receive information on important issues – especially political ones – when the mainstream media is tightly controlled. This proposal was based on an assumption about levels of media censorship and control, subsequently discovered to be false. While the country's news media certainly had been under strenuous attack by the government in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the situation by 2010 was very different. Rather than a news media cowed by oppressive regulation, a vibrant, plural and free media was instead the reality.

Fortunately, another more compelling research idea evolved based on comments made by Tongan journalist, editor and media owner Kalafi Moala (interview 2010). He stated that information and reporting on development activities within the country was almost non-existent and that few Tongans knew what development agencies or the government were doing for them in the name of development. He blamed the Ministry of Information and Communications for this, but also the development agencies themselves. He described these as being too closely linked to institutions, and decried them for forgetting fundamental tenets of Tongan culture – family, extended community and village.

This lack of information on development initiatives has several potential pitfalls for development agencies. It means that the government, donors and NGOs are less

accountable for their rationalisation, financing and outcomes of development projects. This lack of information cuts local populations out of the decision-making process on matters that directly impact on their lives. This is not only undemocratic, it also undermines efforts to engender transparency and, in turn, local ownership – both key aims of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (OECD, 2005) to which Tonga is a signatory.

Transparency and ownership are internationally agreed development goals that are underpinned by effective communication strategies. These strategies keep stakeholders informed throughout the life of a project. Importantly, effective communication also enables citizens to become involved and to take ownership of an intervention. Clarke (2009) dubbed this community involvement 'active citizenship' and said it was a prerequisite for all participatory development interventions.

With these overarching issues in mind, this thesis will look at what communication strategies NGOs and government agencies deployed in Tonga. The intention is to discover how they inform local populations about development activities and to assess how effective these communication strategies are.

Epistemology

An underlying assumption of this thesis is that all research is subjective. As opposed to positivist, analytical and humanistic approaches I contend that a researcher cannot be an objective recorder and observer neutrally carrying out study (Kitchin and Tate, 2000). Instead, knowledge is 'situated' or as expressed by Susan Hanson (1992):

> "Knowledge is contingent on beliefs and values" (cited by Kitchin and Tate, 2000: p 24).

I came to my research with preset ideas, ideology, experience and interests. My choice of topic was a conscious reflection of this: as a former journalist, I decided to take the skills and knowledge I had built up in that profession and apply them to the realm of development studies. To that end, the knowledge I present in this thesis is 'constructed' and is a reflection of my own 'context' as a former journalist. It is inescapable that my context also includes more fundamental characteristics; namely being middle-aged, male and pakeha. These realities also influence the construction of this thesis – not only how the information is interpreted and presented, but how it was

gathered. In the Tongan context, I was always going to be perceived as an outsider. This undoubtedly influenced what information interviewees provided. This need not always be a handicap: being a stranger may mean topics considered taboo within a culture can be discussed more easily with an outsider.

The ultimate aim of this research is to apply its findings in the hope of affecting positive change in how development interventions are executed. The goal, therefore, is not a purely academic one intended only to increase the total of scientific and academic knowledge. Habermas would term this approach Critical Research (Kitchin and Tate, 2000), while Mikkelsen (2005) described it as 'applied research'. She added that development studies research was primarily aimed at producing knowledge that would:

> "…initiate change at the national (macro) level, the regional or sector level (meso) and/ or the community or micro level. The need for information about the conditions and contexts in which interventions take place, about the modalities and processes of implementation, and the consequences and impact of interventions prompt most development studies" (p 125).

Research method

This research was a strictly qualitative investigation that used interviews as the primary source of original information. A literature review was also undertaken to provide background on the issues under study. Aside from being dictated by the type of methodological approaches used, the choice to use a qualitative research method reflected real-life constraints upon the thesis, such as limited time, limited finances, and a lack of usable secondary, quantitative sources of relevant information (Mikkelsen, 2005).

A mix of methodological approaches was employed to investigate this thesis, although these fell under the general rubric of Historical-Hermeneutic science. Habermas (1978) coined this term when he divided science into three types: empirical-analytical, historical-hermeneutic and critical. Habermas created these delineations because there are different opinions on the purpose knowledge should serve.

"[Habermas] suggests that knowledge within each type is mediated through their own interests (technical, practical and emancipatory), developed within differing social media (work, language and power) and through different forms (material production, communication, and relations of domination and constraint)" (Kitchin and Tate, 2000: p 6).

This research primarily used a phenomenological approach in an attempt to 'understand', rather than 'explain' the world (Mikkelsen, 2005). This was achieved through in-depth interviews with individuals involved in the phenomena being studied, namely NGO and government staff, and recipients of development interventions. The research also had an element of the pragmatist school in that it tried to draw some conclusions about Tongan society through observation of individuals and communities.

The type of interviews used were what Patton (1990) would term an Interview Guide approach (cited by Kitchin and Tate, 2000: p 213). That is, there were always some predetermined questions asked of interviewees, although the interview itself was conversational and 'free-form' in style. Mikkelsen (2005) would describe this as an interpretive study, or one concerned primarily with the life of the participants; how they interpret events and how this creates order in their lives. For this study then, it was just as important to interview the recipients of development projects as it was to interview experts and bureaucrats (ibid).

Making contact

Getting Tonga-based agencies to respond to emails or telephone calls from a complete stranger based in New Zealand proved extremely difficult, so I decided the next best approach was to go to Tonga and contact development agencies directly. My first interview in August 2010 was at the NZAID office where I met Melelua Langi at the New Zealand High Commission. She provided a list of NGOs (not all of which had worked directly with NZAID) and suggested other sources that might provide contact names, such as the AusAID representative in Tonga. I also met with Drew Havea from the Civil Society Forum of Tonga. At the same time I met long-time expatriate resident in Tonga, Mary McCoy. Both supplied me with names, as well as valuable background information on NGOs and development projects.

The dozen or so contacts I gathered that first day were the beginning of a 'snowball' research sample. This method of choosing study participants seemed the most effective for several reasons. One was the short time period I had – I was booked to leave Tonga within four weeks so had little time to draw up a more systematic sample. Secondly, given the relatively small number of development agencies operating in Tonga, I concluded that compiling a more systematic list would not provide a significantly different sample than through a snowball selection process. Thirdly, it seemed that adopting a stricter process of selecting interviewees would be at odds with a qualitative research method that relied on a largely unstructured interview approach and technique. Finally, during my first brief trip to Tonga in April 2010, I found that citing a personal recommendation during introductions was the fastest way to gain trust and help interviewees feel at ease (e.g. "I was told by X at ABC NGO that you would be a good person to talk to.") This is a reflection of Pacific oral culture and preference for face-to-face communication (Wrighton, 2010), and makes it an ideal location for snowball sample selection.

There are risks associated with a snowball approach. Firstly, I was completely at the mercy of other people's availability during my four-week timeframe. Secondly, there was always the possibility of sample bias, as I had no way of ensuring my initial contacts would refer me to people they personally supported or agreed with, skewing my entire sample. To mitigate that risk, I needed an initial contact who was less likely to promote his or her own agenda. That was the primary reason for approaching Drew Havea in his capacity as Chair of the board of directors for the Civil Society Forum of Tonga. On its website, the Forum states that it is:

> *"... taking the lead role for involvement of Non Government Organisations on political, social, and economic activities that lead to sustainable development, economic growth and income generation"* (Civil Society Forum of Tonga, 2011).

Its role is as an umbrella organisation representing all development agencies in Tonga. As such, I trusted that Drew Havea would provide me with contacts for development agencies with varied backgrounds and aims

Development agencies

These contacts belonged to what would prove to be the key development agencies used in my research. Not least was MORDI Tonga, which both Havea and NZAID recommended. MORDI would become my primary case study, while other agencies, such as the Women and Children Crisis Centre, Tonga National Youth Congress, Tonga Community Development Trust and the Tonga Family Health Association became secondary case studies. I was also provided contacts of officials from within the Ministry of Finance and the Tonga Development Bank.

Another source of contacts came from the office of Chief Justice Anthony Ford. Chief Justice Ford was my only acquaintance in Tonga and both he and his wife Valda proved extremely helpful in obtaining background information on development issues. This included providing contacts within the Community Development Division of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food, Forestry and Fisheries, and the Langafonua organisation.

As previously stated, the most important contact turned out to be MORDI Tonga. National programme co-ordinator Soane Patolo was immediately willing to help with my research and asked me to join the NGO in a visit to a remote island community in the Vava'u group. The plan was to observe MORDI training sessions on outboard motor maintenance in the community of Hunga, meet MORDI's community facilitators and to stay with the community for three days to conduct my research. I would then return to Vava'u, where I could interview extension officers from the Tonga Community Development Trust. One of these, Alaipuke Esau, was on secondment from the Tonga National Youth Congress, so I could gain three NGO perspectives in remote island settings.

Interviews

For interviews, I initially explained who I was, where I was from and what I hoped to achieve by talking to each interviewee. I gave each subject a written description of the research with contact numbers, both in Tonga and New Zealand. Before or after the interview (whichever seemed more practical), I asked each interviewee to sign a consent form sanctioned by the Victoria University Human Ethics Committee.

During interviews I asked prepared questions that definitely required answers, but otherwise let my discussions with NGO representatives and development recipients to

follow their own course. This allowed interviewees to raise issues they felt strongly about, taking the interviews in directions I had not anticipated and greatly enhancing the depth of information gathered. This open-ended and informal approach is very much akin to a discussion style that several Pacific cultures term *talanoa*.

Talanoa

According to a paper written by Sitiveni Halapua (2000), *talanoa* is a frank face-to-face dialogue "without concealment". The term is derived from *tala,* meaning talking or telling stories and *noa,* meaning 'zero' or 'without concealment':

> "Pacific island societies have throughout their histories relied upon the *talanoa* process. It helps build better understanding and cooperation within and across our human relationships" (p 1).

For Donasiano Kalou Ruru (2010), *talanoa* is an informal and unstructured process:

> "It is subjective, mostly oral and collaborative, and is resistant to rigid institutional hegemonic control" (p 22).

Journalism taught me that recorded interviews often create extra problems: equipment failure means entire interviews can be lost and recordings are also time-hungry – every hour of recording takes around three hours to transcribe into usable notes. This convinced me to primarily take notes in shorthand. My final interview with MORDI national programme co-ordinator Soane Patolo was recorded, however. By that stage, I already knew MORDI would be my primary case study so it was important not to miss any of Soane's responses. I also knew that his rapid speaking style would likely outpace my note-taking skills.

In all, I interviewed 26 individuals who are quoted in this thesis. Several others provided background, but are not directly quoted. I believe this represents a good spread of development actors in Tonga, including NGOs, government ministries, donor organisations and recipients.

Positionality

As stated, I do not believe any of us can be completely objective: our social, political, cultural and gender experiences filter what we hear, see and feel. My own experience as a white, male, middle-aged, ex-journalist was always going to shape the way I perceived the research. Of course, experience can also be a positive. My experience as a journalist meant I was familiar with interviewing strangers from diverse backgrounds, and I was comfortable discussing complex topics while simultaneously taking notes and thinking of the next question to ask.

There were also disadvantages that no amount of experience could mitigate. I did not speak Tongan, I was not related to anyone in Tonga (important in a family-centric culture), I didn't look Tongan and I lacked local knowledge. Rightly or wrongly, I think most of those I met perceived me to be relatively wealthy. These could all be obstacles to free-flowing communication. But being so obviously a stranger can also have advantages: I could be forgiven by Tongans for asking about issues (politics, the monarchy and the Church) they may have been more reluctant to discuss openly among themselves and I was excused from some cultural demands (observing the Sabbath).

My foreignness did not help me when it came to talking alone with women especially on the island of Hunga. While it was never stated directly, it was obvious that local custom forbade woman of marriageable age to be left alone with a male. On the one occasion that did happen by chance, the interviewee was distinctly uneasy. I cannot say whether this taboo prevented women speaking their minds freely, or whether it impacted the conclusions I have drawn. I acknowledge that this is one area that could be seen as a weakness in the research.

Conclusion

This chapter briefly reiterated the origins of this research topic and placed it within the context of wider development discourse. It then detailed how and why a qualitative research methodology was selected and discussed some of the epistemological debates that underpin this approach. Practical issues that impacted upon information gathering were examined and explanations provided on how these

were addressed. Finally, the chapter addressed how the research may have been affected by ethical and positional constraints.

The next chapter will take a detailed look at academic debates surrounding communication in development in order to place this research into a overarching, scholarly context.

Chapter three: Literature review

Introduction

This chapter identifies the three key theoretical threads of modernisation, diffusion and participation within the development communication discourse. It also draws attention to several associated communication strategies and debates that have relevance to conditions existing in Tonga. Finally, it identifies some gaps in the current theoretical debate.

DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION

The same economic, socio-political and cultural forces that have buffeted the development world over the past 70 years have also shaped the progress of development communication. During the confidence of the post-World War Two era, communication methods mirrored the modernisation approach of the First World instructing the Third on the correct path to progress. In the 1960s and 70s, communication practitioners liken many others in development began questioning the assumptions of modernisation and their use of mass media to 'inject' modernising attitudes into compliant and defenceless Third World populations. The post-war consensus was further shattered by divisions caused by the neo-liberal economic blitzkrieg of the 1980s and by the subsequent game-changing ramifications of globalisation in a post-Cold War world (Wilkins and Mody, 2001; Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte, 2006).

Perhaps the most fundamental question to ask initially about development communication is how exactly it differs to the wider field of development? According to Wilkins and Mody (2001):

> "Broadly, development communication refers to a process of strategic intervention toward social change initiated by institutions and communities" (p 385).

This is broad indeed, and there is not a lot in that definition to distinguish development communication from virtually any exercise that aims to transform

conditions within a community. Nancy Morris (2003) provides a more succinct description:

> "Communication is a key component of many overseas aid programmes. Efforts to improve living conditions in the world's poorer areas through social service and infrastructure development are often accompanied by communication campaigns aimed at the general population" (p 225).

Changing the situation of the world's poorest is achieved (in part) through the strategic application of communication technologies and strategies. Communication tools, properly applied, can awaken awareness that mobilises support, encourages behaviour change, influences policy makers and even upends social frames of reference (Wilkins and Mody, 2001; Morris, 2003). Nor does communication need to be an add-on to other development drivers, such as the creation of infrastructure, capacity building or acquiring specialist expertise – communication can be the primary tool in a development project. This is particularly true of social marketing campaigns that advocate changes in behaviour or raise awareness of particular issues and are most often associated with health-related issues (Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte, 2006). In the fight against HIV/AIDS for example:

> "… information campaigns are the only immunization possible until a vaccine is invented" (Wilkins and Mody, 2001: p 387).

Whether it plays a central or very minor role, communication will form a part of all development projects. It may take the form of a well-resourced, multi-faceted and long-term strategy, or it may be a single public notice informing community members of their next development project meeting. Communication is ubiquitous, and can be the primary development tool, especially where behaviour change is the central aim.

Despite this ubiquity, however, the dominant theories underpinning development communication are remarkably narrow, according to a World Bank study (Inagaki, 2007). Inagaki names three dominant theoretical traditions starting with a communications approach that mirrored modernisation theory, This is followed by diffusion of innovations (popularised by Everett Rogers, 1962), which in turn led to the participatory approach as first expressed by Paulo Friere's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* published in 1968 in Portuguese, then in English in 1970.

Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte (2006) have a slightly different assessment, contending

that just two threads dominate the past five decades of development communication. The first they agree is modernisation –communication models inspired by post-war modernisation theories. Within this they place diffusion, saying this is the mechanism by which the First World's (so called) superior economic and technological knowledge could be transferred. Their second development communication thread is dependency. Just like wider dependency theory, the development communication version emerged from, and mirrored, Third World struggles against colonial and dictatorial powers. It too blamed poverty on structural factors rather than culture, and it too found a solution in a participatory approach.

While Inagaki, Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte might disagree on details, they find themselves more or less in agreement. Other scholars cite further theoretical influences to the development communication canon including gender, cultural imperialism, globalisation, resistance, liberation theology and religion (Wilkins and Mody, 2001; Steeves, 2003; Wilkins, 2003; Waisbord, 2003; Huesca, 2001).

Despite the pervasiveness that scholars argue for development communication, it is not blessed by corresponding level of support or understanding. This was not lost on Alfonso Gumucio-Dagron (2009):

> "Communication for development and social change has been around since the early 1970s; nevertheless and ironically, it is still considered a nuisance by many of the large development players – it makes them uncomfortable.

> Trying to explain communication for development and social change to decision makers involves simplifying some larger issues for them to understand the shorthand. However, even in very few words, we cannot disguise what this is about: communication for social change is about people taking into their own hands the communication processes that will allow them to make their voices heard, to establish horizontal dialogues with planners and development specialists, to take decisions on the development issues that affect their lives, to ultimately achieve social changes for the benefit of their community" (p 453).

Gumucio-Dagron suggests it is the participatory quality of contemporary development communication and the grassroots empowerment this implies that makes some uncomfortable. Indeed, on a commonsense level, communication does imply a

two-way process between relative equals (at least within that communication forum). However, as communication theorists point out, this is far from always the case.

MODERNISATION

With the end of World War Two and the beginning of the Cold War, the modernisation paradigm was the dominant approach to tackling poverty and the incipient instability it promoted among the world's poorest nations. The 'Third World' – a counterbalance to the 'First World' of capitalism and the 'Second World' of communism – had to be transformed from pre-modern 'traditional' states into modern, industrialised ones. This was the aim of both the First and Second worlds, although each aimed to create modern, industrialised states in their own ideological image.[2]

The dominant modernisation blueprint came from the United States. It alone had emerged from the war unscathed and was eager to find markets for the consumer goods its undamaged factories were once again producing at breakneck speed. To this end, the US set about rebuilding war-ravaged Europe through the 1947 Marshall Plan. By 1952, and the end of Marshall Plan funding, the economy of every participating European state had surpassed pre-war levels; for all Marshall plan recipients, output in 1951 was 35 per cent higher than in 1938. While altruism was part of the Marshall Plan rationale, its chief aim was to counter the growing influence of the Soviet Union (Mody, 2000).

Fears of growing communist influence were also held for nations emerging from colonial rule in Asia, Latin America and Africa. US President Harry Truman first publicly expressed a desire to extend a form of the Marshall Plan to these underdeveloped nations during his 1949 inaugural address:

> "We must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our
> scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and
> growth of underdeveloped areas … The old imperialism – exploitation for

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[2] Snyder (2003) relates how socialist nations independently ran massive mobilisation campaigns to promote everything from rat annihilation, behaviour changing and, of course, political ideology education. Scant literature is available on how the Second World intended to export its brand of poverty reduction and global influence. As a result, all references to communication development theoretical debates in this thesis relate to the First and Third Worlds.

foreign profit – has no place in our plans. What we envisage is a program of development based on the concept of democratic fair dealing" (Truman, 1949).

Europe and the US shared many of the cultural, economic and political institutions that formed the foundations for modern, industrialised, consumer economies. But these institutions had either never existed in emerging Third World nations or had been systematically erased by their respective colonisers. For modernisers, therefore, the fight against poverty in the Third World also meant changing entire cultures. Modernisation is predicated upon the idea that societies progress through stages of development. This concept was crystallised in the First World by the Stages of Economic Growth model championed by Walt Rostow in his 1960 book *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*. This model extols Enlightenment concepts of scientific rationality and individualism. It presupposes that economic growth and prosperity is achieved only by adopting a capitalist economic system with formal infrastructure and modern technology.

> "Implicit in the discourse of modernisation is a certain philosophy of what development in the Third World should be, and how it should be brought about" (Melkote and Steeves, 2001: p 71)

Modernisation from a development communication perspective undertakes to change pre-modern and backward attitudes. This school of development communication relies on changing behaviour by deploying the 'correct' First World attitudes through mass media campaigns. A seminal theoretical attempt to rationalise this modernising communication approach was embodied by Daniel Lerner's 1958 'passing of traditional society' thesis (Inagaki, 2007; Mody, 2000). Lerner said that exposing people to the mass media allowed them to develop a sense of 'empathy' – the ability to envision and accept new ideas beyond one's local conditions and traditions. It's a top-down, one-way transfer of ideas, based on the notion that mass media messages directly impact on attitudes and behaviours (Inagaki, 2007). This approach had its genesis in World War Two propaganda drives and was popularised by US political scientist and communications specialist, Harold Lasswell. Strongly influenced by Freud, Lasswell took the view that humans were not rational and were driven by deep-seated emotions. This made them extremely susceptible to media messages in an industrialised and urbanised world. The Western way of life with its relentless promotion of individualism had atomised the influence of family, friends and

community. This created a passive population, largely defenceless against mass media messages. The effects of the mass media were seen as direct, powerful and uniform with information being shot direct into the popular consciousness. This became variously known as the Bullet Theory, Hypodermic Needle Theory, or Stimulus-Response Theory of mass media (Melkote and Steeves, 2001).

The role of the mass media in development was accorded a central position in the modernisation paradigm (ibid), despite studies conducted during the 1940 US General Election that found mass media had little influence on people's political decisions (Mody, 2000)[3]. Daniel Lerner, along with Wilbur Schramm, who wrote the highly influential 1964 book *Mass Media and National Development,* maintained that underdevelopment was often not caused by a lack of natural resources, but a lack of human capital. Mass media and education could play a pivotal role in building that capital. Their belief in the modernising power of mass media was strengthened by a high correlation between indices of modernity and the presence of mass media outlets. This was dubbed the mass media 'haves and have nots' and in 1961 UNESCO set a minimum standard for mass media availability in the Third World (Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte, 2009). This prescription held that every 100 people in a population should have access to 10 copies of a daily newspaper, five radio receivers, two cinema seats, and two televisions.[4]

Melkote and Steeves (2001) point out the absurdity of this regimen: daily newspapers would likely take days at least to travel to rural areas where poverty is most prevalent, they point out, greatly diminishing whatever relevance the media may have. Weekly papers would be more practical, it is suggested. More realistic still, given that illiteracy is likely to be a problem, would be to prescribe more than the five radios per 100 suggested by UNESCO. Even in 1961, cheap and portable transistor radios where well on the way to becoming the most popular communication device in history.

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[3] Lazarsfeld and doctoral students from Colombia University studied the 1940 Roosevelt re-election campaign and found that radio and print media campaigns influenced the decisions of just 8% of voters. It was found that interpersonal communication had the greatest impact on behaviour, while media campaigns tended only to reinforce existing opinions.

[4] UNDP figures for mass media availability per 1000 people in developing countries in 1998 stipulated 185 radios, 145 televisions, 39 main telephone lines, 3.6 cellular subscribers, 6.5 personal computers and 0.5 internet users. More recent UNDP figures are not available, however, according to a 2010 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat report into technological capacity, in 2008 Tonga had 25 fixed line telephone connections per 100 inhabitants and almost half its inhabitants had mobile phone subscriptions. In the same year, only about 8% of Tongans had internet connections and less than 1% had broadband connections.

The same could not be said of television, as even Wilbur Schramm pointed out in a 1979 UNESCO report:

> "A good rule of thumb is that television costs about five times as much as radio. It requires more sophisticated technology, more highly trained technicians and maintenance men, producers and performers trained in some skills radio does not require. It is obvious therefore that radio is financially more acceptable for serving local audiences, easier for local communication teams to use effectively. And for this reason many developing nations have renewed their interest in radio, which many of them had abandoned in favour of television" (p 16).

By the 1970s, First World policy-makers' one-size-fits-all position was drawing increasingly scathing criticism, especially from Latin American dependency scholars. Certainly guilty of ethnocentrism, the architects of modernisation could also be accused of gross paternalism. Despite growing evidence that the mass media had only limited impacts on behaviour in the West, development practitioners happily recycled the theory of an all-powerful mass media manipulating defenceless receivers for decades in the Third World. This paternalistic outlook promoted other policies that were equally ill suited to their audience: Modernisation theory preached individualism, despite many Third World peoples being family and community oriented; it was essentially patriarchal and based on a Western concept of progress through historical stages, as articulated by Rostow (Melkote and Steeves, 2001).

The optimism of the 1950s and 1960s that buoyed Modernisation Theory had all but evaporated with the oil shocks of the early 1970s. It was evident that little progress had been made combating poverty in the Third World over the preceding 20 years. By the mid-to-late 1970s, dependency theories and new communication models based on Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's participatory approach had emerged as a viable alternative to modernisation. Dependency theorists, mostly based in Latin America, contended that First World concerns and experiences of the 1940s and 1960s had proved to be a completely inappropriate model for the complexities of the Third World, both for wider development issues and for development communication.

> "There is much value to the criticism made by dependency scholars that modernisation theorists refused to consider power, and specifically power

inequalities in the global scene, in understanding communication issues in Third World countries" (Waisbord, 2003, p 150-151)

Melkote and Steeves (2001) further point out that First World communication strategies are developed for societies that are at peace, are prosperous and are stable. Rather than encourage change, these communication strategies promote conformity to the dominant paradigm: individualism over collectivism; competition over co-operation; and economic efficiency and technology over cultural growth, social justice and spiritual advancement. They point out that the *raison d'être* of development communication, by contrast, is to change attitudes and behaviour.

Another fundamental misapprehension was the actual media consumption patterns of Third World populations. Rather than eagerly consume development-oriented programming, many within target audiences preferred entertainment shows. And even when development themes formed a meaningful percentage of overall programming (there was evidence that programming schedules were increasingly being driven by commercial audience ratings), they often had little validity for poor rural audiences because those making the programmes were invariably urban elites with little conception of rural lives. In the most far-flung areas, development programmes may often not even be voiced in the local dialect (Melkote and Steeves, 2001).

Another factor not addressed by Western communication models is control over communication devices at the receiving end, rather than the broadcast end. Everett Rogers cited an example of a village headman who owned the only radio in the community. His preference was for music rather than development programming meaning no one in his village heard development messages. Finally, there was evidence of a growing, rather than shrinking, knowledge gap. It was found that those with better literacy and existing knowledge gained more from development programming, leaving the less literate or educated even further behind. However, Mody and Shingi demonstrated in 1976 that by tailoring development programming to those most in need, knowledge gaps could be narrowed, if not erased (Melkote and Steeves, 2001).

DIFFUSION

Diffusion shares many defining characteristics of the modernisation paradigm. It is essentially a paternalistic, top-down information exchange from First World 'experts' to Third World receivers. It equates development with the adoption of innovations – (generally) Western technology, political institutions and Western values. Where it departs from modernisation is it acknowledges that mass media campaigns have only a limited impact on behaviour. More importantly for development communication, diffusion recognises that interpersonal relationships are far more influential than mass media for the adoption of innovations (Inagaki 2007).

Named for Everett Roger's 'diffusion of innovations' theory (1963), the Diffusion Model dovetails neatly with modernisation theorists such as Lerner (1958) and Schramm (1964). At the beginning of his book *Diffusion of Innovations*, Rogers sets out the basic tenor of his thesis with a quote from Benjamin Franklin (1781):

> "To get the bad customs of a country changed and new ones, though better, introduced, it is necessary first to remove the prejudices of the people, enlighten their ignorance, and convince them that their interests will be promoted by the proposed changes; and this is not the work of a day" (p 1).

While the Diffusion Model recognises the limits of mass media, it nonetheless regards behaviour change as the goal of any communication campaign. This is achieved by providing new ideas and information that *persuade* individuals to change their behaviour. The standard formulation of this model is Knowledge-Attitudes-Practice, or KAP. Information provides Knowledge, which leads to a change in Attitudes, which in turn leads to Practice – the desired behaviour change (Morris 2003).

Rogers (1983):

> "*Diffusion* is the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system. Diffusion is a special type of communication concerned with the spread of messages that are new ideas" (p 34).

Investigations into diffusion predated Rogers' 1963 volume and, rather than Third World development, it was primarily concerned with the adoption of ideas and technology in the industrialising West. The economic potential of this process became very clear with publication of a 1943 study by Ryan and Gross on the adoption of

hybrid corn in Iowa. Rogers called it one of the most influential diffusion studies of all time.

In 1928, a hardier corn hybrid was introduced to Iowa farmers, heralding an agricultural revolution in farm productivity. By 1941, the corn had been almost universally adopted and, hoping to explain this rapid uptake, Ryan and Gross interviewed 259 Iowa farmers. Their study gave rise to a new field of study and the birth of new concepts and terminology that have since become part of common vernacular – 'early adopters', 'laggards', 'communication channels' to name a few. For communication specialists, the real relevance of diffusion is in revealing the mechanisms by which innovations are spread:

> "Given that an innovation exists, communication must take place if the innovation is to spread beyond its inventor" (Rogers, 1983: p 17).

By the 1960s, it was realised that the diffusion model could be applied to socioeconomic development and there was an explosion of diffusion-based investigations in Latin America, Africa and Asia. Diffusion seemed a natural framework with which to evaluate the impact of development programmes in agriculture, family planning, public health and nutrition (Rogers 1983). At the time, the mass media was seen as the most efficient way of informing potential adopters about an innovation. This belief has changed little, according to Inagaki. In a 2007 World Bank study he contends that despite its many critics, vertical information transmission is still a highly influential strategy in development projects, with numerous studies demonstrating that repeated exposure to mass media messages remains important in achieving direct impacts.

Diffusion critics

However, diffusion is not without its critics. They accuse the approach of having theoretical and methodological biases, and social-structural constraints. Criticisms centre on the implicit assumption that any kind of mass media exposure leads to development with little attention paid to the actual content, quality, appropriateness or reliability of the message. Studies of diffusion programmes seem concerned only with how, when or where someone heard a message, not what they thought of that message (Melkote and Steeves 2001). Another criticism is that diffusion has a pro-innovation

bias, or that all innovations are beneficial merely by virtue of being 'innovative'. The folly of this has been proved repeatedly, but no more so than in agriculture where the introduction of Western-style single cash crops have been the ruin of many Third World farmers, who quickly found themselves reliant on foreign products, technology and markets. This has led to famine as markets collapse and development experts realise all too late there were sound reasons why farmers practiced mixed cropping or preferred certain plant varieties over others (ibid). This pro-innovation bias also posits that innovations only flow one way; that Third World farmers and nations have nothing to teach the First World, that the 'West is best'. This conveniently ignores that Western technology was not created in a vacuum, that it is the accretion of successive innovations many of which originated in the Third World. This mindset encourages an attitude of the 'source knows best' and a closely related tendency to blame the receiver for their failure or poverty.

Further, the very notion that receivers need to be 'persuaded' implies that those not persuaded must be recalcitrant. Again, this blames the audience for their underdevelopment and fails to consider other reasons, such as not hearing the message through a lack of resources, illiteracy, language and so on. Development communication projects often assume certain levels of literacy according to Melkote and Steeves (2001), with several studies showing projects presupposing that audiences have a knowledge of percentages, weights and measures, Western symbols, numeracy and so on. This particularly impacts upon women, who are often less literate but more involved in agriculture. These assumptions in turn widen knowledge gaps, exacerbating divides between a nation's poorest and its internal elites.

Diffusion adherents rely on a trickle-down of innovations from early adopters out to the majority and finally to laggards. In fact, early adopters are likely to already be the elite: they have the advantage of being on the ground-floor of new markets, they likely have resources they can gamble on innovations, and are just as inclined to withhold innovations from competitors as share them, thus widening the income gap.

Finally, in the Third World, as in the West, extension agents[5] have been widely used to promote innovations, especially agricultural ones. Generally in short supply, these

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[5] Extension agents, or Roger's 'traditional change agents', are usually government or NGO representatives charged with informing communities about innovations – most often agricultural or health related. They are often not from the area they work in, meaning they will not understand the local situation, and may not even be farmers or health professionals.

agents understandably target the 'low-hanging fruit' – community leaders, who are generally the best educated and wealthy. Even if these individuals feel inclined to pass innovations on to others, there is little hope that they will do so accurately – their message will always be second-hand and less clear for receivers (ibid). Despite these criticisms (many of which Rogers later addressed), diffusion theory still has an enormous influence on development communication (Gumucio-Dagron, 2009).

The diffusion model can be seen as an intermediate step between the polar opposites of modernisation and participation. Like modernisation, diffusion espouses an essentially one-way transmission of information. But unlike its theoretical predecessor, it recognises that the ability of mass media to provoke behavioural changes is limited. More importantly for the participatory approach, diffusion theorists quite early on recognised the importance of interpersonal channels in the adoption of new ideas. It is the interpersonal channel that has since become the focus of many communication studies (Inagaki 2007), something Rogers himself foreshadowed in 1983:

> "On the other hand, interpersonal channels are more effective in persuading an individual to adopt a new idea, especially if the interpersonal channel links two or more individuals who are near-peers" (p 18).

Interpersonal communication is now recognised as hugely important, especially within behaviour modification projects such as HIV/AIDS and family planning awareness campaigns. Several studies have shown that interpersonal communication – that is between spouses, among family, friends and neighbours – has greater influence on behaviour change than mass media campaigns, although mass media campaigns are a necessary precursor for sparking interpersonal communication (Inagaki 2007).

Social marketing

Social marketing, initially developed by Western advertising agencies, is also a widely used development communication tool and diffusion campaigns have increasingly been replaced by it. USAID and the World Bank have funded social marketing from as early as the 1970s (Snyder, 2003).

Mass media is an essential tool for social marketing, which Gumucio-Dagron and Tuft (2006) argue immediately makes it the preserve of large and powerful organisations able to bankroll television, radio, print and billboard campaigns. Having deep pockets also means other standard advertising tools used for social marketing, including consumer research and pre-testing through focus groups, targeting, audience segmentation and campaign evaluation, can be bankrolled (Morris, 2003; Snyder, 2003).

This dominance by the powerful also allows those organisations to frame social 'problems' as they see them, as opposed to the recipients of innovations. Critics agree that while socially desirable goals might be the stated aim, in reality most social marketing campaigns promote a product, whether it be high-nutrition food, contraceptives or agricultural advances[6] (Steeves, 2003; Melkote and Steeves, 2001). This marriage connects projects with the commercial sector, encouraging governments and NGOs to gradually commercialise development programmes. This focuses projects on economic goals at the expense of long-term interests, such as improving human rights or women's status, argues Wilkins (2003):

> "As people become valued in terms of their ability to consume, programmes for the public good begin to neglect resource-poor and marginalised communities. Programmes designed to improve health, for example, become justified in terms of their benefits to the global economy, rather than in terms of human rights and dignity. To legitimise this approach, programmes focus on local efforts and individual-level change so that political-economic structural concerns are not questioned" (p 248).

According to Gumucio-Dagron and Tuft (2006), it is the health sector that has been the most fervent adopter of social marketing, especially among health sector organisations closely associated with the world's most powerful – the G-8 nations. Today it is the AIDS pandemic that has seen social marketing deployed against it (with little success, they point out), but prior to that it was population control.

Rather than tackle structural issues that contribute to these problems, such as no social security net for old age or high child mortality rates in the case of population control,

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[6] One early example of a product being at the centre of a social marketing campaign was a drink promoted to remedy dehydration caused by diarrhoeal disease. Former advertising executive, Robert Manoff, was the creator of the Nicaraguan *Superlimonada* drink (Snyder, 2003).

social marketing campaigns concentrate on family planning. It is the individual that must control him or herself regardless of other factors encouraging large families. This is reminiscent of the modernisation conviction that culture and traditional beliefs are to blame for poverty.

Gumucio-Dagron and Tuft (2006) contend that because social marketing campaigns are often created and run by advertising agencies, they ignore informal communication channels more salient to poorer sectors of the community, especially in rural areas. Instead, advertisers use hi-tech methods that:

> "… seek to 'sell' a version of harmony and happiness worldwide … Attractive messages, often featuring famous role models, use state-of-the-art technology to persuade rather than to educate" (ibid, p xvii).

The results have sometimes been catastrophic, as the 1970s Nestlé[7] promotion of infant formula to mothers in developing nations demonstrated. Rather than being the healthy alternative it was promoted as, infant formula was accused of killing babies because parents did not have access to clean water to mix the milk powder in or refrigeration to keep it fresh (Melkote and Steeves, 2001; Gumucio-Dagron and Tuft, 2006).

So it can be seen that while diffusion, and its fellow traveller social marketing, broadened the modernisation model, both still adhered to a fundamentally top-down approach that eschewed tackling structural economic problems, tending instead to blame the culture of the impoverished. But it was the participatory approach that truly unseated modernisation as the dominant development communication model (Morris 2003). In fact, as early as 1976, diffusion's principal architect, Everett Rogers, had acknowledged the power of participation. Alfonso Gumucio-Dagron (2009) quotes Rogers from a 2004 interview where he describes his own changing conception of development communication. This reassessment came after being asked in 1976 to edit articles by Latin American, Asian and African scholars in a special issue of the journal *Communication Research*.

> "The articles included empirical studies showing that development could happen in a variety of ways, including the importance of participatory

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[7] A 1977 boycott in the US against the Swiss-based Nestlé corporation went global following magazine articles and a libel case brought by Nestlé highlighted the issue of infant deaths related to the use of infant formula in developing nations.

approaches. So I edited this special issue, which was later published as a small book by Sage Publications, and my initial chapter in it basically pointed out that the old model of development communication had passed or was passing, and there was evidence to support this thesis. My thinking was changing about the role of communication in development, as was my writing on the subject"
(p 445)

PARTICIPATION

Participation has no final meaning, stated British academic and author Robert Chambers (2005). The author of *Rural Development – Putting the Last First* added that this vagueness was appropriate as each individual and group should puzzle out what they think it should mean and how to give it expression. An advocate of participation since its earliest incarnations, Chambers also noted that the participatory method of delivering development had become almost ubiquitous by the 1990s:

> "… it entered almost every field [of] development activity and became a preoccupation on a global scale, preached about and promoted by lenders, donors, INGOs and governments alike" (ibid, p 101).

Indeed, Majid Rahnema called participation "a redeeming saint" for the development industry (cited by Leal, 2007). But this was no endorsement; Rahnema claimed that participatory approaches had been co-opted to gloss over development's failures. Rather than examine the overarching structural causes of intractable poverty, blame was instead laid at the door of peripheral details – in this case, a paternalistic, top-down modernisation approach practiced by development agencies.

Gumucio-Dagron and Tuft (2006) have a somewhat different assessment. They claim that the once dependency theorists had identified structural problems as the cause of poverty, rather than ancestral and cultural defects, countless social and political actions emerged to address these issues. In parallel, alternative and participatory forms of communication evolved. These did not rely on existing communication models, but grew organically out of practice.

Participation and ownership

Intrinsic to the participatory approach is the concept of power and closely related ideas of empowerment, partnership, accountability, ownership and active citizenship (Clarke, 2009; Chambers, 2005; Huesca, 2003; Gumucio-Dagron , 2009; Cornish and Dunn, 2009; Leal, 2007).

Community participation and ownership of development processes and interventions presupposes a level of active citizenship, according to Clarke (2009), who added that achieving sustainable change is unlikely without first gaining active community involvement in an intervention (as opposed to passive acceptance). This involvement includes the community participating in needs analysis, project identification and design, implementation monitoring and evaluation. Other stakeholders (government authorities, for example) also need to feel they 'own' the intervention. This sense of ownership via participation is the logical and necessary outcome of active citizenship (ibid).

The participatory development model, as first outlined in Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), stresses that dialogue is a catalyst for developing individual and community critical consciousness. This he called "conscientisation". The Brazilian educationalist said that development should afford people greater control over the decisions that affect them while also fostering social equity and democratic practices (Morris, 2003; Cornish and Dunn, 2009).

The participatory approach holds that dialogue cannot be a vertical process of information transmission from the 'knowledgeable' to the 'less knowledgeable', but rather a horizontal process of information exchange and interaction. It 'empowers' citizens to have greater control over their social, cultural, and political environment. Importantly, it also requires traditional 'senders', or those in power, to act as listeners and co-creators of agendas and development solutions alongside traditional 'receivers' (Cornish and Dunn, 2009). Steeves (2003) stated that Freire's assumptions of what development communication should do was radically different from the assumptions of modernisation:

> "Freire argues that once people named their sources of oppression, as well as their sources of power, they would then be able to find solutions. For development communication practice, the central focus should be face-to-face

egalitarian dialogue to initiate and sustain a collective process of reflection and action" (p 236)

Another fervent advocate of the participatory model of development communication, Gumucio-Dagron (2009) stated that communication is the lifeblood of participatory development:

> "Participation in development programmes and projects cannot occur without communication for one simple reason: participation *is* communication, the concepts are entangled, intimately knotted as the strings in a fisherperson's net" (p 460).

Bessette (2006) goes even further:

> "The focus is not on information to be disseminated by experts to end-users. Rather, it is on horizontal communication processes that enable local communities to identify their development needs and the specific actions that could help to fulfil those needs, while establishing an ongoing dialogue with the other stakeholders involved (eg, extension workers, researchers and decision-makers). The main objective is to ensure that the end-users gather enough information and knowledge to carry out their own development initiatives, evaluate their actions and recognise the resulting benefits" (p 5).

But what exactly constitutes participation? Since the 1970s, numerous development models have fallen under the 'participatory' rubric. Inagaki (2007) lists just some:

> Liberation Pedagogy (Freire, 1970); Putting the Last First (Chambers, 1983); Dialogue Paradigm (Guba, 1990); Multiplicity Paradigm (Servaes, 1991); Another Development (Melkote, 1991; Jacobson, 1994); Empowerment Approach (Friedmann, 1992); and Autonomous Development (Carmen, 1996).

In his study of 12 projects identified as using a participatory method, Inagaki stated that Uphoff's 1985 participation themes could be identified in all. Those are:

1. Participation in decision making

2. Participation in implementation

3. Participation in evaluation

4. Participation in receiving benefit.

Inagaki then lists very similar communication themes to those promoted within participatory initiatives:

1. The participation of the intended beneficiaries in different or all of the project-cycle stages
2. Horizontal dialogue rather than vertical information transmission
3. Cultivation of trust and mutual understanding rather than persuasion
4. Local-level actions rather than national-level programmes
5. Local knowledge
6. The role of development specialists as the facilitator and equal participants rather than decision-makers
7. Communication process rather than specific outcomes
8. The use of communication to articulate deep-seated social relations (p 7).

Snyder (2003) declares that what counts as participation within campaigns can vary widely. However, she had also identified five common approaches:

1. Representative participation where the support of local representatives is gained and they are included in advisory roles
2. Local expert participation is where existing local organisations are used to conduct campaigns that may be created together, or locals are hired to help create campaigns
3. Audience research participation requires intensive preliminary research with the target audience to refine targets, messages and so on
4. Local outreach worker participation updates Rogers' diffusion concept by using local communicators similar (homophilous[8]) to the target audience
5. Government agenda-setting participation sets up direct communication links with government officials, such as allowing locals to influence decisions by sending video evidence of problems and proposed remedies directly officials (p 172).

Snyder added that evidence suggests these approaches increase sustainability over time, especially where local organisations are strengthened. However, she also questioned whether participatory research necessarily empowers audiences:

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[8] The term homophilous was coined by Rogers to denote individuals or groups whose interests, outlooks and backgrounds are so similar they easily trust each other and quickly share ideas.

> "… conducting research with the target audience does not empower them, because the audience only has the power to make suggestions" (p 173).

Snyder questioned the ability of a participatory project to enhance democracy. She asked: How many audience members need to be involved for it to be deemed participatory, let alone democratising, and to what level of authority within the decision-making process should participants reach before a project can be deemed truly participatory?

Meanwhile, Bessette (2006) identified key ingredients for development communication. While his research is concerned specifically with natural resource management, his prescription echoes and underlines those raised above:

> "For communication to be effective in addressing the three interlinked development challenges of poverty alleviation, food security and environmental sustainability, it must fulfil the following functions: ensure true appropriation and ownership (not just the buy-in) by local communities of any Natural Resource Management research or development initiative; support the learning needed to realise the initiative and facilitate the circulation of relevant knowledge; facilitate the building of partnerships, linkages and synergies, with the different development actors working with the same communities; and influence policy and decision-making processes at all levels (family, community, local and national)" (p 29).

Participatory components are now included in most contemporary development projects regardless of their theoretical orientation, although there is debate as to whether this is more for the sake of appearance than any genuine desire to empower and democratise communities. Likewise, the communication component of participatory development is at best contested and, at worst, misused and distorted (Huesca, 2003). Cornish and Dunn (2009) attempted to dispel the distortions by defining participatory communication as a process of sharing and expressing knowledge and information. Communication, on the other hand, means communicating between people. In their investigations, the pair traced the rise of the participatory approach to see how it informed development communication. They contend that as the participation model became the favoured tool to bring about social and political transformation, communication also embraced new forms, such as

comics, posters and simplified education materials. While more popular, these forms of communication essentially remained a vertical process of imparting information from experts to participants.

With the rise of neo-liberal economic policies in the 1980s, the emphasis of development initiatives shifted to promoting self-reliance. A new prominence was given to interactions with donor bureaucracies as NGOs proliferated and theorists focused more on the role of civil society. Later in the 1990s, the rise of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) and Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodologies saw communication become even more central to the development process and not just an output at the end (ibid).

Participation's critics

Predictably, as participation and participatory communication practices have become *de rigueur*, criticisms of the approach have also multiplied. Some critics held that participatory projects assumed all communities were homogeneous and that they conveniently ignore the exclusion or under-representation of certain groups (Inagaki, 2007). Other critics saw the rapid adoption of participation into the mainstream development ethos as a form of co-option – a direct reaction to critiques of modernisation.

> "For participation to become part of the dominant development practice, it first had to be modified, sanitised, and depoliticised. Once purged of all the threatening elements, participation could be re-engineered as an instrument that could play a role *within* the *status quo,* rather than one that defied it" (Leal, 2007: p 543)

This 'mainstreaming' of participation can be traced as far back as the 1970s with UN measures contributing to the adoption of participatory development. These include the 1978 World Health Organisation Declaration of Alma Ata, which stated:

> "… the people have the right and duty to participate individually and collectively and in the planning and implementation of their health care" (cited by Morris, 2003).

Participation's final admission into the mainstream perhaps came with World Bank

President James P. Wolfensohn championing the cause when he stated that Third World countries need to design their own development policies instead of the financial system imposing programmes on them (Gumucio-Dagron, 2009). This thinking was embodied in the World Bank's 2000 multi-country research initiative *Voices of the Poor*, which promoted the use of participatory methodologies in policy processes. These concepts also spread to participatory governance, accountability, and citizenship. That same year, Melkote and Steeves (2001) wrote:

> "Thus, people at the grass roots were co-opted in activities that, in the end, would make consumers of them for industrial goods and services. Participation, therefore, was a means to an end; the end being greater dependence of the people on a market controlled by elites, both national and international" (p 339).

Promotion of participatory approaches by the very architects of modernisation and neo-liberal economic policies only increased charges that participation was being used to validate predetermined outcomes and even saw participation labelled the 'new tyranny'[9] (Cornish and Dunn, 2009).

Participation as end or as means

Debates that have formed around the participation model over the past four decades continue to be argued today. One is the 'participation-as-end' and 'participation-as-means' dichotomy (ibid). Participation-as-end holds that participation is a fundamental right, with some proponents declaring it a basic human right and citing as support Article 19 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights that guarantees the right to communicate. Melkote and Steeves (2001) quote Juan Diaz-Bordenave to demonstrate this opinion:

> "The need to think, express oneself, belong to a group, be recognised as a person, be appreciated and respected and have some say in crucial decisions affecting one's life are as essential to the development of an individual as eating, drinking and sleeping … Participation is not a fringe benefit that authorities may grant as a concession but every human being's birthright that

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[9] An early critique of participation, *Participation: The New Tyranny* (2001) compared participatory development's promises of empowerment and appropriate development with what actually happened on the ground and was edited by University of Manchester academics Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari.

no authority may deny or prevent" (p 337).

Extending guarantees of free speech to participation puts participation-as-end advocates on a direct collision course with existing power elites who might turn a deaf ear to criticism of their positions, but are likely less willing to accede to direct popular participation in local, national or international affairs.

Participation-as-means, on the other hand, is a more functional and pragmatic approach. It does not necessarily support empowerment, transparency and societal transformation as its principal goals; rather participation is a necessary, if not desirable, ingredient for successful development initiatives. Thus, it can be seen that the participation-as-end/ participation-as-mean dichotomy is a struggle between a strictly technical project aspiration and participation as a political force (Cornish and Dunn, 2009).

Yet, participatory development and participatory communication are underpinned by an empowerment agenda. This encourages a dialogue that challenges power inequities in order to bring about social change from the bottom-up (ibid). Participatory communication envisages a fundamentally new approach to development, one that sees communication as the very objective of development efforts. It can also be a means of self-expression and self-management for self-development (Mody, 1991). By including the voices of the marginalised and underprivileged, communication processes can become more inclusive and open-ended, rather than goal-oriented, and may provide a venue to directly address structural problems. On a practical level, this may mean that gender inequality (for example) is tackled as part of a package of efforts to reduce HIV/AIDS, rather than simply focusing on discouraging unprotected sex (Inagaki, 2007).

Participatory communication problems

Tackling structural issues highlights one of the practical problems faced by participatory projects and participatory communication (particularly interventions applying a participation-as-end approach). These are necessarily long-range and time-consuming types of interventions that often have quite symbolic objectives such as 'empowerment'. These rarely conform to the evaluative criteria demanded by development bureaucracies (Yoon, 1996; Inagaki, 2007).

Projects that are strongly participatory in nature may produce animosity with local government or community officials, as they often demand the transfer of decision-making and power to beneficiaries. Simply not involving officials is not an option, because, as stated earlier, a central theme of participatory projects and participatory communication is to encourage the involvement of local representatives. Participatory projects can also generate divisions within communities: to illustrate this point Inagaki (2007) refers to tensions created between Peruvian villagers when the women demanded changes after listening to entertainment-education radio dramas promoting reproductive rights.

Another criticism, albeit one shared by other development methods, is an assumed community homogeneity. This ignores the exclusion or under-representation of certain groups (such as women) that often exists within communities (ibid). Finally, conceptual fuzziness around participation, including no agreed measure of participatory outcomes means oppressive social relationships can be reproduced under the guise of participation (Huesca, 2003; Morris, 2003).

Liberation theology

Liberation theology is most widely associated with the Catholic Church in Latin America and with figures such as Gustavo Gutiérrez and Paulo Friere. It was an attempt to address the poverty and injustice that oppressed the vast majority of Latin Americans, especially from the latter half of the twentieth century when oppressive dictatorships visited injustice not only upon rural poor, but upon a burgeoning urban middle classes far less inclined to suffer silently. While influenced by Marxism, liberation theology is also concerned by spiritual matters and sees liberation from oppression as a precursor to ultimate salvation.

The relevance of liberation theology to this thesis is the huge influence the Church has within Tongan society. While Tonga's conditions are considerably different from those experienced in Latin America and the island nation is predominantly Protestant, this does not preclude the Church from playing a role in social and political transformation. There are numerous examples outside Latin America where religion (and not only Catholicism) has been a key player in popular struggles for change. Iran, East Timor and Viet Nam (see Preface) are just a few. Given its role in Tongan

society, the Church would always be a worthy topic of consideration for this thesis.

Freire is perhaps the most influential proponent of applying liberation theology to development communication (Steeves, 2001). For Friere, development communication is an emancipatory dialogue that expands individual and community consciousness and power without the burdens of hierarchy. Once people identify the sources of their oppression and the sources of their power, they find their own solutions. For development communication, the central focus should be face-to-face egalitarian dialogue that initiates and sustains a collective process of reflection and then action. This is spiritual practice for Friere with other religious practices such as song, dance and gatherings also helping the communication process (ibid).

> "The structures and processes of development communication may be conceptualised as serving at least three overlapping practical goals: marketing, collective resistance, and/or spiritual awakening" (ibid, p 239).

Huesca (2003) contends that the openness required of participatory communication raises awareness of differences and inequalities, leading movements to address and transform them. Liberation theology's call for action on behalf of the poor requires political involvement and activism in collaboration with other groups to challenge oppressive social structures. In Latin America at least, the most obvious collaborators in this project were (or are) Marxists because they too reject capitalism and the Western preoccupation with the individual over community. Huesca points out that this partnership would only ever be short-lived because of Marxism's rejection of religion, its faith in science and its championing of armed revolution.

Gender

Gender plays a role in all development projects and is a central plank of the eight Millennium Development Goals to be achieved by 2015.[10] It is no less important in the Kingdom of Tonga, which has a fundamentally patriarchal culture, although traditionally women also hold some exalted family positions (James, 1997; 2003).

Steeves (2003) argues that while gender is crucial to development communication scholarship and practice, it is also a very complex and highly contextual field. She

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[10] The text of the third MDG reads: ***Promote gender equality and empower women***. *Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015.*

points out that one impoverished woman's experience will differ dramatically from another's because of her particular cultural, religious and political realities. As a result, many minority and Third World feminists have rejected Western feminist analyses because of their "monolithic notion of patriarchy". This Steeves labels as ethnocentric, imperialistic and inaccurate. Despite this schism, there is a paucity of development communication studies into gender. The majority, according to Steeves, are concerned only with the representations of women in developing nation media, whereas only a small number look at women's participation within media. For the vast majority of the world's women, democratisation of communication and information is irrelevant, as they do not have access to basic telecommunication technologies. Of greater value, Steeves asserts, are projects to increase female literacy, make greater use of indigenous forms of communication, increase female education and empowerment, and encourage traditional women's groups and networks.

While Riaño (1994) agrees that development communication has traditionally overlooked the barriers faced by women in accessing development information, this has now changed. She asserts that development communication programmes are now being created to specifically target women:

> "Women as farmers, mothers, wives, agents of environmental protection and managers of households constitute subjects of information in development interventions. Women's participation is encouraged in regard to three specific goals: (a) to change current critical practices, (b) to encourage active support and (c) to mobilise the community for mass campaigns" (p 444).

Globalisation

Globalisation, rather as the term implies, is a worldwide phenomenon that effects even geographically remote locations such as Tonga. This phenomenon, also known as 'postmodern', 'postindustrial' and 'the information society', is characterised by new communication technologies that have enabled accelerated restructuring of global capitalism. This has led to the significant alteration of production, distribution and consumption of goods, services and symbolic culture (Huesca, 2001).

For Guttal (2007), the term globalisation describes a variety of economic, cultural,

social and political changes that have shaped the world for the last 50 years:

> "Its proponents claim that it is both 'natural' and an inevitable outcome of technological progress, and creates positive economic and political convergences. Critics argue that globalisation is hegemonic and antagonistic to local and national economies" (p 523).

Huesca (2001) contends that the global restructuring experienced through globalisation has reduced the power, authority and credibility of traditional institutions, including development agencies. This same process has rendered the logic of modernisation and dependency obsolete, replacing them with an 'anything goes' spirit of free trade and "transnational regimes". In response to globalisation and the diminishing legitimacy of traditional institutions, new global social movements have emerged. These coalesce around a variety of issues, including the environment, peace, human rights, labour standards and the activities of international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund.

The concept of participation itself has also been transformed by a globalised world. According to Cornish and Dunn (2009) participation advocates have taken on a wider view, expanding from:

> "… opportunities to rights, beneficiaries to citizens, projects to policies, consultation to decision-making, micro to macro" (p 668).

But Guttal (2007) takes a less positive view of development's response to globalisation, arguing that the development industry has been globalisation's most effective "portals" with some of the most powerful actors in the globalisation arena being part of the mainstream development establishment. Those actors include international finance institutions, UN agencies, academics, think tanks, civil society organisations and consultants "all of whom devise the applications by which economic globalisation is operationalised" (p 527).

Guttal adds that an underlying paradox of globalisation is that the same forces that promote global capitalism also promote democracy, human rights, and government intervention:

> "This is paradoxical, because global capitalism cannot survive in an ethical climate that promotes genuine democracy and fundamental human rights, nor does it favour independent-minded states" (p 529).

Leal (2007) similarly argues that the international development industry is a chief conduit for globalisation, something stated in plainly in 2000 by world governments ratifying the Millennium Development Goals. Leal points out that the declared goal of halving global poverty by 2015 is littered with terms such as 'sustainability', 'participation', 'empowerment', 'equality', and 'democracy', but no mention is made of forces that produce poverty:

> "Maintaining a politically and conceptually ambiguous stance, the MDG declaration affirms that 'the central challenge' faced by the planet's governments and respective institutions is 'to ensure that *[neo-liberal]* globalization becomes a positive force for all the world's poor' (United Nations General Assembly 2000: 2)" (Leal, 2007: p 543).

Globalisation also affects mass media. From the 1980s, media companies have consolidated into media empires that are increasingly commercialised, driven by market logic and focused on ratings. Gumucio-Dagron and Tuft (2006) assert that civil society's response has been to professionalize their communications and media strategies in the hope of gaining better access to "privately-controlled mediated public spheres". In the process they focus on events and actions to gain media attention causing development ideals and arguments to be oversimplified. The pair refer to Ignacio Ramonet's 1997 contention that because of this new focus, the news media can no longer claim a 'fourth estate' role. By joining with existing political and economic estates, the news media no longer has any interest in a civic objective – safeguarding the community against abuses of power by public and private elites. Ramonet's answer is to create a fifth estate that denounces the "hyper-power of the media conglomerates" complicit in the neo-liberal globalisation agenda.

Gaps in development communication theory

As with any analysis, gaps exist in development communication theory either through omission or because conditions change requiring renewed appraisal. One problem that scholars have identified is that communication is rarely given adequate recognition when development practitioners are designing interventions (Gumucio-Dagron, 2009). Inagaki (2007) contends this will only be mitigated when the strategic value of

communication is widely recognised. Until then, development projects will give communication a secondary role with a commensurate budget:

> "Underutilization of communication – giving only implicit and common sensual roles to communication without associating it with specific mandates on contents, channels, forms, actors, timing and so forth, based on firm theoretical underpinnings – is not an uncommon practice in international assistance programs perennially strained by limited budget and human resources" (p 2).

The status of development communication is not assisted by conceptual problems resulting from a lack of clear definitions and the persistent confusion around fundamental terms such as 'information' (one way) and 'communication' (multiple ways). This is particularly true of participatory projects and the communication that characterises them (Jacobson and Storey, 2004; Gumucio-Dagron, 2009; Cornish and Dunn, 2009; Inagaki, 2007).

This confusion also leads to difficulties in evaluating development communication outcomes. In addressing this problem, Gumucio-Dagron (2009) states that while evaluation is necessary, he asks what should and can be measured?:

> "Evaluation shouldn't be about counting, but about the quality of life improvement. Social change cannot be evaluated in the same ways as rice production or the manufacturing of bicycles" (p 461).

Snyder (2003) points out that despite many years of communication campaigns, very few qualitative studies have been conducted into their effectiveness. For example, only 11 per cent of Uganda AIDS campaigns undertaken in the late 1990s were later measured to establish how many people were reached, let alone how many had actually changed their behaviour. By not evaluating campaigns, much valuable information is lost forever on which is the best approach for a particular group, region or nation.

As stated earlier, evaluations of diffusion programmes seem primarily concerned with how, when or where someone heard a message, not with what they thought of that message (Melkote and Steeves 2001). This preoccupation with mechanisms rather than the message itself means the original aim of an intervention can be undermined.

Meanwhile, the impact of corruption on development communication practice remains to be documented and theorised more fully claim Wilkins and Mody (2001). This is especially the case where it impacts on the long-term consequences of individual projects, larger programmes and on social dimensions. They also warn against an undue preoccupation with new communication technologies:

> "The history of development communication discourse establishes a trend of excitement about one new technology after another, as scholars and practitioners proclaimed the benefits that radio, satellite television, video and other channels would bring to development projects. New computer technologies need to be looked at in this context" (p 391).

Conclusion

Theoretical debate on development communication has closely followed the arc of wider development discourse starting from post-war modernisation theories through to debates on the effects of neo-liberal economics and globalisation. Development communication itself did not become a widely debated branch of development discourse until the 1960s and the theories of diffusion first articulated by Everett Rogers (1963). Modernisation and diffusion have remccording to Gumucio-Dagron (2009), participation is communication and vice versa.

These – modernisation, diffusion and participation – then are the three main themes identified in this chapter. Also addressed are secondary themes of social marketing, this chapter. Also addressed are secondary themes of social marketing, ownership, liberation theology, globalisation and gender, as these have considerable potential to impact upon development initiatives undertaken in Tonga. In fact, many of the concepts discussed in this chapter are directly applied by the NGOs studied for thisccording to Gumucio-Dagron (2009), participation *is* communication and vice versa.

These – modernisation, diffusion and participation – then are the three main themes identified in this chapter. Also addressed are secondary themes of social marketing, ownership, liberation theology, globalisation and gender, as these have considerable potential to impact upon development initiatives undertaken in Tonga. In fact, many of the concepts discussed in this chapter are directly applied by the NGO thesis.

In particular, MORDI Tonga applies a virtual blueprint of participatory themes identified by Uphoff, and associated communication practices separately identified by Inagaki and Snyder.

The following chapter will look at the history and background of Tonga's political and media landscapes. This will take the research from a global, academic view of development communication and place it more firmly within the local and contemporary context of Tonga.

Chapter four: Political and media systems in Tonga

Introduction

This chapter will provide a brief outline of Tonga's history post-European contact with special attention given to the birth and evolution of its unique political system. This is a necessary first step in gaining an understanding of the forces that have influenced and shaped the Kingdom of Tonga's contemporary political environment, and the challenges faced by development agencies. This short history will focus on events over the past 40 years that led to the much-anticipated November 2010 General Election. This election was the first to be held under an amended constitution: one that handed the Tongan people (commoners) 17 of 26 seats in parliament and, for the first time, a majority of votes. The Tongan people, through their elected representatives, can now outvote the nobles and – theoretically, at least – dictate to the king (all new laws still require the Royal Assent). While immediate results of the election will be included in this chapter, it is too soon to assess the long term outcome or say how the election might effect development agencies working in Tonga.

The momentous change to Tonga's 135-year-old constitution cames nearly four decades after calls for greater democracy, transparency and accountability first gained public attention in the island kingdom. Those calls grew as Tongans became increasingly dismayed at the financial mismanagement and poor governance repeatedly demonstrated by its mostly non-elected leadership. Aid donors, especially New Zealand and Australia, took up calls for greater accountability; appeals that became more pronounced after Tonga's economy stumbled in the 1970s with loss of its key export earners, copra and bananas. Over time, Tonga's economy became increasingly dependent upon remittances from citizens living overseas and from foreign aid. This has only served to highlight scandals that have dogged Tonga's quasi-feudal leadership. At a time when international donor agencies have sought answers to the causes of intractable Third World poverty, governance has increasingly came under the spotlight. In this environment, flagrant displays of ineptitude and poor governance by Tonga's leadership could no longer be ignored at home or abroad.

Inextricably connected to that governance agenda is the role of the news media. This chapter will investigate the recent history of Tonga's mainstream news media to shed light on how the Fourth Estate has performed, or failed to perform, as community 'watchdog'. Secondly, an appraisal of Tonga's media – its reach, audience and control – will also provide essential background related to a central theme of this thesis – communication.

POLITICAL BACKGROUND

All nations are unique – singled out by customs, language, political systems, geography and so on. Tonga is no different. While it shares a common ancestry with near Pacific neighbours and has periodically had extensive contacts with them, most notably Fiji, by comparison to mainland Asian or European cultures, Tonga's has remained relatively cosseted for the better part of 3000 years. Unsurprisingly, this seclusion has produced an identity that is exclusively Tongan. Today, however, it is Tonga's constitutional monarchy – the only remaining monarchy in the Pacific – rather than its language or customs that truly sets it apart from other nations. Tonga also has one of the oldest extant constitutions in the world, and can proudly proclaim it was never colonised, unlike other island nations around it[11] (Campbell, 1992, 2001; Powels, 2007).

Tonga's Constitutional Monarchy has ruled for 135 years. It was created by Taufa'ahau, a regional chief who unified the islands of Tonga under his leadership, declaring himself King George Taufa'ahua Tupou I in 1845. In 1875, with the assistance of Wesleyan missionary Reverend Shirley Baker, he wrote what is agreed to be a remarkably progressive document for its time, the Constitution of Tonga (Powles, 2009; Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade [NZ], 2010). It included a Declaration of Rights guaranteeing individual freedoms and equality for all, prohibited slavery, and enshrined legal rights such as Habeas Corpus and the right to a timely and fair trial. It also guaranteed freedom of the press.

Crucially, the constitution cemented the king's own position by relegating rivals to permanently subordinate roles. Under the constitution the status of 20 chiefs (later

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[11] New Zealand journalist Michael Field (2010) somewhat undercuts this claim by stating Tongan leaders in fact "… pleaded with assorted powers for annexation, settling only in the end with a British protectorateship, reluctantly agreed" (p 85).

increased to 30) was entrenched by the king and only he could confer or remove what would become hereditary titles (Powles, 2007). These chiefs, or nobles as they became known, controlled parliament and, together with a further six estate-holding chiefs, controlled almost all land[12].

As well as guaranteeing numerous rights for Tongans, the 1875 constitution created a three-tier class system consisting of the royal family, nobles and commoners. The constitution also transformed traditional kinship-based fealty into a citizen-state relationship. Land leases are distributed to male commoners via the nobles (private land ownership is illegal for royalty, nobles and commoners alike), commoners are taxed and they must perform jury duty. Families are also obliged to pay levies to nobles, normally in farm produce, some of which is ultimately paid to the king (Powles, 2009).

This remains the bedrock of the Tongan political system and is regarded by most Tongans as a central part of their traditional identity (James, 2003; Powles, 2009). In fact, the monarchy and the constitution were foreign concepts imported largely in response to contact with Europeans and the very real threat of colonisation. The Samoan *Matai* system and Fiji's Great Council of Chiefs share a similar genesis (Meleisea, 2000). A key reason that King Tupou I adopted the constitution was to convince foreign powers that Tonga had acceptable government institutions and was politically stable enough to govern itself without outside assistance or interference (Powles, 2007; Campbell, 1992). As it was, Tonga became a protectorate of Britain from 1900 to 1970. Modern Tonga, as a result, is an amalgam of Christianity, British concepts of government and law (constitutional monarchy), and US-style notions of a powerful executive (Powles, 2009; Koloamatingi, 2009). This is overlaid onto an indigenous hierarchical social structure with a strong sense of kinship allegiance and deference to social and political superiors (*faka'apa'apa*). This combination is conducive to the formation of broad power bases and of social classes (Powels, 2007).

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[12] Land in Tonga cannot be sold. All town and beach-front land belongs to the government with the remainder divided among the nobles. They in turn rent it to the people at rates decided by the legislative assembly. The constitution also set out terms under which land could be leased. The first-born son inherits land. Where there is no male heir, inheritance passes through the female line but not to a female heir (Campbell, 1992). By the late 1990s with a rapidly expanding population, most land had been allocated resulting in some abuses of position by nobles (James, 1997).

Government

The 1875 constitution made the monarch head of the state, government and Commander-in-chief of the military forces (Powles, 2007). The government includes the monarch, Privy Council, Cabinet, Legislative Assembly and Judiciary. The executive decision making body is comprised of the monarch's appointees sitting in the Privy Council and Cabinet. The Privy Council includes the monarch, the Prime Minister and other ministers, and has the supreme executive authority. Its role is to assist the monarch to formulate policies that may become law subject to confirmation by Parliament (in Tongan, the Privy Council is called the *fakataha tokoni,* meaning assisting forum). The Legislative Assembly comprises nobles and People's Representatives, who together pass laws that are in turn interpreted by the judiciary. As in the UK, the Tongan Privy Council is the highest court of appeal. Cabinet is appointed by the King and is chaired by the Prime Minister. Cabinet also has veto powers over appointment of the Ha'apai and Vava'u governors.

Constitutional amendments tabled ahead of the 2010 election made several far-reaching changes to Parliament. It reduced the number of seats from 30 to 26. Crucially, 17 of these seats are now are reserved for commoners or People's Representatives. The remaining nine go to hereditary nobles, who are elected by noble families. The Prime Minister and Speaker of the House were once both appointed by the King, but following the 2010 election this appointment is voted on by the elected Members of Parliament.

At a national level, the Tongan government controls the disbursement of most overseas aid funds, runs commercial ventures (often in competition with private firms) and is the country's largest single employer. This position of primacy is underpinned by Tonga's culture of deference, as explained by Kerry James (2003):

> "The theatre of cultural hegemony is reinforced by honorific terms of address, the use of formal language, and the etiquette of deference, which may include seating oneself on the floor to speak to a noble minister in his office" (p 326).

Even with the transformative effects of ever-greater numbers of Tongans living abroad during the past 30 years, this "etiquette of deference" remains the dominant cultural model. It is played out throughout government and the private sector, within NGOs, churches and villages, right down to the family level (ibid).

National political change

In 2005, an inquiry by the New Zealand Parliament's Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee into the country's relationship with Tonga raised concerns about the political and economic power held by Tonga's royal family. It said this control stifled reforms that could benefit ordinary Tongans at a time when its economy was shrinking and many Tongans were reverting to subsistence living. The inquiry also cited a 2001 report from the then New Zealand High Commissioner Brian Smyth to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Smyth wrote:

> "The [Royal] family has held on to absolute power and privilege for far longer than most other royal lines. Unlike monarchies elsewhere there has been no evolution over time … Democracy is a foul word in this Kingdom ... The King, the rest of the Royal family and the nobles sit at the pinnacle of this system and understandably want to stay there. The puzzle is why the public let them get away with it – particularly in this day and age, with experience of overseas liberties and with such clear evidence of corruption and mismanagement ... From a socialist perspective the system is anathema. It involves redistribution from the poor to the rich." (p 8).

One of the 17 recommendations made by the New Zealand committee was to work alongside the Tongan government "to facilitate change towards representative democracy by supporting the Tongan judiciary, Legislative Assembly and public service." [13]

Democracy movement

Challenges to the government had gained momentum for over 30 years, led largely by a faction of commoner politicians and supported by independent media since the late 1980s. This group articulated growing popular resentment over government failings, especially financial mismanagement (Campbell, 2005). A leading figure of that movement remains 'Akilisi Pohiva, a former teacher who was drummed out of the public service in 1984 after fronting a radio series critical of the government. Pohiva did not take his fate lightly, successfully suing the government in 1988 for unfair

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[13] Unsurisingly, the committee's request to visit Tonga was denied by the Tongan government, which viewed the committee's work as NZ interference in domestic policies (Koloamatingi, 2009).

dismissal. He also launched an occasional newspaper *Kele'a* (conch shell), the first independent newspaper in Tonga since the 1880s, and mouthpiece for growing demands for change in Tonga.[14]

In 1987, Pohiva was elected to parliament as a People's Representative. This win came largely as a result of revelations published in the second issue of *Kele'a* detailing the generous allowances paid to MPs who took part in a 12-day tour of the Tongan islands. The expedition was initiated to explain controversial 1986 tax laws, but it was alleged some MPs more than doubled their annual salaries through the junket (Campbell, 1992). The 1987 election is widely recognised as Tonga's first where political concerns overshadowed traditional kinship and geographic allegiances. It produced a landslide for pro-democracy candidates with all but three of the nine incumbent People's Representatives ousted in favour of young, educated politicians (for the first time, six of the nine People's Representatives elected had university degrees). Several of those voted out of office blamed the result on articles in the *Kele'a* (James, 2003; Moala, 2002).

Pohiva has made his name as a firebrand Member of Parliament ever since, demanding change and seeking to impeach ministers he believed were guilty of mismanagement or corruption. He is the longest serving People's Representative, "the champion of the people and scourge of the government" (Campbell, 2008: p 2), and easily wins his parliamentary seat at each election.

This newly elected faction of pro-democracy, commoner politicians coalesced into a loose political grouping with Pohiva as nominal head and has steadily transformed political behaviour and public perceptions since. In 1992, what had become known as the Pro-Democracy Movement held the first of several conventions on constitutional change, producing specific proposals that were then presented to government. The conventions and related education campaigns revealed a deep-seated sense of grievance among ordinary Tongans over perceived corruption among nobles and the king's indifference to these abuses. (Powles, 2007, 2009; Campbell, 2005).

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[14] During its first years *Kele'a* was more a pamphlet – an occasional publication dealing stridently with contemporary political issues. It re-launched in 2004 as a commercial newspaper and is now the most popular weekly in Tonga, selling out within hours of hitting newsstands. 'Akilisi has since handed over direct editorial control to his son, Siosiua Po'oi Pohiva, who is listed as publisher of the paper.

But the government ignored Pro-Democracy Movement calls for change despite these initially being quite modest. The reformers sought greater government transparency in public spending and greater representation of the people in parliamentary decision-making, not a radical overhaul of Tongan society or an end to the monarchy. In 10 years up to 1998, six parliamentary motions calling for specific constitutional reforms or for the formation of a constitutional review committee had all failed to get traction in a Parliament dominated by nobles (Campbell, 1992; 2005). However, the movement for change would not be fobbed off forever. In 1998 the Pro-Democracy Movement Committee – formed to write specific constitutional changes –became the Human Rights and Democracy Movement of Tonga (HRDMT). Like its predecessor, the HRDMT refused to call itself a party, claiming instead that it was a movement for change.

Government scandals

Meanwhile, government had become embroiled in numerous scandals involving state funds, nepotism and irresponsible use of government positions. One drawn-out saga in particular reflected badly upon King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV, proving pivotal in the eyes of many Tongans and a vote-winner for the pro-democracy movement.

As early as 1983, the government had sold Tongan passports to foreigners, mostly Chinese nationals. In 1990, Pohiva and fellow People's Representatives alleged the practice was illegal as the foreigners had not fulfilled conditions required by the constitution before they were naturalised and issued with passports. Of the 426 who had been issued with a passport, many had never set foot in Tonga, including former Philippine dictator Ferninand Mracos and his wife Emelda (Moala, 2002). The passports were selling for as much US$37,000 and the government was reported to have eventually earned as much as US$50m from their sale. Pohiva hired a New Zealand QC to sue the government and have the practice stopped.

In 1991 protests over the passport scheme saw around 2000 people march to the Royal Palace to present the king with a petition of several thousand names protesting the granting of citizenship to non-residents. Faced with growing popular anger and the very real prospect the passports would be declared illegal in court, the government called an emergency session of the Legislative Assembly in February 1991 to amend

the constitution making the passport sales legal retroactively. The issue proved crucial for many Tongans as it demonstrated that problems within government went beyond mere misconduct by individual ministers of which the King was ignorant. To the contrary, the King had been made well aware of the passports issue and public concern via marches and petitions.

> "Their importunities received no public response, no reforms were made, no cabinet reshuffle followed. The passport and naturalisation retrospective legislation received royal assent. Royal ignorance was now no longer a viable explanation. It could still be argued however, that although the king knew, he was powerless to constrain his ministers, or feared dismissing them for lack of suitable alternatives. Alternatively, he knew and did not care, or knew and approved. Whether the king bore responsibility or not, the glaring fact now was that the problem was constitutional" (Campbell, 2005: p 97).

Despite the retrospective legislation, the scandal refused to go away. In 2001, it was revealed that US$20 million from the passport sales held in a trust fund in San Francisco had been lost in a dubious investment scheme promoted by an American associate of the King. The Minister of Justice and Minister of Education, who were trustees of the fund, were held responsible and instructed to resign from cabinet. No other action has since been taken to recover the money.

Attacks on the media

The government's image was to be further tarnished by botched attempts to muzzle the press. In the spotlight was *Taimi 'o Tonga*, a weekly newspaper launched by Kalafi Moala in 1989. The government passed two bills in 2003 modelled on Singaporean media-control legislation: the Media Operators Bill and the Newspapers Bill (Robie, 2004). To pass these, the government first had to amend freedom of speech clauses in the constitution. The move created widespread outrage with 10,000 Tongans signing a petition against the legislation and thousands more marching in protest. Nevertheless, the bills were given royal assent in October 2003. By January 2004, they had been challenged in court and by October the court had declared them unconstitutional (Campbell, 2006).

Hot on the heels of that embarrassment came another very public debacle in 2004 with collapse of Royal Tongan Airlines. This time the royal family was implicated via the Crown Prince, although it was three government ministers who were dismissed from cabinet.

> "Thus in three years, the government's reputation for competence and integrity had suffered more than usual damage: five ministers dismissed and three major controversies" (ibid: p 55).

The run-up to the 2005 elections would see further body blows to the government's reputation. Demonstrations over electricity price rises and a new consumption tax forced embarrassing government back-downs, but the real damage came with the June 2005 introduction of a new civil service salary structure awarding wage increases to civil servants insultingly stingy compared to those won by parliamentarians (Campbell, 2008). A six-week civil service strike ensued and only ended when government conceded salary increases of up to 80 per cent.

> "The affair had a number of unusual characteristics: the solidarity of the strikers, their refusal to deal with mediators, and their refusal to negotiate; the effrontery and insolence of the rhetoric on Pangai Si'I;[15] and, finally, the joining of industrial demands to political demands. The latter included, among others, the return of electricity generation to the government [this had been taken over by the Crown Prince], democratic reforms and the resignation of the Prime Minister Prince Lavaka" (ibid: p 98).

Democratic reforms

The same year, 2005, saw parliament take its first official steps toward greater democracy when it created the National Committee for Political Reform (NCPR). The King's nephew, Prince Tu'ipelehake Uluvalu, a popular royal who had often sided with commoners, was named chair of the committee, which comprised six MPs and four 'independent Tongan professionals'. The committee gave itself less than a year to consider submissions, hold informal talks on legislative changes and submit reports to both the King and Parliament (Powles, 2007). But what was intended to diffuse

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[15] A grassed field outside parliament where strike rallies were held daily in Nuku'alofa.

opposition only ended up inflaming it. According to Campbell (2008), the NCPR report delivered to parliament in October 2006:

> "... conceded everything that the reform lobby had been calling for during the previous 15 years: a government responsible to an elected parliament; the exercise of royal prerogatives on the advice of an elected prime minister; the retention of the status of royalty and nobility" (p 102).

Hard-line reformers inside and outside parliament insisted upon the immediate adoption of the recommendations. The government, meanwhile, favoured a more circumspect approach. By November Parliament was still debating its options – a pace that incensed hard-line reformers and a large and increasingly rowdy crowd in Pangai Si'i Park. Feelings became even more inflamed after it became known Parliament would adjourn for the year rather than make a final decision on the NCPR report. On November 16, the crowd erupted into violence, sacking downtown Nuku'alofa.

What Tongans now dub "16/11" killed eight, destroyed many buildings and businesses, and was even branded an attempted coup by Lopeti Senituli, press secretary and adviser to the Prime Minister (Planet-Tonga.com, 2006). The riot was a watershed moment for Tonga and saw five incumbent People's Representatives charged with sedition. They were 'Akilisi Pohiva, 'Isileli Pulu, William Clive Edwards, 'Uliti Uata and Lepolo Taunisila. The five were eventually acquitted on appeal in 2009 after the court said the prosecution had not provided enough evidence.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the riot, the government and the King signalled in January 2007 a determination to proceed with NCPR recommendations. In July 2008, the Constitutional and Electoral Commission Bill was passed setting up a commission to investigate electoral reform. As with the NCPR before it, the commission had a tight timeframe – less than a year to elicit submissions (these could only be lodged by groups of 200 people or more) and to hold 17 public forums (five in Vava'u, four Ha'apai, one on Eua and the Niuas, and six on Tongatapu). In its June 2009 Interim Report, the commissioners said that they sensed…

> "A widespread and clearly articulated feeling that central government has failed to reach many communities and individuals. It was apparent that many Tongans have little interest in politics or the structure of government. This

may arise partly from a lack of ability to affect change over many generations, but comments in the outer districts suggest it also stems from the need to support themselves and their families and a perception that government however formed, will simply continue to neglect their interests and devote most of its time, energy and resources to the central districts" (Powles, 2009: p 144-145).

In April 2010, legislation amending the constitution was passed providing a new 26-seat Parliament. The main island of Tongatapu would have 10 seats, Vava'u three (up from two), while the Niuas and Eua would retain just one representative each. These seats would also represent defined electorates with each MP voted in by their constituents. Previously, parliamentarians would represent an entire island whether it was Eua with just one MP or Tongatapu with several. (RNZ, 2010-a).

In the lead up to the November 2010 election, extensive education campaigns on changes to the electoral system were accompanied by a drive to enrol voters. These campaigns were undertaken by several NGOs, but just 40,000 Tongans had registered to vote by the deadline of August 31, 2010. Tonga has a population of 104,000 (RNZ, 2010-c).

The 2010 Election

As widely predicted, the Friendly Islands Democratic Party (FIDP) headed by 'Akilisi Pohiva claimed a landslide victory taking 12 of the 17 People's Representative seats with five going to independents. However, with nine of the 26 parliamentary seats reserved for nobles, the FIDP missed the absolute majority it had hoped for. The next step for the new MPs was to elect a Prime Minister by secret ballot. Initially, Pohiva seemed assured of securing the required votes and the nobles stated they wanted to "work closely with the party to move the country forward" (RNZ, 2010-d). However, Pohiva's dominant position crumbled after the nine nobles themselves gained support of the five independent MPs and another of FIDP's own –Niua MP Sosefo Vakata – defected to the noble's camp (RNZ, 2010-e).

On December 21, Tongatapu noble, Lord Tu'ivakano, was named Prime Minister. The 58-year-old received 14 votes to Pohiva's 12. Ten days later he named his 11-man cabinet, which included six People's Representatives, three nobles and two

commoners from outside the legislature. One cabinet position went to Pohiva (Minister of Health), while another went to his FIDP colleague, Isileli Pulu. One of two cabinet roles from outside Parliament went to Clive Edwards, a former police chief who lost his seat in the election (Matangi Tonga Online, 2010; RNZ, 2010-f).

Just 17 days after being appointed, Pohiva quit his cabinet role. The announcement came a day before cabinet members were to be sworn in and parliament officially opened. In a letter published on the Ministry of Information and Communication's website (since removed), Pohiva explained that he objected to cabinet ministers being appointed from outside of Parliament when his own party had elected members qualified to fill such roles. He also objected to signing a cabinet agreement in which required he agree not to vote against the government (Stuff.co.nz, 2010). While both objections are understandable given Pohiva's political record, political commentators have also pointed out that he would find it virtually impossible to mount a credible and effective opposition to government while holding a cabinet post. This would not be lost on a man who has made a career out of being a government opponent.

Local politics

At the community level in Tonga, especially on the remote islands, it is the District Officer and Town Officer who wield a decisive influence. The *'ofisa kolo,* Town Officer, is elected every three years. He (the post is invariably held by a male) reports to the District Officer (*'ofisa fa kavahe fopua*) and is the government's representative in the village. It is the Town Officer who relays government decisions from the local governor or from the Prime Minister's Office to the community through monthly community meetings or fonos. The Town Officer resolves community disputes and maintains law and order (he has powers of arrest if there is no police presence in the community). He is also the community representative to government, so will lobby ministries on behalf of his community (Bennardo and Cappell, 2008; 'Alamoti Tautakitaki, MORDI Community Facilitator,

Interview 2010).

Nearly all the NGOs spoken to for this thesis agreed that the Town Officer plays an important role in their projects.

> "With all projects the Town Officer plays a critical role. The Town Officer calls a meeting of the community and arranges a venue. He selects the people who should participate. Although we usually send a participant list and check that the right people are being told" (Emily Esau, Tonga Community Development Trust, interview 2010).

According to the Tonga Community Development Trust, the Kingdom's oldest NGO, traditional governance structures, especially at the village level, are often based on land tenure and it is the noble who makes the important decisions. However, since the creation of the Town Officer role, nobles have increasingly abdicated their governance duties. Village committees remain the forum where issues affecting a community are thrashed out with the Town Officer calling and facilitating meetings. The NGO admitted, however, that committee meetings can be captured by one group within the community, whether it be the Town Officer, a wealthy family or the local noble. The result is that community members increasingly see meetings as irrelevant.

Politics and development

So what relevance do these national and local political machinations have for development workers? According to Richard Englehardt (2000):

> "All development issues are management issues embedded in a matrix of power at the family, village, tribal, national, regional and global levels" (p 178).

While national-level political manoeuvrings may have little day-to-day impact on Tonga's most impoverished, especially those in the remote island groups, the frustrations that spurred People's Representatives mirror growing public dissatisfaction with the monarchy, increasing poverty and indifferent local governance. James (2003) contends that this sense of frustration was actively encouraged among villagers by:

> "… better-educated protesters who use the media, debates in parliament, and *faikava* meetings (where men congregate to imbibe the national beverage and discuss matters of import)[16] to educate villagers about their rights of citizenship and the illegal abuse of privilege by members of the government" (p 331).

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[16] Faikava or kava clubs are a growing phenomena in Tonga and other Pacific islands. For more information on their importance for development NGOs see chapter 6.

The implications are two-fold for aid agencies. Firstly, demands for greater transparency by the pro-democracy movement dovetail neatly with donor demands for improved governance and aid budget oversight. Governance was an area specifically identified for action by the 2005 Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee report into New Zealand's relationship with Tonga referred to above. Subsequently in 2008, New Zealand committed $1.5 million to supporting democratic reforms, focusing on civic education and public participation, as well as support for the Electoral Commission. AusAID too made democratic reforms a priority by supporting the Tonga Constitutional and Electoral Commission, along with an extensive public awareness campaign of 151 community workshops and 46 half-hour television programmes.

Secondly, the consciousness-raising activities of pro-democracy groups weakened Tonga's traditional *faka'apa'apa* culture of deference to one's social superiors. Inevitably, this impacts on village-level attitudes towards development, and will likely encourage communities to demand greater input and control over development projects affecting them. For development workers, understanding political structures can be crucial to the success of an initiative. This is just as important at the village or community level as it is at the national level.

> "If local-level development gaols are to be pursued successfully, it is essential to identify the people of influence and authority who can get things done or stifle efforts in the area singled out for attention. This is especially true of programmes which require a strong element of participatory development" (James, 2000: p 132).

TONGAN MEDIA

During a preliminary research trip to Tonga in April 2010, I investigated aspects of the Kingdom's mainstream media. Research prior to the trip seemed to bear out the notion that Tonga's media was tightly controlled, censored and occasionally directly gagged by the government. In 2010, international NGO, Freedom House, described the Tongan press as being Partly Free and ranked it at 70 out of 196 nations, giving it a score of 32 (0 being most free and 100 the least free) (Freedom House, 2010). These assessments were backed by considerable evidence showing that Tonga's news media

had at times been under siege from authorities. This included attempts to muzzle reporting, the detention of journalists and editors, and legislation that banned newspapers. This assessment was backed by long-time Television New Zealand Pacific correspondent Barbara Dreaver, who described journalism in Tonga as "grim" during an April 2010 edition of TVNZ's Media7 show (TVNZ, 2010).

But despite this apparent climate of media hardship, the Tongan population seems well informed. The pro-democracy movement, which has long highlighted issues of corruption and poor governance, remains vocal and its popularity has increased. With the benefit of hindsight, it can be seen that government hopes of dampening demands for political change through the blunt cudgel of media censorship was a flawed and counterproductive strategy. Flawed or not, these attacks must have had a chilling effect on an independent news media. Within days of arriving in the capital Nuku'alofa in April 2010, my assumptions about Tonga's mainstream media were turned completely on their head. It was soon apparent that despite repeated government attempts to silence media critics, Tonga boasts an active and vibrant mainstream news media with four weekly newspapers, a well respected news website and an expanding stable of private radio and television stations.

Kalafi Moala, one of Tonga's most well-respected journalists and newspaper editors, set the record straight after being told of Barbara Dreaver's description of Tongan journalism being "grim":

> "Media is very free here. Things are taken out of context, usually from outside. Things have changed a lot in Tonga" (Moala, interview 2010).

Most of that change has occurred over the past decade, especially since the Tongan government's now infamous 2003 attempt to legislate control of the print media. Those measures – the Media Operators Act 2003, Newspaper Act 2003 and Act of Constitution of Tonga (Amendment) Act 2003 – it is widely agreed were aimed at stifling independent newspaper *Taimi o' Tonga* (Singh and Prakash, 2006; Campbell, 2006).

Launched in 1989, *Taimi o' Tonga,* or Times of Tonga, was the first independent commercial newspaper to be printed in over 100 years in the kingdom.[17] Within six years it would become the target of government efforts to silence it when, in 1996, the paper's owner and publisher, Kalafi Moala, and its editor, Filokalafi Akau'ola, were imprisoned for contempt of parliament. The unprecedented case followed reports in the paper of a parliamentary motion to censure a government minister. The pair, along with People's Representative 'Akilisi Pohiva (accused of leaking the information), were sentenced to 30 days in prison. The Supreme Court later declared these sentences unconstitutional and released the trio, who were subsequently awarded a total of US$26,000 in compensation (Robie, 2004).

In 2003, the Constitution of Tonga again protected the newspaper; this time because of government attempts to amend Clause 7 guaranteeing free speech and press freedom. This attempt was followed up with the Media Operators Act 2003 and the Newspaper Act 2003. All three attempts to muzzle *Taimi o' Tonga* (and by association, all other print media in Tonga) were later deemed unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 2004 (RNZ, 2004).

In response to the government's 2003 attacks, journalists and media outlets formed the Media Council Incorporated to represent the news media, establish an effective complaints committee, encourage journalism training and engage with government on media related issues (Matangi Tonga Online). So, rather than stifle the press, government attacks on media freedoms have encouraged a flourishing of mainstream, independent media. This is confirmed by Kalafi Moala, who describes Tongan media as free, especially Tongan-language newspapers which publish very "lively", content on "politics, parliamentary debates and crime" (Interview 2010).

Following his prosecution by government, Moala has become something of a local media mogul, adding the *Tonga Chronicle*[18] to his print stable and getting involved in FM radio and television channels (ibid). His former *Taimi o' Tonga* editor, Filokalafi

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[17] The *Kele'a* or Conch Shell had been launched 12-18 months earlier by People's Representative 'Akilisi Pohiva, but at the time it was an occasional publication and could not be classed as a mainstream newspaper.

[18] The *Tonga Chronicle* was government owned but Moala took over the paper under a three-year deal. He immediately made it an English-language newspaper, saying this was an untapped market. There is little doubt the editorial style (staid by comparison with Tongan-language papers) is influenced by the deal Moala struck for the paper, which sees government retain ownership (RNZ, 2009; Kalafi Moala interview 2010).

Akau'ola, has also contributed to a flowering of media, opening a rival weekly newspaper called *Talaki* in 2003. Meanwhile, the *Kele'a* was relaunched in 2004 and is now a weekly paper run on a commercial footing with Pohiva's son, Siosiua Po'oi Pohiva, listed as publisher. Added to this mix are several regularly published church-based newspapers that discuss current events, and the Public Service Association publishes a newspaper as well.

Broadcast media

Freedom of the broadcast media is a different story, however. Like print media, radio and television were until recently exclusively owned by the government. High start-up costs especially for television is one reason for government's domination of broadcast media, but the State also enjoys far greater legislative controls over broadcasters. This is maintained directly through the Communications Act, and indirectly through broadcaster licensing and spectrum allocations.

The Tonga Broadcasting Commission (TBC) was established by Queen Salote Tupou III in 1961 to run a single AM radio station, ZCO. The commission remains solely owned by the Tongan government, but now operates two free-to-air TV channels – Television Tonga and Television Tonga 2. It also operates a commercial AM radio station, Radio Tonga; one commercial FM channel, Kool 90FM; and a 24-hour Radio Australia relay channel.

In 1991, King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV added some competition when he opened the Oceania Broadcasting Network (OBN), a rival television channel to state-owned TV3 (which closed in 1993). OBN was operated by members of the Tokaikolo Christian Fellowship and broadcast mostly religious programmes. Later, the fellowship expanded programming to include news, sport and entertainment shows, and the channel became known to many as 'People's TV' because it broadcast views not seen on state television. In 2003, Sangster Saulala, the head of OBN, and Tavake Fusimalohi, the former head of the Tonga Broadcasting Commission, were accused of contempt of court along with three members of the Human Rights and Democracy Movement in Tonga (a grouping of pro-democracy advocates formed in 1998) following a debate run by OBN questioning legality of the ban imposed *Taimi 'o Tonga* (Reporters without Borders, 2003; Pacific Islands Report, 2007).

During the 2005 public servants strike, OBN again ran into trouble when it continued to air the views of strike leaders, several of whom were also pro-democracy advocates. In 2006, on heels of the Nuku'alofa riots, the government closed OBN saying it had helped orchestrate the violence. Station head, Sangster Saulala, was charged with sedition but later acquitted. Nevertheless, two years after the riots the OBN studios remained under army occupation and much of its equipment had been destroyed, according to Saulala (RNZ, 2008-c).

By that time OBN had already lost its place as an alternative news source for Tongan viewers. In November 2005 the Tonga Broadcasting Commission (TBC) in partnership with Fiji Television began broadcasting 12 channels of Sky Pacific Television into the kingdom. This was expanded to 16 channels a year later. This expansion did not signal a softening of the government's determination to control content as the TBC continued attempts to muzzle political debate in the run-up to 2008 elections.

In June 2007, the TBC announced that all radio and television political reporting was on hold. The issue was described as an internal matter by Prime Minister Feleti Sevele in Parliament and was related to complaints about accuracy and balance. Eleven weeks before the elections, TBC manager 'Elenoa 'Amanaki promised that political programmes by candidates would resume subject to "some censorship". The censorship applied only to paid-for and pre-recorded campaign spots by election candidates after new internal regulations stipulated these programmes be hosted by a TBC staff member and guest panels discuss only predetermined topics. Censorship would only be applied to prevent defamation suits 'Amanaki told reporters:

> "We will censor programmes when they make personal attacks and criticisms of other persons or political groups or discuss matters not related to their agenda" (Matangi Tonga Online, 2008).

This explanation had some validity. Personal attacks and unsubstantiated allegations against opponents seem a hallmark of Tongan politics and of political reporting. This is due to libel laws remaining largely untested in Tongan courts, as well poor training of journalists across much of the industry. However, the veracity of the TBC's position was seriously undermined when it sidelined its own staff two weeks out from the election and demanded that all coverage be vetted by its board – headed by Prime

Minister Sevele – and TBC managers. TBC said the procedure was necessary to maintain accuracy, balance and the right of reply, and insisted its own staff were not capable of applying such basic journalistic measures. This position seems bizarre considering the TBC employs some of the most experienced journalists in the country and that it had six months to ensure staff were adequately trained since political reporting was initially pulled (RNZ, 2008-a; Islands Business, *undated*).

Pesi Fonua, publisher and editor of the Matangi Tonga Online website and head of the Tonga Media Council, said the ban would affect election results. The move also drew condemnation from the Pacific Islands News Association (PINA) and New Zealand cabinet minister, Peter Dunne (theage.com.au, 2008). A 2008 US State Department human rights report also reported that Tongan media access to parliamentary debates had been restricted with the speaker announcing on 3 June that only one reporter from the TBC would be admitted into Parliament during debates and only for one hour. The print media, meanwhile, had access only to the official minutes, usually published several days after Parliament closed (US Department of State, 2009). For daily media, these restrictions undermine any sense of timeliness and hence the worth of reporting at all.

Such indirect censorship is still in evidence. As recently as May 2010, Kalafi Moala complained the TBC had pulled Taimi Media Network's Television Tonga 2 Channel. The channel was taken off air on 7 May 2010, after he refused to pay the lease for the previous two months. Moala confirmed that he owed the government, but blamed the TBC for delays caused by the censoring of his programmes. He told Radio New Zealand International:

> "We had felt over the last two to three months that they were deliberately making us try to fail, in the sense that they increased the censorship. If we had programmes that were political of nature… uhh… these were sometimes just pulled without our knowledge" (RNZ, 2010-b).

He added that the channel would be back on air within weeks through a deal struck with DigiTV, a private TV channel owned by Ireland-headquartered mobile phone company Digicel.

Distrust of state-owned mainstream media and a perception that it is censored is not confined to journalists. Several NGOs spoken to during fieldwork in Tonga for this

thesis stated they specifically do not use TBC radio or television programming because of perceived censorship. Those that do admitted to practicing self-censorship to avoid content being excised by state bureaucrats. Tonga National Youth Congress director Vanessa Lolohea said the congress relied on state-run AM radio broadcasts to promote its messages to remote island groups. However, the fortnightly broadcasts are strictly about projects – no opinion is included in the content to "avoid being censored". By contrast, the monthly newsletter published and distributed by the group is where issues affecting Tongan youth are honestly discussed because "it cannot be censored" (Vanessa Lolohea, interview 2010).

Katalina Tohi, the former head of television at TBC, said that while there was no state censorship policy, self-censorship was a common practice among state broadcasters wary of offending powerful and conservative (often Church) sensibilities (Katalina Tohi, interview 2010). Tohi is now co-owner of broadcasting company Broadcom with her husband Maka (also a former TBC employee), who operate Radio One on the 88.1FM frequency[19]. Tohi cited an HIV/AIDS awareness programme being broadcast on Radio One as an example of what privately owned media could air and state radio wouldn't. This was not because state radio avoided HIV/AIDS, rather it refused to discuss it openly. She explained that even basic terms, such as condom, were never uttered by state broadcasters for fear of upsetting conservative listeners. Instead, euphemisms such as "adequate protection" were used. She said the result was that listeners tuned out, missing important health information (ibid).

While still an employee of TBC Tohi told Australian radio in 2006 that self-censorship was common among the news media following the November riots, although she again denied there was direct government censorship of news items:

> "The journalists and the people in the media [acting] as gatekeepers are now more cautious of what to give the people because otherwise, you know, it may

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[19] In December 2010 Radio One was ordered off air by the Ministry of Information because the Tohis were unlicensed. In fact, the license for 88.1FM was owned by Kalafi Moala's media company, TMN Ltd, which had leased the license to the Tohis since 2009. Katalina Tohi claimed the closure was political after the station was accused of inciting audiences against MPs who might have voted against the Democratic Party in parliamentary elections for a new Prime Minister. Moala cut ties with Broadcom over the complaints leaving Radio One without a license. Broadcom then complained it had been waiting for two yeas for a license of its own from government. On February 1, 2011, Broadcom was granted a license to broadcast on 89.5FM. (Ministry of Information and Communications, 2011)

be some reports may provoke a repetition of these November 16 incidents"
(Australia Network, 2007).

Journalism training

Former journalist and current head of the Women and Children Crisis Centre,
'Ofakilevuka ('Ofa) Guttenbeil-Likiliki, said that rather than overt government
control, a major challenge for her is to change traditional attitudes held by journalists
on issues such as gender. She is involved in journalist training, which she uses to
"sensitise" students.

> "It's not just [teaching them about] violence, it's about economic freedom for
> women, land tenure. It's about teaching standards, to look at other issues
> beyond the immediate ones of violence" ('Ofakilevuka ('Ofa) Guttenbeil-
> Likiliki, interview 2010).

Training for journalists is also an issue for Filokalafi Akau'ola, editor of the *Talaki*
newspaper. He employs staff directly from high school, but admitted there was only
so much on-the-job training he could provide. He thought that a natural inclination for
Tongan reporters was to protect sources out of deference, family ties or simply
because "everyone knows everyone" in such a small nation. This means informants
are less likely to be named in stories or directly quoted. This seriously affects the
veracity of stories and leaves editors open to charges that stories are untrue.
(Filokalafi Akau'ola, interview 2010).

These issues are related to a lack of experience and training. Vikilani (2010) quoted
Pesi Fonua, Matangi Tonga Online publisher and head of the Tonga Media Council:

> "The biggest threat to medeia freedom in Tonga at the moment is the media
> itself, simply because it has not raised the standard of journalism in the
> country…" (p 77).

Robie (2008) also confirms that few Pacific journalists provide adequate background,
research or context to make sufficient sense of a news or current affairs development.

Despite the embarrassing back downs endured by the government in 1996 and 2003,
it seems a desire for complete control of the media is never far from the surface. As
recently as July 2010, the Minister of Information and Communication, 'Eseta

Fusituʻa, admitted on Tongan television that legislation was being prepared to regulate the print media in much the same way as government polices controlled broadcast media (Pacific.Scoop, 2010).

Relevance to development communication

How then does the state of the news media – good or bad – impact on development initiatives and development communication? Explaining that Tonga's media was once predominantly owned by the state and Church, Moala relates how almost-always-government-friendly news reports covered up corruption, failures and scandals leaving the public to suffer from "not knowing what happens" (Papoutsaki and Harris, 2008). This state of general ignorance impacts on the work of NGOs. As previously stated, an effective mainstream news media acts as a watchdog, exposing dishonesty, abuse of power and ineptitude. But just as important are the less tangible effects of a vibrant media – enlivened public debate fostered by an active and informing media. This results in a heightened sense of accountability and vigilance among politicians, public bodies and community members (Singh, 2004).

It is easy to see that where the news media does not carry out its 'watchdog' functions, communities are far more likely to be ignorant of corruption in their midst, have a reduced sense of their own relative poverty (or wealth), feel detached from the community and uninformed of events in the wider world. Where this is the case, development agencies intending to work with that community will have to fill that information void to some extent. In the Tongan case, one NGO felt compelled to increase awareness among remote island community members of government plans to change the electoral system in time for the community to lodge submissions on the proposal. Behaviour change campaigns may also include general knowledge content. For example, health-related messages will need to explain the consequences of certain behaviours in order to 'persuade' the audience to choose the desired options.

The very act of informing audiences – of increasing knowledge – can engender greater individual and community militancy for change, e.g. education campaigns on reproductive rights in Peru that questioned existing gender roles, as cited in chapter three. This in turn may stimulate an increased sense of empowerment and ownership among community members.

Where mainstream media is not effective or perceived to be compromised, communities are less likely to trust the messages they carry. This was confirmed by Tongan NGOs, which stated that they tailor messages to suit the format being used, or do not use some media at all. For NGOs, understanding which newspapers, broadcasters or other media are trusted by target populations could save time and resources and increase the impact of their communication initiatives.

Conclusion

This chapter is divided into two parts, with the first providing an overview of Tonga's political system in order to place subsequent, on-the-ground research into context. A basic knowledge of political structures at national and local levels will provide greater insight into how and why Tongan communities operate they way they do. This will go some way to explaining the socio-political mechanisms that perpetuate poverty and identify some of the actors that have an interest in stalling calls for change. The section also detailed the rise of the democracy movement, including initial results of the historic 2010 General Election held under an amended constitution. This election was the culmination of decades of popular demands for change and for the first time promised the majority of Tongans an opportunity to take control of their own affairs. This too could have repercussions for agencies working in Tonga down the track.

The second part of this chapter discussed Tonga's mainstream media and provides the link from politics to development. The media, especially the news media, plays a significant role in both the political and development realms, informing the population, and ensuring that both politicians and development agencies are held accountable for their activities by acting as a community 'watchdog'. This feeds into wider development efforts to improve governance and thereby boost the effectiveness of aid. Where the media is seen to be biased or ineffective, its ability to increase transparency is seriously compromised in the eyes of the community. Development agencies should be aware of these perceptions in order to better mould their own development communication strategies.

The following chapter will background the NGOs that took part in this research before information in this and the previous chapters is used in an analysis of their activities.

Chapter five: NGO case studies

Introduction

This chapter provides a brief overview of the background, aims and project focus areas of the Tongan non-government organisations studied for this thesis. MORDI Tonga was the primary case study and provided numerous opportunities for interviews, either with MORDI staff or with recipients of development activities. Other NGOs provided varying levels of input, but all provided valuable insights into development activities and development communication in Tonga.

MORDI Tonga

MORDI stands for Mainstreaming of Rural Development Innovations and is an International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) initiated organisation.

IFAD, an agency of the United Nations, was established as an international financial institution in 1977 and was created following the 1974 World Food Conference. A central insight to come from that conference was that food insecurity is more closely tied to structural, poverty-related problems than to issues of poor food production. As a result, IFAD focuses on country-specific solutions, working with the rural poor, governments, donors, non-governmental organisations and others to address structural issues. Solutions include increasing access to financial services, markets, technology, land and natural resources.

IFAD's presence in Tonga dates back to 1983 when it supported three projects in association with the Tonga Development Bank, distributing loans of US$6.3 million. In 2003 Tonga was included in an IFAD sub-regional strategy that introduces development innovations in selected poor rural communities throughout Pacific Island nations. Development of agriculture and rural sectors in the outer islands is a cornerstone of IFAD's strategy in these countries. This strategy includes parts of Melanesia and the remote outer islands of Polynesia and Micronesia, all of which are experiencing increasing hardship among their rural poor.

In June 2004, IFAD supported a regional workshop in Apia, Samoa that attracted representatives from a range of Pacific NGOs and the private sector. The aim was to identify key factors that impede development of isolated rural Pacific communities. As a result, the MORDI programme itself was developed late in 2004 with the Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific International (FSPI) as executing agency and IFAD as the major donor. MORDI is overseen by a project steering committee made up of major regional NGOs. The aim of the programme is to contribute to sustainable, improved livelihoods of vulnerable communities, especially youth and women, living in remote rural areas of Pacific Island countries. These efforts are guided by the United Nations Millennium Development Goals adopted in 2000. MORDI currently operates in Fiji, Tonga and Kiribati, but plans to extend operations to the Cook Islands, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste by the end of 2011.

In Tonga, the aim of MORDI is to build capacity in target communities, but also to help fund projects. MORDI Tonga helps communities develop local capacity by recruiting Community Facilitators from within the community. These facilitators then help communities draw up their own priority development lists and associated action plans. Next, MORDI Tonga assists communities to implement these plans through objective assessments, providing specific training and helping to access donor funding.

MORDI Tonga changed from being a Programme to an NGO in its own right in 2009. Soane Patolo, MORDI's general manager, explained this was to enable it to apply for donor funding independently of FSPI and IFAD. NZAID is now a primary donor. The Catholic Women's League (CWL) – Tonga, the Tonga National Youth Congress (TNYC), and the Civil Society Forum Tonga are three local NGO partners for MORDI Tonga.

Due to its own capacity and funding constraints, MORDI Tonga limits its activities to three districts within Tonga. The criteria used to select these areas are:

- Being among the poorest 25 per cent of all communities in Tonga

- Remoteness with limited external access (but not so limited MORDI itself cannot access it)

- Receiving little support form other NGOs or donors

- Demonstrated self-reliant behaviour

- A leadership well disposed to the MORDI approach.

The three areas are the Lulanga District in the island group of Ha'apai, the Motu district within the Vava'u group, and communities on the island of Niuafo'ou.

Women and Children Crisis Centre (WCCC).

Founded in October 2009, the Women and Children Crisis Centre (WCCC) works to eliminate all forms of violence against women and children, to promote the human rights of women and children and to promote gender equality.

Prior to 2009, all WCCC staff were employed at the Tonga National Centre for Women and Children (TNCWC), an organisation with similar aims to the WCCC, but with a governing board largely controlled by government representatives. Over the years staff at TNCWC became frustrated at what they saw as an inability to fulfil their role as a non-government organisation. They grew frustrated that strategies developed by staff were often in direct contrast with views held by government representatives, who held the balance of power in the TNCWC decision-making process and blocked certain activities. In 2009, staff decided to break away and form their own NGO and established the WCCC.

The organisation operates a safe house, provides 24-hour counselling, legal advice, financial advice, women and girl empowerment, male advocacy, and community outreach and awareness programmes. In 2010, it dealt with 354 clients seeking help. The WCCC partners with numerous organisations, including the Tonga Police Domestic Violence Unit, the Ministry of Health, Salvation Army, Life Line and Tonga National Youth Congress.

In December 2010, the WCCC won the Human Rights Award for advancing gender equality in the Pacific from the Regional Rights Resource Team and the Secretariat of the Pacific Counsel. The co-ordinator of the WCCC is 'Ofakilevuka ('Ofa) Guttenbeil-Likiliki, who has a background in film, television, communications and journalism.

Tonga National Youth Congress (TNYC).

The Tonga National Youth Congress is focused on the interests of youth and was founded in 1991 with the support of Churches and the Tongan government. Its goal is to improve the welfare of youth in the Kingdom of Tonga through programmes that foster responsibility, citizenship, community service and leadership. It is staffed by Tongans and local and overseas volunteers. The current TNYC director is Vanessa Lolohea. Her background includes a degree in biochemistry gained in Australia, before returning to Tonga to work for a company exporting vanilla. She then worked two years for the Peace Corps before joining the youth congress in 2008.

The head office is in Nuku'alofa, but there are also local offices in each of the island groups of 'Eua, Ha'apai, Vava'u, Niuatoputapu and Niuafo'ou. The six offices are all independent organisations with their own governance arrangements and financial management. They come together under the banner of TNYC, and the management of the central TNYC office. Local congress co-ordinate youth activities for member village youth groups and provide community and social activities. Three of the island congress and the National Office also carry out income generation work. The organisation as a whole receives project funding from a range of donors. TNYC programmes include the Tonga National Volunteers Service, Pacific Stars Lifeskills, Youth Parliament, Future Farmers of Tonga, HIV/AIDS and gender development, the Environment Committee, and micro-finance initiatives.

The TNYC media team produces Le'o E Kaha'u (*Voice of the Future*) magazine to provide youth an opportunity to voice their opinions and read about youth issues. It also acts as a training ground for writing, design and magazine production. According to Lolohea, the magazine fulfils a valuable role, as it is free of government censorship, unlike radio programmes the organisation broadcasts via state-owned AM radio stations.

TNYC conducted surveys of Tongan youth in 1998, 2001 and 2007 aimed at informing the organisation of the main issues concerning young people and whether the organisation's programmes are having an impact on youth. These surveys form the basis for new projects.

Tonga Community Development Trust (TCDT).

Tonga Trust, as it is informally known, started from the work of the Catholic Village Women's Development Programme (VWD) in 1978. The organisation was formally registered in November 1983 under the name Foundation for the Peoples of the South Pacific/Tonga (FSP Tonga). Two years later, the name of the organisation was changed to Tonga Community Development Trust. Since its inception, the organisation has been governed by a Board of Directors with day-to-day management by the Executive Director, currently Sione Faka'osi.

The TCDT is headquartered on the main island of Tongatapu. Field offices were opened in the second largest city of Neiafu on Vava'u in April 1999, with others subsequently opened on the Ha'apai and 'Eua island groups.

The TCDT has a long history of development projects based on community needs, established through community consultation. The TCDT focuses on capacity building with special attention given to the least developed and most disadvantaged communities. Projects cover family and community health; rural water supply and sanitation; sustainable development; environmental conservation; disaster preparedness; women's development; human rights; good governance, civic education and voter education. Specific projects undertaken include, Pesticides Awareness and Sustainable Agriculture (PASA), Project, Awareness Community Theatre (ACT), People and Policy Project (PPP), and Disaster Preparedness Strengthening Project (DPSP).

Tonga Family Health Association (TFHA)

The Tonga Family Health Association was established by a group of volunteers in 1975 as the Tonga Family Planning Association. Its primary role was to promote and provide integrated family health services to the people of Tonga. In 1983 its focus shifted to provide quality family planning services at a grassroots level. Now the TFHA provides knowledge, information and education on family planning and sexual health to communities, targeting vulnerable populations, especially the poor, marginalised and at risk.

TFHA clinics on Tongatapu, Ha'apai and Vava'u provide general and specialised counselling services, management of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), antenatal care, family planning, maternal and gender health, child health and general health care. The clinics are of a drop-in type where confidentiality is stressed and a special emphasis placed on encouraging youth access. TFHA runs a community-based service, the Family Life Education Worker programme, which provides contraceptive information and services that fit within local cultural constraints. This requires that someone known and trusted by the villagers provides information and contraceptives discretely. There are 32 workers who receive monthly training from TFHA staff on a range of sexual and reproductive health issues, including HIV/AIDS in the Pacific.

A central focus of TFHA is increasing awareness of adolescent health issues, youth empowerment, and preventing HIV/AIDS. A key educational tool used is the Fili Tonu Drama Group, part of the TFHA's Adolescent Reproductive Health project. Fili Tonu translates as 'right choice'. The group performs in schools and at community events, exploring youth issues, such as drinking, obesity, violence, peer pressure and sexual health. The group also performs to raise the profile of the Tonga Family Health Association.

Langafonua 'a Fafine Tonga.

Langafonua 'a Fafine Tonga was launched by Queen Salote, who established the organisation to promote and enhance the social, cultural, economic and spiritual development of Tongan women and their families.

Recently, Langafonua 'a Fafine lost its preferential position within government and as a result has lost funding and the input to other NGOs. It has not had projects funded by donors for two years (as of September 2010). This is blamed by Langafonua 'a Fafine leadership on politics and a falling out with government over welfare initiatives.

Its offices are housed in a prime colonial building on the main street of Nuku'alofa – Taufa'ahau Rd. This also houses the Langafonua Handicraft Centre (LHC), which was established as a non-profit organisation in the 1960s. In 2010, management agreed that the LHC should become the business arm of Langafonua 'a Fafine as a profit-making enterprise, while maintaining its original philosophy of assisting the

women of Tonga. This business is now the main source of income for the organisation with much of the profit going towards upkeep of the building. The leadership hopes that by making the organisation a profitable business, it will be less reliant on government patronage and can evolve to be of greater benefit to women. All staff are volunteers.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided details on the background, aims and primary focus areas of the Tongan NGOs studied for this thesis. There were other sources of information used in the following analysis section, specifically the beneficiaries of MORDI projects and community leaders on the remote island of Hunga. Tongan government officials were also interviewed, as were numerous Tongans not directly involved in development projects. Some of these were little more than casual conversations and not recorded; however, all interactions helped paint a vivid picture of the challenges NGOs experience working in Tonga.

The next chapter will analyse the information gathered during interviews with the above organisations and their recipients, and with government officials and local development experts.

Chapter six: Analysis

Introduction

The overarching aim of this thesis is to identify successful communication strategies used by development agencies working within Tonga's unique media, cultural and political landscape. This chapter analyses information gathered from NGOs working in Tonga. It places those experiences within the wider development context, looking first at diffusion and then participatory approaches to development and development communication. From there, important secondary themes are addressed. These are:

- Ownership and how this is built within a target community

- The necessity of face-to-face communication within Tonga's oral culture

- The central role played by the Town Officer, and

- The evolution of kava clubs as a progressive communication and organisational forum.

The primary NGO case study used in this chapter is MORDI Tonga. Other NGOs detailed in the previous chapter, are also cited, as are the views of non-NGO experts. While all the NGOs used as case studies in this research delivered participatory-style activities, methods taken from both diffusion and modernisation paradigms are also evident in some projects, depending on their specific objectives. Whatever the ideological roots of the methods deployed, all activities included a strong communications component, as would be expected from essentially participatory development activities. As Gumucio-Dagron (2009) argued: communication *is* participatory development and one cannot occur without the other.

This chapter will demonstrate that mass media forms of communication – radio, television and newspapers – are used and are considered to be helpful in disseminating new ideas and initiating change in Tongan communities. However, the island nation's oral culture means that face-to-face communication remains the most effective means of exchange. This is as true for the comparatively well-developed island of Tongatapu as it is for the remote islands where access to mass media is poor to non-existent.

DIFFUSION

The diffusion model is an intermediate step between the polar opposites of modernisation and participation. Like modernisation, diffusion espouses an essentially one-way transmission of information. But unlike modernisation theory, which unquestioningly relies on the mass media to disseminate messages to provoke behavioural change, diffusion recognises that the influence of mass media is limited. Diffusion theorists recognised that interpersonal communication instead plays a far more significant role in the adoption of new ideas (Rogers, 1983; Inagaki 2007). Nonetheless, diffusion theorists, like modernisation advocates, regard behaviour change as the goal of any communication campaign whether to change an undesirable behaviour or encourage the adoption of a new one. This is achieved by providing new ideas and information that *persuade* individuals to adjust behaviour.

A UNESCO-funded HIV/AIDS radio awareness campaign is one example of a diffusion model, mass media development activity conducted in Tonga. Broadcast on a privately owned Broadcom radio station, Radio One FM 88.1, the show ran for half an hour during the evenings Monday to Friday. Broadcom co-owner and station manager Katalina Tohi said the show had proven successful because it "spoke" to the target audience (Tongan youth) in their language, using slang terms and raising issues older generations might feel were taboo. A phone-in segment encouraging listeners to call up with their own questions about sexual health issues had been especially popular and proved how effective the show was she claimed.

This radio show epitomizes later diffusion theory thinking. While it uses mass media to produce a specific change in behaviour, it acknowledges that this cannot be achieved through a simple, one-way transference of information. The radio show format, especially the phone-in segment, was designed to create discussion between listeners, and between listeners and studio experts. It "spoke the language" of the target audience, stated Tohi, who added that this sort of radio show was a first for Tonga's young people. As a former employee of state broadcaster, Tonga Broadcasting Commission, she confirmed that similar HIV/AIDS campaigns had run, but with only limited success. The reason, she claimed, was that basic terms such as condom were never used for fear of upsetting powerful conservative groups. Instead, euphemisms such as "protection" were used. She said the result was that young

people tuned out and missed potentially life-saving health information (Tohi, interview 2010).

The approach adopted by the HIV/AIDS campaign acknowledges the crucial role interpersonal communication has in diffusing messages beyond the original messenger – in this case studio-based sexual health experts. This is all the more important in a culture such as Tonga's, which is traditionally reticent about discussing sexuality and sexual health issues.

PARTICIPATION

Describing the Participatory Development Approach, Robert Chambers (2005) said that each individual and group must themselves puzzle out exactly what they think participation should mean and how to give it expression. Chambers stated that what constitutes meaningful participation for one culture may be completely different for another. It may also be different between certain groups within a community, or even between individuals within that group. This is due to the unique conditions and aspirations that each individual, group and community must juggle when considering development activities intended to forever change their lives.

Tongans have approached participatory development armed with their own cultural and political mores. Interacting with the concepts of empowerment, partnership, accountability, active citizenship and ownership, these traditions have produced distinctly Tongan expressions of participation. Because communication is such a fundamental component of participation (Gumucio-Dagron, 2009), Tongans have also established distinct communication methods that are culturally relevant and specific to them. These will, of course, evolve as Tongan culture does, and as more people gain access to new communication mediums, such as mobile phones and the internet. These technology-driven trends can already be glimpsed within the relatively well developed main population centre of Tongatapu.

Majid Rahnema (1990, cited by Leal, 2007) provocatively called participation 'a redeeming saint' for the development industry. Rather than an endorsement, she claimed the industry was more concerned with peripheral details – a paternalistic top-down approach practiced by development agencies – than with fundamental structural problems. In a sense, Rahnema's assessment could be applied to Tonga. The

participatory approach demands a horizontal transfer of information, rather than the vertical top-down flow, all to familiar from modernisation and diffusion approaches. But Tongan culture is strongly hierarchical, both politically and socially and there lies an obvious source of conflict awaiting participatory development activities – one that requires a considered communication strategy to mitigate.

From its inception in 1978, the Tonga Community Development Trust (TCDT) has consulted with communities on their needs. It was a participatory approach right from the beginning, TCDT executive director Sione Faka'osi stated (Faka'osi, interview, 2010). Likewise, Emily Esau from the Tonga National Youth Congress remarked that consultation is standard practice when establishing local priorities and that dialogue forms the basis of community action plans (E Esau, interview 2010).

Projects conducted by MORDI Tonga represent almost a textbook illustration of the participatory approach. In fact, its activities almost exactly mirror a checklist of desirable participatory objectives and functions, published by Chambers (2005: p 87). Those are:

- Making known local wishes

- Generating development ideas

- Providing local knowledge

- Testing proposals for feasibility and improving them

- Increasing the capability of communities to handle their affairs and to control and exploit their environment

- Extracting, developing and investing local resources (labour, finance, managerial skills, etc)

- Promoting desirable relationships between people, especially through co-operative work.

Similarly, a 1992 set of participation guidelines drawn up for the World Bank by Bhatnagar and Williams is even more succinct (cited by Chambers, 2005; p 104):

1. Information sharing: people are informed in order to facilitate collective individual action

2. Consultation: people are consulted and interact with an agency, which can then take account of their feedback

3. Decision-making: people have a decision-making role, which may be theirs exclusively, or joint with others, on specific issues of a policy or project

4. Initiating action: people are proactive and able take the initiative.

MORDI's own guiding principals list the adoption of a demand-driven approach for deciding community-level development activities; a bottom-up approach to determine policy; and the adoption of a 'learning' approach for the implementation of the programme. In other words, MORDI aims to promote development that is stipulated by the communities themselves; that is informed by the communities' own knowledge and experience; and that achieves sustainability through local ownership. Indeed, the first guiding principal listed in a MORDI Tonga Information Booklet is: "The need to ensure broad *ownership* at all levels" (MORDI Tonga). This is a term not explicitly addressed by Chambers, but it is a concept central to the success of activities conducted by MORDI and the other NGOs in Tonga, and implicit within participatory projects.

Ownership

"I have seen many community-level projects and the main failure is ownership. If you design a project and there is no ownership there, people lose patience and then it will definitely fail" (Soane Patolo, interview 2010).

The 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness signed by more than 100 donor and developing country governments, multilateral donor agencies, regional development banks and international agencies lists 'a sense of ownership' as one of five mutually reinforcing principles. They are: Alignment, Harmonisation, Managing for Results, and Mutual Accountability are the remaining four. The intention of the Paris Declaration is to better co-ordinate aid among donors and help developing nations take a greater lead in their own national development plans. Despite ownership being recognised as central to this effort, there is very little detail contained within the document on how ownership would be achieved, or even a definition of ownership.

The most signatories could agree on was to:

- Exercise leadership in developing and implementing their national development strategies through broad consultative processes.

- Translate these national development strategies into prioritised results-oriented operational programmes as expressed in medium-term expenditure frameworks and annual budgets.

- Take the lead in co-ordinating aid at all levels in conjunction with other development resources in dialogue with donors and encouraging the participation of civil society and the private sector. (OECD, 2005)

The Tongan ownership experience

At a national level, it is hard to discern just how determined the Tongan government has been in implementing Paris Declaration principles and, specifically undertakings on ownership. Some independent verification comes via the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS, 2010-a). In its July 2010 report, *Tracking the Effectiveness of Development Efforts in the Pacific*, the PIFS states that Tonga has replaced its run of Strategic Development Plans with a more focused planning framework. The report then acknowledges that of all the elements contributing to aid effectiveness, ownership is one of the hardest to define. However, it adds that formulating a national plan is "a strong starting point for establishing ownership of development priorities" (p 4), although goes on to say this in itself does not drive political decisions or resource allocation. According to the report, international experience shows that achieving "active national ownership" of development efforts requires:

- Mechanisms that help to ensure decisions about development arise from the national political debate, through formal and informal processes

- The ability to translate national priorities into operational costed programmes ("prioritised results-oriented operational programmes as expressed in medium term expenditure frameworks and annual budgets")

- A robust national policy framework on the use of development resources that guides budget management and relationships with development partners

- The ability to generate understanding and commitment in development partners

through consistent dialogue (PIFS, 2010).

It is not the purpose of this thesis to assess how well Tonga has achieved Paris Declaration commitments, but if there has been political debate leading to development mechanisms (as recommended in the first point above), these have not been widely reported to the public. Tongan journalist, and editor of the *Taimi o' Tonga* and *Tonga Chronicle* newspapers, Kalafi Moala, stated that reporting of development issues is rare. His opinion was that the body charged with keeping the population informed – the Ministry of Information – had failed to do its job on this important aspect of Tongan affairs. He also complained that development NGOs themselves fail to use informal forums. They are too linked to institutions, rather than Tonga's culture of family, extended community and village (Moala, interview 2010). That development projects are often driven by donors and elites is a common lament in developing countries, states Rodrigues (2008).

As for the final point above – engaging in "consistent dialogue" with development partners – the PIFS itself casts doubt on Tonga's performance:

> "One of the ways in which developing countries can assert the behaviours expected of development partners is by agreement on local versions of international agreements ... But neither Tonga nor Tuvalu mentioned them in their country reports, suggesting that their practical effects may have been limited" (PIFS, 2010: p 7).

So, it seems Tonga has made only tentative progress in establishing ownership of its national development agenda. But is this the same ownership that MORDI's Soane Patolo described above?

Just like the Paris Declaration, the PIFS report does not specifically define ownership. It does say the process requires popular input and that it should not be a "technocratic exercise". But the emphasis of the document is weighted in favour of national development plans and 'country ownership', rather than any popular, grassroots sense of the term.

Buiter (2007) suggests that 'country ownership' is a jargon term coined by international finance institutions to obfuscate the realities of structural adjustment programmes. While those types of programmes may not be directly relevant to Tonga,

Buiter asks how any nation can declare it has reached a national consensus on development priorities and approaches when even the smallest and most homogenous still contains within it groups with diverse needs and a multiplicity of view points? He concedes, however, that where institutions for political and economic governance are seen to be representative and legitimate, it may be justifiable to claim that these 'speak for the country' or 'represent the interests of the country'. He qualifies this by pointing out that those nations requiring development programmes are most often the very ones afflicted by non-representative institutions that are corrupt, poorly led and with little civil society participation.

Community ownership

How then is grassroots or community ownership defined? A community that has a sense of ownership over its development implies it also has some input into that agenda – that it has 'participated' in the formulation and implementation of development activities, rather than simply had development to imposed from the outside in a classic modernisation approach. That participation plays a role in Tongan development should not be surprise: it is widely accepted that all development projects now include some participatory elements no matter their ideological orientation (Chambers, 2005; Huesca, 2003; Cornish and Dunn, 2009; Morris, 2003) and even those organisations more inclined to impose interventions from above – international financial institutions, for example – have become cheerleaders of participation (Gumucio-Dagron, 2009). But true community participation – and its corollary 'ownership' – requires more than a consultation process designed to merely 'tick the participation box'.

Some core goals of the participatory approach are to establish active citizenship,[20] a sense of empowerment, partnership, accountability and ownership. All of these concepts and attributes are linked and are complimentary. Without active citizenship and community participation, a sense of ownership over the development process cannot be achieved (Clarke, 2009; Freire, 1970; Chambers, 2005; Huesca, 2003;

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[20] Active citizenship presupposes a level of community participation and ownership of development processes. Sustainable change is unlikely where the target community has not actively participated in needs analysis, project identification and design, and monitoring and evaluation. Active citizenship is a logical and necessary outcome of community participation, and begets a sense of ownership (Clarke, 2009).

Gumucio-Dagron, 2009; Cornish & Dunn, 2009). This active participation in, rather than passive acceptance of, the development process is achieved by involving the whole community – firstly, through needs analysis, then project identification and design, and ultimately in implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Therefore, active citizenship is a logical and necessary outcome of community participation, and this results in an all-important sense of ownership (Clarke, 2009).

Community ownership is a consequence of participatory development – an approach that recognises the internal strength of communities themselves and hands as much control of the development agenda to the people as possible. This raises collective self-esteem, and encourages the community to take responsibility for its own actions and future direction. In essence, this is what Paulo Freire stressed in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970): by raising individual and community critical consciousness (conscientisation), a level of buy-in or sense of individual and community ownership will be achieved.

How NGOs in Tonga achieve ownership

NGOs interviewed for this thesis ranked creating a sense of ownership as requisite for the success of development projects and programmes. Ownership is achieved by working directly with those in the community, and by drafting existing political institutions and community organisations into development efforts.

In the case of MORDI, building community ownership begins with the very first contact. Through the Town Officer, MORDI arranges an initial meeting with the whole community to explain its aims and approach. Its key message is that the programme is the community's and it is up to the community to dictate what projects are undertaken and how quickly they will proceed. Only when the whole community has approved the programme will MORDI begin working with it.

The next priority is to appoint community facilitators. These are individuals selected from within the community to liaise directly with MORDI. The community facilitator will "stand between them and us, as a bridge for communication" (Patolo, interview 2010). Those NGOs that use community facilitators provide training on how to run meetings, basic governance, creating community action plans and reporting on activities. Both MORDI and the TCDT provide training for facilitators with the

TCDT specifically training women for women's groups and youth for youth groups, and providing governance training. MORDI holds its community facilitator training over two weeks on Tongatapu with all transport and accommodation costs covered for participants.

Tonga Community Development Trust executive director, Sione Faka'osi, stated that facilitators are often ex-teachers because they are articulate and experienced mediators, respected by the community (Faka'osi, interview 2010). While it is ultimately up to the community to select facilitators, the TCDT is careful to avoid selections that may be controversial. That is, individuals known to have a bias for or against certain sectors of their community. Faka'osi admitted it is difficult to find good facilitators – those interested in promoting the whole community, rather than family members or favoured groups. He found that those volunteering to be facilitators were usually older, established financially and had time to commit to the role. While not a paid position, facilitators often receive some form of incentive (usually meals supplied during community work).

Once selected and trained, community facilitators organise a meeting of the whole community where a list of development priorities and a plan on how to achieve these goals is drawn up. This includes specifying the community's level of participation – what work they will carry out and what level of funding the community will shoulder. Development 'wish lists' often start off as quite fanciful and may feature demands for the latest consumer goods, such as flat screen televisions, but they quickly become more realistic as the community adjusts to the new role of deciding its own destiny (Patolo, interview 2010). Community development 'aspirations' are written onto large sheets of paper and hung on the walls of the community hall to act as a constant reference and reminder for the community.

MORDI also undertakes a detailed baseline survey of community assets with the number of houses, livestock, inhabitants, plantations, water supplies and other relevant data plotted onto a map of the local area. These are shared among residents. Like MORDI, TCDT project proposals are formulated through direct engagement with the community. These proposals are refined by TCDT representatives, who then go back to the community to discuss specific details, such as the community's level of participation.

Communication and ownership

Nearly all the NGOs consulted for this thesis reported that their most important communication tools are community meetings and workshops. These can be fonos of the whole community or smaller groups discussing specific issues. This face-to-face dialogue and feedback process is not dependent on literacy or communications infrastructure, thus ensuring the whole community can be included in the development process. This familiar and relaxed exchange provides an opportunity for facilitators to uncover misunderstandings community members might have.

This sharing of ideas, or horizontal communication, is a key point of difference that distinguishes participation from modernisation and diffusion paradigms. Communication approaches related to the latter two stress a paternalistic, top-down exchange of information from First World experts to Third World receivers. This form of communication cares little whether the entire community is involved, believing instead that new ideas will naturally trickle down, or diffuse to the whole community once the superiority of those ideas is understood. This trickle-down reasoning underpins the diffusion paradigm, which relies upon change 'champions' to act as agents of change. This approach assumes that communities are homogenous, that ideas diffuse unimpeded and fails to recognise that there will be existing elites and community, and that these divisions might be exacerbated if not all members have equal access to new ideas (Melkote and Steeves, 2001).

Participation, meanwhile, is predicated upon sharing information equally, or horizontally, between stakeholders (NGOs, extension workers, government officials) and the community (Bessette, 2006; Inagaki 2007). It is understood that community members know best what works for them and their local environment. By tapping into this indigenous knowledge, development agencies can better ensure active citizenship and local ownership (Clarke, 2009; Chambers, 2005; Huesca, 2003; Gumucio-Dagron, 2009; Cornish & Dunn, 2009).

Face-to-face communication

Several reasons were cited by Tongan NGOs to explain the success of, and their preference for interpersonal, face-to-face communication over mass media forms. The most obvious are physical constraints – a lack of infrastructure and the vast distances

that overwhelm the reach of Tonga's mass media. These are most obvious for remote island communities where limited electricity supplies (to power televisions and radios) and sporadic boat sailings (to bring newspapers and mail) mean face-to-face communication remains the most reliable way to transmit ideas. This does not stop the Tongan government or international donor agencies from using mass media to announce new initiatives or funding rounds. The now-defunct AUSAid Tonga Community Development Scheme was advertised in newspapers and on the radio even though a preference was given to schemes in remote islands where mass media was unreliable (Ministry of Finance and National Planning, interview 2010).

NGOs understand that mass media forms, such as newspapers and radio, are also vital communication tools, albeit less so in remote communities. Community consultations emanating from constitutional reforms in the run-up to the 2010 elections demonstrate this:

> "When the government first called for submissions, they announced it on the radio. The papers didn't get to the Niuas [Niuatoputapu and Niuafo'ou islands 350km north of Vava'u] for about four months. That's when people in the Niuas realised that this was important, because they had more details [from the newspaper] (Patolo, interview 2010).

Patolo's point is that the immediacy and short life of broadcast messages often means they are brief on detail. In this case, the islanders needed more information to fully understand the ramifications of electoral reforms. This case also demonstrates the potential failings of mass media communications in remote areas, as by the time the community made submissions, the process had already closed.

> "You can't name a specific timeframe for the communities I work with: if there's no transport, if they haven't been trained on proposal writing, you can't get proposals to stick to the timeframe" (ibid).

NGOs also find face-to-face communication more effective on Tonga's main island of Tongatapu where distance and poor infrastructure do not impact on the population's ability to access information via the mass media. This preference for interpersonal communication – even where other options are available – is something diffusion theorists have long been well aware of. Everett Rogers, the father of diffusion theory, highlighted this in 1983:

> "...mass media channels are often the most rapid and efficient means to inform an audience of potential adopters about the existence of an innovation, that is, to create awareness-knowledge ... On the other hand, interpersonal channels are more effective in persuading an individual to adopt a new idea, especially if the interpersonal channel links two or more individuals who are near-peers (p 18).

Interpersonal communication is recognised as hugely important, especially for behaviour modification projects such as HIV/AIDS and family planning awareness campaigns (ibid). Several studies have shown that interpersonal communications between spouses, or among family, friends and neighbours, have greater influence on behaviour change than mass media campaigns delivered via newspapers, radio and television. That is not to diminish the effectiveness of mass media campaigns entirely: they are often a necessary precursor, laying the informational groundwork for subsequent campaigns based on interpersonal communication (Inagaki, 2007).

In Tonga, interpersonal communication is all-the-more-important because, as a Pacific culture, the preferred form of communication is oral, rather than written (Wrighton, 2010). Adolescent Health and Development project co-ordinator for the Tonga Family Health Association, Katherine Mafi confirms this. People prefer to hear stories, especially those presented in a humorous way (Mafi, interview 2010). This goes some way to explaining the popularity of the Fili Tonu drama group and why it has proved such a key promotional tool for the Family Health Association.

Fili Tonu is a drama group affiliated with the Tonga Family Health Association that began in 2000 as part of the Adolescent Reproductive Health project. Fili Tonu, which translates to 'right choice' in English, performs at schools and communities and explores youth issues such as drinking, obesity, violence, peer pressure and sexual health. The group is made up of nine volunteers who write and perform all the shows. In theoretical terms, Fili Tonu fits into the 'folk media' or 'entertainment-education' format. This has been used to great effect in areas with limited access to electronic media (Snyder, 2003). Fili Tonu members believe humour is especially effective in Tonga, which is why they focus on comedy to keep audiences engaged.

There are also drawbacks to relying so heavily on face-to-face communication. For TCDT Vava'u community facilitator, Alaipuke Esau, relying on the Town Officer to facilitate face-to-face communication can be problematic, as the Town Officer is not

always seen as traditional (the system of representation is only 50 years old). Before the Town Officer everyone did what they were told by elders, he stated (A Esau, interview 2010).

TCDT head, Sione Faka'osi, said these attitudes are dying out and a more transparent decision-making process based on open community discussion is evolving, eclipsing even the role that nobles once monopolised:

> "Once the nobles became aware that this [democratisation] was not a political process [of grabbing power], but a governance process, they saw it was important for development. They then drove it themselves" (Faka'osi, interview 2010).

Ownership through communication

The remote community of Hunga in Tonga's Vava'u group community tells a story that illustrates disempowerment and a loss of ownership. It began with the Canada Fund providing free concrete water tanks for each home in the community. According to Hunga community facilitator 'Alamoti Tautakitaki, the community was initially very grateful, as until then everyone relied on one large communal concrete tank constructed decades previously, filled from the roof of the community hall. When the last of the new tanks was installed, the Canada Fund left. Within a year the tanks began to crack. More and more families were forced to get water from intact tanks belonging to neighbours. What had started as a significant improvement in water supplies became a curse and a potential source of community division. The community had no idea the tanks could be easily repaired with fresh cement, Tautakitaki explained. Another community member stated that the experience had left them feeling bitter and beholden to the Canada Fund like "children".

That was not the only time development agencies had provided new facilities for Hunga, but had failed to consider ongoing sustainability. A Japanese agency recently supplied each home with solar electric panels. Batteries stored power generated during the day and then ran household lighting at night. After about a year and once community members had grown accustomed to their electric lights, the batteries began failing. These were specialised and could not be replaced easily by the

community. Eventually, they substituted them with easily obtainable and relatively cheap car batteries, discarding the donor batteries altogether.

But it was the water tank experience that became a touchstone for the community. Perhaps it was the simplicity of its solution – the fact that the community already possessed the skills and materials required to plug the cracks – and that they had (for a time at least) become blind to their own abilities and the potential of their own initiative. The water tanks symbolised a level of dependence Hunga had developed.

> "We just waited for the government to tell us what to do. Over time, more people were leaving Hunga" (Sione Atu community facilitator, interview 2010).

MORDI's emphasis on engendering a sense of ownership and empowerment plainly struck a chord in Hunga when the NGO arrived in the community not long after.

> "The first time MORDI came, we thought they were just like other donors. Then they started training community facilitators and working with them through the year. This was different. The others never asked us what we wanted to do. With MORDI everyone is involved. People started to see real things happen.

> "Change is difficult. But with MORDI, they plan something and they start to see something change. They are motivated and empowered. We started in 2007, and it's only in the last year that we can see the changes in people's attitudes" (Tautakitaki, interview 2010).

MORDI approach

MORDI Tonga selects the communities it approaches to work with based on six criteria:

1. They should be among the poorest 25 per cent of all communities in Tonga

2. They should be remote upland or outer island areas with limited external access (although not so remote that the programme could not operate effectively)

3. The community receives little support from other donor/NGO programmes

4. They should be proactive and have demonstrated self-reliant behaviour

5. District and village leadership should be supportive of development

6. Total population should be dense enough to make project delivery cost-effective.

Once a community is selected and it agrees to work with MORDI, community facilitators are chosen and trained. A detailed survey is also carried out that counts houses, livestock, inhabitants, plantations, water supplies and other relevant data, which is plotted onto a map of the island. This information is shared among residents.

The community together draws up its three-year development plan, prioritising certain key activities. For the Hunga community, it was agreed the most crucial priority was to build a road traversing the cliff to the community jetty. This was the only practical access to their boats and their lifeline to the outside world. Other priorities included establishing a communal garden and youth job training.

Another step in the MORDI approach is to encourage greater community involvement in the monthly community fono. These are an existing forum held in all Tongan communities and are called by the Town Officer. The effectiveness of these community fonos varies widely from community to community. Several interviewees stated that nobles and other local elites dominated the community fonos. TCDT executive director Sione Faka'osi added that the monthly meetings were often poorly attended because a small group of community members and families often get re-elected to committee roles year-in, year-out. Community committees can also be guilty of leaving major and difficult decisions to local nobles. The result is that many community members become disenchanted with the process and feel powerless against entrenched power blocs. This leads to greater apathy and disengagement from local decision-making (Faka'osi, interview 2010).

The residents of Hunga have largely solved the issue of public disengagement by devolving decision-making deeper into the community. Rather than leave all decisions to the Community Committee or the Town Officer, they have created sub-committees with each responsible for a certain activity or resource within the community. For example, there is a vehicle committee, garden committee, youth committee, even the community fence committee. Each sub-committee meets monthly to plan its own activities and sends its Secretary and Chair to the monthly

Community Committee meeting where they propose those activities. The Community Committee can veto sub-committee plans, depending on whether they fit with wider community development priorities.

An example of an activity accepted by the Hunga Community Committee came from the vehicle sub-committee. It wanted to build a garage to house the community-owned tractor and truck, plus tools used to construct the road and used in the community garden. This plan was accepted as it complimented the community's three-year plan. Community facilitator 'Alamoti Tautakitaki, who claimed credit for the sub-committee idea stated:

> "This way, everyone feels they belong and have a role. They have risen to this challenge" (Tautakitaki, interview 2010).

Even quite simple tasks are controlled by sub-committees. 'Ana Pua is the Chair of the women's committee. The main task of the 28 women and youth in the group is to keep the village clean. Each Saturday they visit every home in the community to check if they are clean and have secure pigpens. Homes not meeting cleanliness standards are fined TOP$2 and if residents do not pay they are 'named and shamed' at the monthly village fono. People are happy to have the checks, Pua said, and are happy that sanitation is looked after.

Akosita Tu'a is secretary of Hunga youth committee. This committee has 15 members aged 14 to 34, and is primarily concerned with creating employment opportunities for Hunga youth. Each Monday they undertake volunteer work, cleaning up the beach, the village and vacant houses. The group also operates a lawn-mowing business to earn money for the group and individual members. For each lawn-mowing job, the group takes 40 per cent of the profit while 60 per cent goes to those doing the mowing. The committee also raises money by holding concerts and running kava clubs (see later explanation of kava clubs). They use these funds for community projects such as supplying solar power. Like other committees, it meets once a month to come up with new projects.

Tu'a explained that since MORDI became involved in the community, there had been a noticeable change:

> "People are saving their money. The women use their time better with crafts. The more money they have, the better. Before they did not have the skills to

be self-employed. MORDI conducted financial literacy courses and families are now saving money" (Tu'a, interview 2010).

The above descriptions of development processes and activities are intended to demonstrate how community members become direct participants in their own development initiatives, even the most mundane tasks. The NGOs involved would likely agree with Gumucio-Dagron's (2009) assessment of the participatory approach:

> "Everybody knows that projects fail when communities are not involved and do not take ownership of the social change process; and everybody knows that the only real guarantee for sustainability is when people appropriate a programme" (p 455-6).

Communication plays a crucial role enabling that appropriation, participation and ownership. Participatory development communication focuses on informing people to help change attitudes and facilitate dialogue with stakeholders. The aim is to assist all those involved to address common problems by identifying required partnerships, knowledge and material conditions to effect change.

> "The focus is not on information to be disseminated by experts to end-users. Rather, it is on horizontal communication processes that enable local communities to identify their development needs and the specific actions that could help to fulfil those needs, while establishing an ongoing dialogue with the other stakeholders involved (eg extension workers, researchers and decision-makers). The main objective is to ensure that the end-users gather enough information and knowledge to carry out their own development initiatives, evaluate their actions and recognise the resulting benefits" (Bessette, 2006: p 5).

TOWN OFFICER

A crucial development stakeholder in the Tongan setting is the Town Officer. All communities in Tonga elect one of their own to be the government's representative. Very little is written about working with local government authorities in the literature covered by this thesis. Where authorities are described, they are invariably part of the developmental problem – at best bureaucratic and at worst reactionary, corrupt and

oppressive. In Tonga, NGOs have found that gaining the active support of local government representatives is crucial for the success of development activities.

> "In every district there is a District Officer – one person to look after one whole district. Then in each community there is the Town Officer – just those two representing the government. Those two roles are very important for the success of MORDI. If we don't get their support… that's one of the reasons activities fail at the community level" (Patolo, interview 2010).

Those communities where the Town Officer leads the people – reminding them to attend meetings, get reports written and encouraging community members to get involved are the ones that perform well in development activities, Patolo states.

The Town Officer also plays a critical role for the TCDT. Again, he acts as the NGO's contact person in the community, calling community meetings and arranging the venue. According to TCDT Vava'u representative Emily Esau, this includes selecting those who will participate in meetings, although the NGO does have input on participant selection via a list sent through to the Town Officer. TCDT community facilitator on the same island, Alaipuke Esau, cautions that Town Officers can also have their own agendas and may interfere in projects. The NGO is mitigating this issue through the Pacific Leadership Programme, an AusAID initiative based in Fiji. This programme attempts to evolve traditional forms of leadership to meet the demands of modern societies.

According to MORDI Hunga community facilitator, 'Alamoti Tautakitaki, the Town Officer's central responsibilities are to maintain peace, and law and order. Development was never part of their role:

> "Some are better than others, but they are not required to look at development. More often, the Town Officer and the community rely on the government for development initiatives" (Tautakitaki, interview 2010).

For Hunga, this meant proposals went first to the Vava'u governor and then to central government. Many proposals had been lodged over the years, Tautakitaki claimed, but they never succeeded because they went through government and got bogged down in bureaucracy.

Napa'a Halatanu is the Town Officer for the community on Hunga. Elected in 2004, he has been re-elected unopposed in triennial elections ever since. Halatanu sees his

role as being a "bridge" between the governor on Vava'u, the Prime Minister's office and the people of Hunga. This duty is performed primarily through the monthly community fono where he informs the community of new laws and government programmes, and notes community concerns to pass on to relevant authorities. MORDI has not attempted to change this side of his role, although other responsibilities within the Community Committee have expanded. Each sub-committee now reports to him and he in turn reports every decision made by those committees back to the community during each monthly fono. While this managerial-type role has grown, decision-making has devolved to the wider community through the sub-committees.

> "Before people did not make decisions. With the committee model everyone is happy because they can make decisions. Everyone has input and can agree with decisions and are responsible for the decisions" (Halatanu, interview 2010).

Halatanu also fulfils a vital oversight and accountability function: while each committee raises its own funds for development activities, each must also gain the Town Officer's approval to spend that money. This level of oversight is separate to evaluations and reviews conducted by donors.

KAVA CLUBS

A decision-making forum increasingly important for both rural and urban Tongan communities is the *faikava* or kava club. Drinking kava has long been an important community ritual for men in Tonga. The more traditional kava circle is usually a private, invites-only forum for formal discussion, as well as an avenue for courtship. In recent decades, however, a less formal version of the kava circle – the kava club – has evolved. These are now a feature in virtually all Tongan communities. Unlike kava circles, kava clubs are open to all-comers (as long as they are men) willing to contribute to the cost of the kava.

Beginning not long after nightfall and continuing into the early morning, participants of kava clubs talk, sing, play music, play board games and cards, smoke cigarettes and, of course, drink kava. Alcohol is not allowed. There is a considerable spread in the age of kava club members, unlike kava circles, which are usually reserved for

working, family men (those in their late 20s and 30s up). Kava clubs are increasingly admitting teenagers, some as young as 15, according to Women and Children Crisis Centre male advocacy trainer Usaia Hemaloto.

Typically, most kava clubs begin as more or less spontaneous gatherings of village men who drink kava together to socialise. Initially, this is conducted wherever they can – in a church hall, out in the open or at private homes. As they become more organised, participants often collect funds among themselves to build a dedicated clubroom. Buoyed by this success, fundraising becomes a permanent feature for many of the clubs and members turn their attention to wider community projects. Some have even spread overseas with chapters established wherever large groups of Tongans reside – New Zealand, Australia and the USA. More affluent members of overseas chapters may also raise funds for the home club, giving the Tonga-based club considerable financial clout within the community. Kava clubs have even become a Reality Television phenomena in Tonga. *Kava Idol* is a variety show sponsored by state-owned telecommunications company, TCC, and broadcast live on Friday nights. It features community kava club musical and dance groups that compete for a TOP$10,000 prize pool.

Kava clubs and development communication

Few development activities are pure examples of any one theoretical approach, whether they be modernisation, diffusion or participatory models. Most are a mixture using a combination of communication techniques. Women and Children Crisis Centre male advocacy trainer, Usaia Hemaloto, mixes diffusion and participatory approaches to raise awareness about family violence. His main task is to raise awareness about gender issues among men and especially the high incidence of family violence in Tonga. His primary medium is the kava club. He states that within the clubs, he can talk face-to-face with a wide cross section of men in a venue where all participants feel comfortable and unencumbered by traditional concerns over hierarchy.

Normally, he simply drops in on a kava club unannounced. The evening gatherings often last until 4am or later, giving Hemaloto ample time to become accepted by the

group. He normally first discusses general topics, such as fishing, the plantation or politics, then raises the issue of family life:

> "Not everyone wants to discuss fishing or is interested in politics. But everyone has a family life and can contribute. I am only raising awareness. I do this all the time. I ask them, 'Who is looking after the family while you are at the kava club every night for hours'.

> "I can talk with a rich man, an educated man, a noble or a poor fisherman on equal terms. Everyone is equal. You can talk about issues you do not hear about elsewhere" (Hemaloto, interview 2010).

This highly targeted and orchestrated form of interpersonal communication is more effective for Hemaloto than other mass media options. While radio, television and newspapers might have a broader reach it is difficult to assess how well target audiences receive messages with this mass media, scattergun approach. On the one hand, Hemaloto's kava club method is an example of diffusion; its aim is to modify behaviour (in this case to reduce violence against women), but does not rely on an orchestrated mass media campaign to get this message across. On the other hand, the fact Hemaloto interacts directly with his audience on an equal footing using a horizontal (rather than top-down) form of communication, gives this a distinctly participatory flavour.

In one sense kava clubs are very traditional in that they are strictly male domains, however, they are distinctly modern in other aspects. For example, the strict social hierarchies and *faka'apa'apa* (culture of deference) that remains such a feature of Tongan society does not bind kava club members so strongly. As Hemaloto states above, at the kava club he can speak as an equal to nobles and fishermen alike. This relatively egalitarian forum seems not to be replicated anywhere else – at least, not on such a scale.

The rapid growth and penetration of kava clubs into all corners of Tongan society and the fact these have often evolved into much more then simple social organisations can be seen as a grassroots expression of the growing desire for community-led development. Plainly, traditional institutions – nobles, central and local government, and the Church – have failed to adequately meet this desire leaving a vacuum that kava clubs have filled.

Kava clubs rely upon face-to-face communication as the primary development communication medium. This is as true as for clubs in remote areas as it is for those in the relatively infrastructure-rich regions such as Tongatapu and Vava'u where access to mass-media options is not an issue for NGOs. Because of their ubiquity and the unparalleled access kava clubs give to community members (albeit male), it would be wise for any development organisation planning to work with Tongan communities to consider kava clubs as an important communication option. This is especially relevant where mass-media alternatives are unavailable.

Conclusion

In this chapter the importance of ownership in the Tongan development setting was explored. NGOs working in Tonga stated that instilling a sense of ownership among target communities is a key determinant for the success of development activities. But creating a sense of 'community ownership' is not the same as 'country ownership', a stated objective of the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. Creating a sense of community ownership is achieved in part by deploying effective development communication strategies. In the Tongan case, this is primarily accomplished via face-to-face, verbal communication, although mass media mediums are also used to a lesser degree.

Empowerment and active citizenship are inextricably linked to the concept of ownership and these are essential elements for successful participatory development projects, a development methodology employed by the NGOs studied. Mechanisms and communication strategies deployed by NGOs studied in Tonga to encourage active citizenship and a sense of ownership were also outlined. Again, these are essentially participatory approaches, primarily reliant on verbal communication. This approach fits well with Tonga's oral culture. This makes related fields of development communication, such as folk media or entertainment-education as practiced by the Fili Tonu theatre group, particularly effective among Tongan audiences.

Tongan NGOs are well aware of the need to use existing political and cultural structures to promote development agendas. The District and Town Officers, central government's elected representatives in every Tongan district and community, are indispensable for the success of development projects. NGOs stated that the level of

support these government representatives demonstrated towards community development had a direct impact on the immediate and long-term success of activities. In the community of Hunga, the primary case study for this thesis, the Town Officer was a central player in development activities. His participation in the community's development programme changed his own role, devolving many of his decision-making responsibilities out to the wider community. The net effect was that while there were more decisions to be made as a result of development initiatives, his own workload had reduced and he was happier with this role.

Another indigenous organisation used by development agencies is the kava club. This relatively new social phenomenon has become a potentially important communication conduit for NGOs, offering almost unparalleled ease of access to community members. While strictly a male domain, kava clubs are not subject to the same hierarchical rules that dominate almost every facet of Tongan society – nobles and commoners, rich and poor, young and old mix freely at kava clubs without strict rules enforcing traditional deference to social and political superiors. This affords NGOs a unique opportunity to communicate face-to-face with a community's male population – a group that still wields most of the decision-making responsibilities in Tongan. Local politicians and NGOs have been quick to recognise the value of kava clubs as a communication tool. The Women and Children Crisis Centre uses them extensively to promote its non-violence message to men, while the Tonga Community Development Trust and Tonga National Youth Congress also use them when appropriate.

In the next chapter, all facets of research and analysis used in this research are drawn together to form four key conclusions. This chapter will address key concepts related to participatory development, mainstream media, local and national government and emerging grassroots forums. There will also be discussion around the relevance of ownership to development projects and the role of the Church in Tonga.

Chapter seven: Conclusion

This thesis examined communication strategies used by NGOs working in the Kingdom of Tonga. The aim is to uncover and highlight communication strategies – with particular reference to the mainstream media – that had proven effective in achieving development goals. It is hoped these lessons might be applied to better deliver development initiatives.

As a first step this thesis investigated wider debate on the role of communication in development. This revealed a rich academic discourse known broadly as development communication. Three theoretical threads dominate this area of study: modernisation, diffusion and participatory communication methodologies. These approaches mirror wider development industry debate, and also tackles related issues, such as gender and globalisation.

Next, the current state of Tonga's political and mass media environments were examined. This chapter first gave a précis of Tonga's unique political history since the newly unified nation became a Constitutional Monarchy under King George Taufa'ahua Tupou I in 1875. A special focus was kept on the growth of Tonga's democracy movement, culminating in the landmark 2010 General Election held under an amended constitution. The evolution of Tonga's mass media, especially its news media, is closely related to Tonga's political trajectory, and both have implications for development agencies initiatives undertaken in the country. Providing readers some background on Tonga's political and media climates was seen as vital in placing subsequent research and analysis sections into context.

In-country research undertaken for this thesis, detailed in Chapter six, involved numerous semi-structured interviews with NGO staff and recipients of development initiatives. These interviews were conducted over four weeks in August and September 2010, mainly on the island of Tongatapu, but also on two islands in the Vava'u group. The primary case study is MORDI Tonga, an NGO affiliated to UN agency IFAD. Gathering information for that case study included travelling to the remote island of Hunga as a guest of MORDI and spending three days interviewing community members about their experiences of development. Finally, Tongan government officials from the Ministry of Finance; and Ministry of Agiculture, Food,

Fisheries and Forestry were interviewed, as were in-country representatives of donor agencies, AusAID and NZAID.

An assumption dashed

The original underlying purpose of this thesis was to demonstrate the central role mainstream media plays in the development process. The assumption was that without an effective, unfettered and pluralistic media (read: news media), development initiatives could not reach their full potential. They would be poorer without the media for being less transparent, less accountable, less informed and, ultimately, less effective.

The in-country research did not support that assumption. Thankfully, something far more compelling than yet another treatise on the democratising, but fundamentally non-challenging, power of mainstream media was revealed. I discovered that far from being a crucial actor on the Tongan development stage, mainstream media takes more of a backseat role. Yes, it has a part to play, and without mainstream media, development initiatives are rendered two-dimensional with less credibility. That is, without the publicity and transparency that media attention brings, development initiatives become an exclusive dialogue between providers and recipients. For those outside that dialogue, development is far less tangible – it is something that occurs in another place to other people.

What this research did establish is that face-to-face communication is a far more powerful development actor in Tonga. Nearly all the NGOs interviewed agreed that sitting down as equals with aid recipients to discuss community needs, possible solutions and how these might be achieved was one of the most important determinants for short and long-term success of development activities. Mainstream media is in the mix, they agreed, but it sits beside other development actors, such as the Church, local government or external forces like globalisation, in importance.

As suggested, this research did uncover factors that have considerable influential on the success of development initiatives deployed in the Tongan setting. Those factors can be summarised under four main headings:

1. **Communication:** Face-to-face communication remains the most useful and persuasive medium in Tonga. This is partly due to the uneven coverage and unreliability of communications infrastructure limiting the reach of mass media forms, but is primarily due to Tonga possessing a largely oral culture that values human interaction over other forms of communication.

2. **Ownership:** Truly participatory projects – that is, those that do more than merely tick the consultation box – must enlist local input and engender a sense of ownership among communities if they hope to achieve both short term and sustained success. Creating an open, respectful, horizontal dialogue with communities is essential in creating that sense of ownership.

3. **Town Officer:** While local and national government institutions have been eclipsed to some degree by development organisations, community development activities still depend for their success upon the support of the Town Officer. This elected official remains an organisational linchpin in most communities responsible for calling monthly community meetings (fonos) and often deciding what activities will be undertaken and who will be involved.

4. **Kava clubs:** In many communities across Tonga, *faikava,* or kava clubs have evolved from essentially being social clubs into key grassroots community organisations. Kava clubs not only function as discussion forums, they are organising committees, centres for fundraising and a comparatively classless alternative to more traditional institutions, such as the Church or community fonos.

These key findings will now be discussed in further detail. I then think it appropriate to make special mention of the Church in Tonga, as this is an existing powerful institution that has considerable potential to influence change within the country.

Communication

Since Daniel Lerner's "passing of traditional society" thesis (1958), the mass media has been a favourite tool for the delivery of development-related messages. Its most basic function is to inform communities about development activities, such as the

construction of roads, new funding rounds, legislation changes and so on. But using the mass media to communicate development-related messages can also be a development activity in and of itself. This is particularly true of campaigns that advocate changes in behaviour or seek to raise awareness of an issue. These advocacy campaigns can cover a plethora of messages, but are most often associated with health-related issues, such as family planning, nutrition or the fight against HIV/AIDS. In the case of HIV/AIDS, as Mody and Wilkins (2001) pointed out, the use of mass media takes centre stage: "Information campaigns are the only immunization possible until a vaccine is invented" (p 387).

A crucial first step in this investigation was to assess the state of Tonga's mass media, especially the news media. Despite a widely held perception that the Tongan government tightly controls the mainstream media, the contemporary reality is quite different. Four privately owned, competing newspapers are published weekly on Tongatapu (home to more than 70 per cent of the population). Several niche periodicals are also published by church groups and the public service union, as well as by NGOs such as the Tonga National Youth Congress. There is also a mix of private and state-owned radio and television broadcasters with varying levels of reach into the other islands groups. These island groups are Ha'apai, Vava'u and the Niuas. Of these Vava'u has the best access to mainstream media because it is home to Tonga's second largest city, Neiafu. It is also the main destination for tourists in Tonga and is consequently well served by telecommunications, airlines and sea transport.

Beyond Neiafu, however, transport is irregular and small-scale consisting mainly of private boats. All other communications infrastructure is similarly basic. This means newspapers arrive out of date, if at all, television reception and the internet is almost non-existent and those with radios can generally pick up only state-run AM radio stations. The result is a serious mainstream media divide between Tongatapu and almost all of the other islands except Neiafu in Vava'u. This means that outside of Tongatapu, face-to-face communication remains the dominant method of exchanging information and new ideas – not newspapers, television, radio or the internet.

Ownership

During research for this thesis it became apparent that engendering a sense of ownership among target communities was crucial for the long-term success or sustainability of participatory projects. Numerous authors have come to similar conclusions on the importance of ownership including Clarke, 2009; Chambers, 2005; Huesca, 2003; Gumucio-Dagron , 2009; and Cornish & Dunn, 2009. Creating that ownership, or buy-in, was achieved by establishing a respectful dialogue with the whole community from the outset. As already stated, face-to-face dialogue is by far the most effective communication tool in Tongan society, even in the relatively sophisticated media environment existing on Tongatapu. Across the island nation, NGOs utilize established community leaders (Town Officers) and forums (monthly community fono and more recently, kava clubs) to initiate that face-to-face dialogue. These approaches emphasise horizontal communication, rather than top-down interactions that are the hallmark of participation (Gumucio-Dagron, 2009; Cornish and Dunn, 2009; Bessette, 2006). Encouraging communities to draw up their own development priorities, nominate specific projects and elect their own leadership are some of the mechanisms through which horizontal dialogue is achieved. Importantly, these ideas and opinions are treated with respect and taken seriously by NGOs. Encouraged, community members develop a genuine enthusiasm for the development process and take ownership of it. Where this sense of ownership is not achieved, projects either fail outright or prove to be unsustainable (Soane Patolo interview 2010).

Examples of where poor communication resulted in unsustainable or failed projects were numerous in Tonga. I have already detailed development projects on the island Hunga that fall into this category: the water tanks provided by the Canada Fund, solar electricity panels supplied by Japanese donors and the EU-built health clinic. Other examples pointed out by NGOs included several jetties built for remote island communities that were quickly washed away by storms because donors failed to consult with locals about the best site to build these structures (Soane Patolo interview 2010).

Town Officer

Broaching those initial contacts and establishing face-to-face dialogue with communities hinges in large part upon the attitude of the Town Officer. Since the 1960s, every Tongan community has elected one of its own to be their central government representative[21]. The Town Officer can wield considerable influence over a community, its overall development and the success of development projects. According to NGOs and community members interviewed for this thesis, Town Officers have been known to use their elected position to advance themselves and their favoured cliques (Napa'a Halatanu interview 2010). This exacerbates inequities within communities and promotes community disengagement with the political process (such as it is). The level of Town Officer support was cited as the key factor in the long-term success of development projects initiated by MORDI Tonga – those communities that enjoyed only half-hearted Town Officer support were demonstrably less successful than those where the Town Officer played an actively supportive role. This was even more crucial where projects relied upon community participation (Soane Patolo interview 2010).

The role of the Town Officer in Tonga demonstrates that often it is local government, rather than national, that has the biggest impact upon the day-to-day activities of a community, especially those in remote areas. This goes largely unrecognised in development and development communications literature, which seems preoccupied with the initiatives of central government.

Kava clubs

Kava clubs, or *faikava*, have developed spontaneously and organically across Tonga, and are prevalent even on the most remote islands. While they have existed for generations, more recently kava clubs have evolved to become something more than mere social organisations. In many communities kava clubs have become an organisational focal point, initiating community development projects and fundraising to achieve those goals. Kava clubs, especially on the main island of Tongatapu, have evolved into well-organised and often wealthy establishments. Following the Tongan diaspora, affiliate clubs have also been established overseas in New Zealand,

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[21] According to James (1997), there were 151 Town Officers in 23 districts.

Australia and the US. These clubs fundraise for their 'home' clubs giving some considerable economic clout.

There seems little academic research or other literature available on the contemporary role of kava clubs, but my own observations confirmed that *faikava* have become an important forum for community discussion and action. Politicians and NGOs have also been quick to recognise the importance of kava clubs and have used them as a vehicle for promoting their own messages. The Women and Children Crisis Centre actively uses kava clubs to promote its non-violence message (interview 2010), while other NGOs confirm they use the forums in a more ad-hoc manner. Pro-democracy politicians and activists have also used *faikava* to spread their message (James, 2003).

It is my assessment that *faikava* have assumed the role of community forum because they allow the expression of a more egalitarian outlook. This is in contrast with more traditional institutions, such as the Church or local and national government, which remain mired in the traditions of hierarchy and *faka'apa'apa* (respect). The less traditional outlook reflected by *faikava* has gathered strength over the past 30 to 40 years in parallel with similar developments, like calls for greater democracy. The genesis of these trends can be traced to an educated elite (James, 2003) and the experience of expatriate Tongans living and working in New Zealand, Australia and the US. Of course, there are also the effects of greater access that nearly all Tongans now have had to foreign culture via television, movies and travel.

The egalitarian ethos demonstrated by kava clubs only goes so far, however. It remains a strictly male domain, which is something NGOs wishing to take advantage of these forums ought to be mindful of. That should not preclude kava clubs from being considered an important communication tool for NGOs working in Tonga. Plainly, however, they are just part of the communications mix and would not be suitable for development messages directed specifically at women or children. For those messages, women's weaving and craft groups should be considered. While not as visible as kava clubs, these groups are also prevalent throughout Tonga and provide an opportunity for NGOs to access large gatherings of community women.

Tonga's kava clubs and women's craft groups are examples of local, participatory organisations that have evolved spontaneously to fulfil local needs. These have not arisen through the interventions of development agencies or through government

initiatives. They are truly grassroots organisations involved in community development. Of course, the impact of these organisations varies dramatically from community to community, but they seem more effective than most traditional, hierarchical institutions, such as nobles, the Church and government. More importantly for development agencies, they embody many of the attributes those organisations strive to create – both are participatory, community owned, empowering and sustainable.

The Church

NGOs and community members interviewed for this thesis said very little about the Church in relation to development, despite the fact that this institution so obviously remains hugely important in Tongan society. The main four denominations – Methodist, Mormon, Catholic and Free Church of Tonga – are present in nearly all communities, often occupying the largest and grandest buildings in each. The communities seem to be the primary funders of these buildings. However, none of the main churches seem to be closely involved in funding community-level development and no NGO cited the Church as an active partner in projects. In fact, the Church was only directly referred to as a conservative force that had to be placated, especially where it concerned projects with a moral dimension, such as sexual health and HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns ('Ofakilevuka Guttenbeil-Likiliki, Vanessa Lolohea interviews 2010). That is not to dismiss the efforts of NGOs with religious affiliations that work in Tonga (the New Zealand Salvation Army, for example, has a strong presence on Tongatapu), nor to imply that Tongan churches are completely absent from development efforts (TCDT community facilitator Alaipuke Esau stated that the TCDT does work with churches). However, these denominations do not visibly lead efforts to develop their parishioner communities in the way that Liberation Theology clergy have done in Latin America. Appropriately, given that Liberation Theology is most closely associated with Catholicism, the only reference to a Tongan church leader taking an active role in promoting change was Bishop Patelisio Finau in the late 1980s. Field (2010) quoted Finau in 1989 declaring that Tonga's elite had enslaved its commoners and created a climate of fear. The response from King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV was to label the Bishop a Marxist, while the Crown Prince

Tupouto'a later suggested he was the representative of a foreign power (p 65). Finau died of a heart attack in 1993.

It is my contention that failure of such a central Tongan institution to take leadership in promoting material and social improvement of Tongan communities is a major abdication of responsibility. Before arriving in Tonga, I was expecting to witness a society that was devoutly religious across all strata – rich, poor, young and old. This was largely the case. What did surprise was the level of cynicism levelled at the Church by a minority of mostly young Tongans. This was not so much disillusionment with the institution, but with its leaders, who were often seen as self-serving and greedy. This attitude was echoed even more strongly among Tongans (and Pacific Islanders generally) I have met living in New Zealand. If this is a growing trend, I suggest it will eventually create a crisis of legitimacy for the Church and an institutional vacuum within Tonga.

This vacuum will be exacerbated by other existing trends; the declining influence of nobles (James, 1997) and a perception that central and local government has abandoned communities (Pesi Fonua 1992, cited by James, 1997). This void will have to be filled and to some extent already is by NGOs. But of far more importance, I suggest it is grassroots community organisations such as kava clubs and women's craft groups that will step into the breach.

At this point I should acknowledge that my perceptions of the Church are undoubtedly coloured by my own secular upbringing and atheism. It is also true that I did not question all interviewees closely on Church involvement and without speaking or reading Tongan, could easily have missed evidence of their input. However, I think it significant that no one interviewed about development activities they were involved with discussed the Church except in an oblique way. If the Church does play a significant role in development, it is reasonable to assume that interviewees would have raised this.

Similarly, my assessment that kava clubs are (relatively) egalitarian cannot be separated from my own experience. While I did attend a kava club evening, I could not understand what was being discussed and my presence – the only palagi, or European, in the community – no doubt the meant the dynamic was changed to some extent.

Finally, while I was provided access to women's weaving groups and other primarily female organisations, it was impossible to be completely free of gender-specific behaviour prescribed by an essentially patriarchal tradition ('Ofakilevuka Guttenbeil-Likiliki interview 2010). Politically, Tongan women are under-represented, especially in parliament. According to Guttenbeil-Likiliki (2006), since women received the vote in 1951, only four have been elected People's Representatives in the Legislative Assembly. Decision-making at both national and local levels, therefore, remains largely the preserve of men – women cannot inherit land (The Human Rights Brief, 2009) and violence against women remains a significant problem.[22] This can only limit the depth of my assessment of women's (and by extension, children's) issues.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I believe that development agencies considering initiatives within the Kingdom of Tonga should carefully consider tailoring their communication strategies to best fit the local culture and infrastructure. Even for those initiatives that are not predominantly participatory in nature, it is important that agencies do not rely solely upon mainstream media to communicate with recipients. To achieve the best coverage and ensure the best understanding, agencies should make use of existing forums that rely on face-to-face communication – monthly community fonos, kava clubs and women's craft groups. They must also enlist the co-operation of Town Officers in each community where they intend to work. Without gaining his support as a first step of an initiative, the overall success of the activity will be seriously compromised. Both of these points are just as valid for the relatively developed islands of Tongatapu and Vava'u, as they are for remote islands.

Finally, I believe this research highlights areas that are richly deserving of further study. The first is kava and women's craft clubs, and their activities, spread and influence. These are unique community phenomena that are not only examples of grassroots organisations evolving spontaneously and without outside intervention, they are also forums that development agencies might harness to their advantage.

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[22] Recent official efforts to combat domestic violence included the creation of the police Tongan Domestic Violence Unit in 2007.

Secondly, I believe that attitudes towards the Church in Tonga are changing, especially towards the big four denominations, and that these institutions no longer enjoy the support they once did. This is largely speculation on my part, and plainly Tonga on the whole remains a devout nation. However, as globalisation becomes more entrenched and new ideas take hold, it seems reasonable to assume that a global trend of diminishing church attendance will also be felt in Tonga.

Again, this has implications for development agencies wishing to work in the country. If, as I suspect, traditional Church influence is declining, partnering with those organisations may be counterproductive if development initiatives are identified with a discredited institution. Conversely, those issues that were once met by strong opposition from the Church may now receive a more open hearing from the Tongan public. Lastly, Tongan churches may also decide that they need to reverse public cynicism about their role, and take more of a lead in community development. This may see Churches be more willing to partner with development agencies.

Despite its veneer of traditionalism and social (if not political) stability, Tongan society appears to be changing rapidly – new ideas, leaders and institutions are appearing as the old lose legitimacy and are increasingly challenged by new generations of Tongans. Effective development communication (and development agencies) will reflect these changes, choosing to work with new, community organisations. This type of development is thus contributing to change, rather than shoring up the old, increasingly discredited institutions (Cowen and Shenton, 1996). In the process, they are linking forms of development (e.g. MORDI) to wider processes of socio-political transformation. They are moving with the times (and the people), not trying to recreate conditions (real or imagined) from the First World.

<center>END</center>

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Getting the Message: Development Communication in Tonga

Interview Information sheet.

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I am a Masters student from Victoria University in New Zealand, working on a Masters thesis to be published early in 2011.

I am researching the way in which development projects in Tonga have been promoted and explained to the Tongan people. I want to find out which communication approaches work best. It is my hope this information will help development agencies and the Government to better inform and include the Tongan people in future development projects.

The University has provided ethics approval for this research on condition that consent is obtained from each person I interview.

I am interviewing people about development projects they are familiar with. Participation in this research is voluntary and will be conducted in person. It should take no more than 60 minutes. (An interpreter will be supplied if required).

During the interview, I hope you will share your personal and professional views, feelings, ideas, and recommendations on how development projects are, and can be, communicated to the Tongan people.

The interview will cover:

- Your thoughts on a development project that you are familiar with.

- Your involvement with that project.

- How you were told about the project and what information was provided on its aims, timelines, purpose and the people it would effect.

- Your ideas on what could be done differently in future.

Before we start the interview you will be asked to sign a Consent Form. This is because what you tell me may be published in the resulting research thesis and deposited with the University Library. It may also be used in academic or professional journals. Your information or views will not be passed directly to any other private or government agency.

If you agree to participate, your views may

- be attributed to you personally and the organisation you represent, should you agree to that (see Consent Form)

- be attributed only to the organisation you represent (see Consent Form)

- only be attributed to you (see Consent Form)

- remain completely confidential (see Consent Form)

You can withdraw any information you have provided by 31 November 2010 by:

- emailing: lewiskenn@myvuw.ac.nz

The information you provide will be stored securely and only be accessed by Ken Lewis, an interpreter (if required) and the Academic Supervisor (named above). The information will be held for up to two years and then destroyed.

I am happy to provide a summary of the research results when it is completed. Please tell me how to best to get these to you when you sign the consent form.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. Your responses will be a valuable contribution towards this research.

Getting the Message: Development Communication in Tonga
Consent Form

I have read or had the information sheet explained to me. I understand the purpose of this research project is to investigate communication methods used in development projects undertaken in Tonga.

Please tick as appropriate:

- I consent to my name being used when my comments or opinions are used in this research (see waiver of confidentiality). ☐

- I request my name to be omitted. ☐

Organisation name:
- I consent to the name of the organisation I work for being used in this research (see waiver of confidentiality). ☐

- I request the name of the organisation I work for to be omitted. ☐

Complete confidentiality:
- I do not want any details that could identify me to be used. ☐

I understand the interview may be electronically recorded and that any notes or recorded material from interviews will be destroyed after 2 years of the research process being completed.

I understand all information I provide will be kept confidential and accessed only by the researcher, interpreter (if required) and the Academic Supervisor.

I understand I may withdraw myself and any information I have provided from the project without explanation by contacting Ken Lewis directly by 31 November 2010.

I understand the results of this research will be included in a thesis and may be used for publication in academic or professional journals.

I, (name) _____ from

(organisation) _____ have agreed to be interviewed by Ken Lewis as part of his Masters research project.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Getting the Message: Development Communication in Tonga

Interpreter Statement of Non-Disclosure

I ,
(name)_____,
have agreed to work with Ken Lewis as an interpreter during his Masters research project in
Tonga.
I understand that confidentiality is important to everyone taking part and I promise I will not
discuss what has been said in any of the interviews I have been an interpreter for.

I also promise that I will not reveal the names or identities of the participants to anyone.

Signature: _____

Date: _____