

**Our Story about Development:
From Theory to Blaming-Thy-Neighbour**

by

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Introduction: We Dance in Different Ways

‘Research for a Change’ is a noble dream for those who engage in this process of knowledge creation. In order to have a notion of what ‘research for a change’ means for us, we have to have an idea of what we are doing in relation to our *commitment* to development in our communities. I am aware that the word ‘development’ means different things to different people at different times and in different places. For a pure economist, development means increased productivity, which is a necessary condition for growth in the production of the goods and services—such as health research, hospitals, doctors, and nurses—that are demanded by the people. It is therefore not unreasonable to think that a healthy community is a productive community. However, this is a one dimensional and linear way of thinking about development. I used to think like a pure economist, but I am alright now! In the Tongan language ‘development’ means *faka-lakalaka*: “the way of the dance”. The *lakalaka*-way involves the *collective*, organized, co-ordinated, and systematic way *we* dance, sing, and move our eyes, arms, legs, and bodies up and down, left and right, backwards and forwards, around and about in the pursuit of the relative satisfaction of our feelings, desires, and wants in life. This is a multi-dimensional and non-linear way of thinking about development. And indeed we need healthy Pacific peoples to perform development in this *lakalaka* way. Let me share with you a poem that I wrote for this *fono* about the *lakalaka* ‘way of development’:

Development

Develop-*meant* we dance
In different ways

We dance
The economist would like us to think
We dance to the bank

We dance
The priest would like us to believe
We dance to heaven

We dance
The leader would like us to sing
And dance to foreign forces

We dance
The teacher would like to see
Us dance to graduation

We dance
The artist would like us to feel
We dance to imagination

We dance
We dance to the values
Our parents would like us to share

For we dance to the rhythm we like
As we move towards a healthy life.

The connection between development and research manifests itself in the many different ways we choose to *dance* and interact with one another in order to satisfy our various needs. To me, based on the kind of research activity and thinking that I have been doing over many years, the idea of development entails the concerns of caring and providing for the relative satisfaction of our social, cultural and spiritual needs in life.

In connection to research for a change in the area of health, one may argue that the research needs of Pacific peoples include our social, cultural, and spiritual needs in life. In other words, I would like to suggest to you this morning that the notion of ‘research for a change’ in the area of health for Pacific peoples is closely connected and organically inseparable from and the ideas of development for Pacific peoples, as the development of healthy Pacific peoples entails the caring and providing for our various needs in life. Having said this, let me now tell you our story of the development of Pacific peoples and the latter’s relationship to the kind of dialogic interaction between researchers and policy-makers I have personally experienced in our region.

A Structure of Dialogic Interaction between Researchers and Policy-Makers

It is important to have dialogic interaction between researchers and policy-makers with a very clear structure that supports the translation of research into a meaningful approach to development. Such a structure should be designed to promote ‘free and open’ dialogue between researchers and policy-makers on the issues that are important and meaningful to them. What is important and meaningful to a researcher may not be necessarily important and meaningful to a policy-maker and *vice versa*. For example let me share with you part of a dialogic interaction between Honorable Sir Albert Kipalan, a former Minister for Public Services of Papua New Guinea and myself during the Pacific Islands Conference of Leaders in 1993:

HONORABLE SIR KIPLAN: It was a well prepared document presented by Dr. Halapua. In my country there is a regular change of the government, and we are elected for only five years. I want to

deliver goods and services to my people within that five-year period. Otherwise I am voted out of the government within this period. My problem here is, Dr. Halapua, how do I apply the theory you presented in a most practical way so that I seem to be bringing development back to my people so that they can vote me in again in the next election?

PRIME MINISTER HENRY: That's sustainability of a different order, Mr. Minister.

HONORABLE SIR KIPALAN: My second question is, because we have only five years and we can be voted out within two years, so we must bring, development and savings to the villages; only then can we survive. If I follow this model I will surely be out of politics, and that is what I am faced with now. How do I apply political will toward your ideology so that both can work?

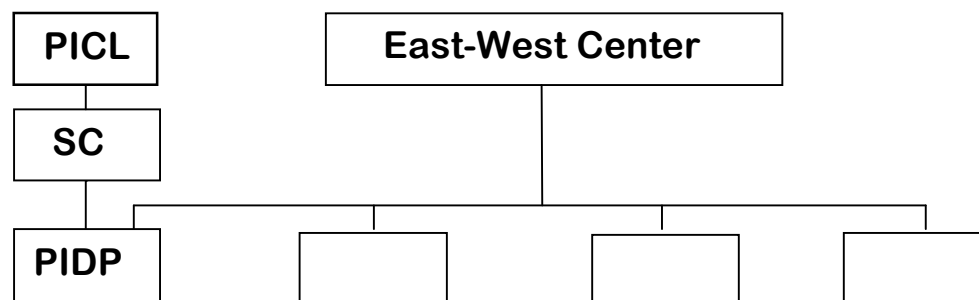
(Sustainable Development and Population, *Proceedings of the Fourth Pacific Islands Conference of Leaders*, S. Halapua and B. Naudain, eds., East-West Center, Honolulu, 1995, pp.76-77)

This example serves to illustrate the different conceptions of what is important and meaningful to a policy-maker (e.g. Hon. Sir Kipalan) and that which has significance and meaning for a researcher (e.g. my model of development). Thus a 'free and open' dialogue is essential in the sense that the conversation between researchers and policy-makers must not be driven by some pre-determined, rigid "agenda" of issues that ought to be adhered to, and which dictates the outcome of what we want achieve. For the purpose of this kind of dialogue is to foster, between researchers and policy-makers, better understanding and better identification of the issues of research and development. In other words, a free and open cooperative dialogue between researchers and policy-makers is a necessary condition for the translation of our research findings into meaningful policy options for development in our own communities. The research issues and

research outcomes must be important and meaningful for *both* researchers and policy-makers.

Let me share with you the type of structured dialogic interaction between researcher and policy-maker shaping the way we think about and do our research work at the Pacific Islands Development Program (PIDP) of the East-West Centre (Figure 1).

Figure 1: A Structure of Dialogic Partnership in Research and Development



PICL : Pacific Islands Conference of Leaders
SC : Standing Committee
PIDP : Pacific Islands Development Program

The PIDP serves as the regional Secretariat as well as the research and training arm for a regional organization called the Pacific Islands Conference of Leaders and its Standing Committee. In particular, PIDP provides research and training products based on the issues and problems identified by the heads of governments in the region. The Pacific Islands Conference of Leaders, which meets every three years, selects the Leaders to serve on its Standing Committee. This Committee reviews our research projects and outcomes annually to ensure that they respond to the issues and challenges raised at each Pacific Islands Conference. This unique process enhances our capability to translate and communicate

research ideas and outcomes, and to understand the things that have significance and meaning for us as researchers and as heads of government. However, the translation of research ideas and outcomes into recommended and implemental public development plans and policies falls outside the purview of our researchers, so curtailing our direct involvement in the design and implementation of development plan and policy at the national level. Though I would like to think that, in terms of achievement, our researchers make some contribution to shaping the way we think about development in the region.

Research Themes & Achievements

Over the past twenty-five years, we have pursued our mission to promote the development of the Pacific islands region through cooperative research, training, and dialogic partnership with the Pacific island Leaders. The following thematic areas reflect this valued dialogic partnership:

- Development and Change, 1985
- Private Sector Development and Regional Cooperation, 1990
- Sustainable Development and Population, 1993
- Population, Employment Creation and Resource Management, 1996
- Managing Globalization for Development: The Pacific Way, 2000
- Enhancing Unity and Dignity: Fighting for our Common Security, 2003

The challenges and complexities of island development within the context of changing economic, social, and cultural conditions remain the

primary focus of the PIDP work. Our activities during the 2004 can be divided into two main areas. These relate directly to the Pacific Islands Conference of Leaders' thematic areas of 2000 and 2003; namely, Peace Building and Conflict Reduction, and Governance and Globalisation. In addition to these we are currently considering two new initiatives in the areas of Policy Dialogue on Political Transformation and Capacity Building in the field of Economic Analysis.

Where Are We Going? Development with Dignity

The policy-oriented research projects based on these foregoing thematic areas have resulted in scores of working papers, research reports, and several books. This body of research work has contributed to the empirical data underlining some of the major resolutions—such as procedures and guidelines for disaster preparedness and response, management of tuna resources, private sector and economic growth, sustainable development and population policy etc.—that were moved and adopted by the Pacific Leaders as important parts of the various work programs of the regional organizations and agencies implementing projects in the Pacific.

Of the themes established by the Leaders and noted above, the *common* underlying principle is “development with dignity.” This principle has been underscored many times by Pacific island Leaders and is integral to the aspirations of the people in our shared region. For instance, we do not just want to improve the health status of Pacific peoples. More importantly, we want our Pacific peoples to achieve better health status with dignity. In my view the largest threat to the vision of development with dignity—such as a vision of achieving optimal health with dignity

for Pacific peoples—is not so much the lack of resources, but rather the lack of a recognized and practical process for inclusive, meaningful dialogue regarding the question: “Where are we going?” The word “where” refers to “the way” as in “the way we are going”, for example, ‘to improve the health status of Pacific peoples with dignity’. Thus development with dignity means that our policy-makers, our people, and our development partners must be willing and prepared to engage in a non-confrontational, cooperative process of inclusive and meaningful dialogue about the directions of development in our own communities. With this approach, the level of our expectation for development will adjust to the meaningful and important things that we can and want to do in life.

Let me tell you two stories to illustrate the point that I am trying to emphasize, namely, the need to change our conventional approach to development.

Storytelling-Time

The first is called *Wolei Story about “Who Do You Trust”?*

- Hybrid Renewable Energy System vs Traditional Chiefly System’
- Westinghouse truth *versus* traditional truth
- palangi story *versus* Pacific Islander story
- implications for Capacity Building

The second is called *Ha’apai Story about “Corruption”*

- un-Authorized church trip from Ha’afeva to Fotuha’a’
- right relation to God *versus* right relation to Government
- past generation *versus* future generation

--implications for sustainable development

Pacific Paradox: Blaming-Thy-Neighbour

The Pacific islands region has witnessed fundamental changes in international, regional, and national geopolitical relations which have influenced and shaped changes in the approach to development. These changes have been in the direction and movement of development toward concerns relating to caring and providing for the Pacific people's cultural, spiritual, and economic needs and may be viewed in terms of three main stages.

Between 1970 and 1993 the direction of development focused on the rather narrow idea of "economic development" in the region. National economic development planning was King and was regarded as the key to "economic growth". As a result, domestic and foreign aid resources and consultants were channelled into this technical input-output exercise. Basically the success or failure of conventional approach to development hinges on three crucial elements, namely:

- opportunity
- confidence
- capability

Each of these elements divides into local and foreign components.

Without the local people's confidence in their capability to translate the desirable opportunity available into tangible outcomes, the input of capital investment will not result in the economic growth specified by conventional model. Sadly, the outcome in terms of sustained "economic growth" with broadly shared societal benefits failed to meet the original

expectations as articulated by the followers of (inappropriate) conventional economic development theory in the Pacific islands context.

Subsequently, our development partners and numerous bilateral and multilateral development agencies blamed the people of the Islands and their Leaders for the failure of the conventional development planning model to deliver the expected economic growth, which in the view of many island leaders and scholars was highly inappropriate to begin with. This “blaming-thy-neighbour” attitude of our development partners was reflected in the 1993 World Bank Report, which termed the unexpected outcome of high capital investment and low output growth in the Pacific Islands region as the “Pacific Paradox.” This label was unjustified inasmuch as the development model recommended by our development partners and used by numerous Pacific island nations failed to take into account the diversity of situation in our island communities and failed to see that ‘we dance in different ways’. (**Sustainable Development and Population**, *Proceedings of the Fourth Pacific Islands Conference of Leaders*, S. Halapua and B. Naudain, eds., East-West Center, Honolulu, 1995)

From 1994 to approximately 2000 we at PIDP continued to emphasize our belief, through our publications, that the conventional development model embraced by numerous governments and development partners in our shared Pacific islands region was fundamentally inadequate for the purpose of addressing the broad social, economic, environmental, political and cultural development needs confronting the Pacific islands today. We called for a new and different approach to development in the Pacific region, one requiring fundamental reframing and redirection (Halapua, S., “Harmonizing Resources for Sustainable Economic

Development in the Pacific Islands Context” in *Environment and Development in the Pacific Islands*, edited by B. Burt and C. Clerk, Australian National University and University of Papua New Guinea, 1998). During this period, Leaders and development partners tended to place their hopes on what we may be described as “economic growth and sustainable development” but unfortunately in practice continued to use the same conventional development model that had failed them before. The shift in the rhetoric of development without the altering the direction of development, resulted in the use of the same, largely inappropriate, conventional model of economic development. In retrospect, the conventional model is associated with the growth of poverty, distortions of regional and international trade arrangements, and the increasingly binding strings of control attached to foreign development assistance, as well as a number of conflicts in the region.

Dialogic Approach to Development

Today we see a need to move the emphasis away from the inappropriate, narrowly economic and non-dialogic conventional model of development towards a more inclusive and participatory dialogic approach to development. That is, bringing people of different status and different values together to address *how* Pacific communities can approach, not only the economic dimension of development, but also our concerns for our social, cultural, and spiritual needs in life. And in light of the observations on our development history expressed in the preceding paragraphs, we, i.e. Leaders and researchers, continue to cherish and remain optimistic about our commitment to building and nurturing our meaningful and dialogic partnership in our cooperative

endeavours toward achieving development with dignity for the people in our shared region.