

section applies the concept of multi-dimensional training to grassroots human capital development in mahogany-based communities in rural Fiji. In the final section, there is a discussion of the significance of appropriate grassroots training programmes for community empowerment and development and, ultimately, for long term socio-political stability and economic growth in Fiji.

Locating the emerging interests of grassroots empowerment for sustainable development

The notion of grassroots empowerment for sustainable development has emerged from a number of different sources.

‘Bottom-up’ approaches to development (outlining both processes and experiences) have been documented in a way that makes both intellectual and practical sense. These include Robert Chamber’s (1983) notion of ‘putting the last first’ and Freire’s popular participatory methods with grassroots Latin American communities (McLaren, 2000). However, the challenge is to put these ideas into practice in a rural Fijian context (White, Nair & Ascroft, 1994).

In an earlier article (Nabalarua, 2001), a number of requirements that were considered critical to the success of an attempt to apply the concepts of popular participation and empowerment to a rural-based and provincial women’s project (Tailevu province, Fiji) were outlined as follows:

- knowing oneself and one’s role in relation to the community is critical to building credibility and integrity;
- understanding the relevant traditional and non-traditional systems and their associated rituals and protocols;
- being wholly familiar with the language and culture of the community in which one intends to operate;
- identifying and acknowledging key centres of authority, influence and leadership to assist in providing support and strategic direction for the processes of change and so that the processes involved will be seen as being authoritative;
- facilitating processes of learning and upskilling that provide for the growth of individuals and groups and that encourage and support partnerships;
- adopting a work ethic and management style that is team-oriented and participatory;
- raising awareness and generating commitment, holding intensive, consultative small group meetings in the early stages of the empowerment process;
- avoiding ‘reinventing the wheel’ and making the best possible use of existing networks and processes;
- staying focused and committed to small and manageable outcomes; and
- being conscious of the need to take account of the community’s eagerness to drive the process and of the need not to betray its trust.

Although all of these requirements may be met, any attempt to apply global concepts of empowerment in a local context will inevitably give rise to problems. However, problems encountered in relation to the Tailevu province project referred to earlier

created important learning opportunities for the team and ultimately led to an analysis of the empowerment process, particularly what works and what does not, that should prove useful in the future. In particular, that analysis clarified the difficulties associated with the multiple roles (for example, researcher, participant) that had to be adopted in some cases by the same person.

It is important to consider how projects such as that of the rural-based and provincial women's project in Tailevu province, Fiji, relate to mainstream discourse of Pacific Islands (PI) development. Much has been said and written by scholars and aid agencies about the significance of sustainable development processes in communities that are disadvantaged, poverty-stricken and marginalized, communities whose members occupy the lowest socio-economic tiers of society. Although it is not my intention to revisit that literature here in any detail, I would like to take issue with some of its underlying assumptions.

Factors that affect development performance in Pacific Island countries have been documented by Siwatibau (1991, 1992) who provides an insider's view of the stark realities on the ground. He examines the multiple and interconnected dimensions of development (natural, physical, social, cultural, political, economic, demographic, and sectoral) in Pacific Island countries in relation to industry and to primary and secondary services, arguing that the following factors are characteristically present:

- fragile island environment where the small scale of operations limit what can be achieved;
- frequent exposure to natural catastrophes like cyclones;
- increasing dependence on primary industry for livelihood;
- relatively small domestic markets linked to small populations and low income levels;
- remote external markets with associated high transportation and marketing costs;
- vulnerability of open economies;
- high population growth rates;
- skills shortage, high wage levels and low productivity;
- pervasive and dominant public sector;
- limited growth of private sector influenced partly by inappropriate fiscal policies;
- low level of domestic savings;
- scarcity of good 'bankable' projects;
- complex land tenure systems yet to be effectively addressed in Melanesia (high islands); and
- increase in recent years of political and social instability in the Pacific region.

This list represents what I shall refer to as ‘development orthodoxy’. It is, in many ways, technocratic in character. It is predominantly quantitative in nature. Above all, it lacks a strong social and human focus. In these respects, it is characteristic of a traditional school of economic development thinking that has had limited success on the ground in many Pacific Island countries. In relation to this school of thought, the following questions arise: By whose standards is development performance in Pacific Island countries being assessed? On whose values are these standards based? Are particularities on the ground taken into consideration in the evaluation of development performance? These questions are particularly relevant in view of the fact that continued moves to ‘correct’ the shortcomings of small Pacific Island economies, and to align them structurally with the demands of an increasingly global market, have not produced the improved quality of life and sustainable development outcomes that were envisaged. Indeed, so far as there has been an improved standard of living, it has been largely confined to those at the top of the socio-economic scale. Indeed, the socio-economic gap between segments of communities has widened.

New aid policy initiatives in relation to Pacific Island countries now focus on poverty alleviation. It is currently argued, for example, by NZAID, that in the context of the Pacific it is ‘poverty of opportunities’ that is at the heart of the problem. Experience on the ground however, suggests that the opportunities are there. What is at stake is ‘poverty of access’ to these opportunities. Therein lies the real cause of, for example, gender inequity. The fight to eradicate poverty is not a struggle against lack of opportunities. Rather, it is a struggle against inequality of access to opportunities. Unless issues of gender equity are addressed at all levels, we will continue to have a category of poor people in our midst who are further disadvantaged by institutionalized structures and processes that restrict equitable access to opportunities.

How does this tie in with sustainable development? Underpinning the concept of sustainable development is the necessity of meeting current needs without compromising or jeopardizing the needs of future generations. This necessarily involves being cautious, people-oriented and mindful of the needs of others. It incorporates the values of sharing, nurturing, caring, responsibility, trust, respect, tolerance, humility, love, partnership, and wisdom. It involves respect not only for people, but also for the knowledge systems that have sustained, and continue to sustain, human communities. When one compares the underlying value assumptions of sustainable development and those of indigenous worldviews, one finds that the two are strongly aligned. It follows, therefore, that locating the empowerment process within the parameters of a sustainable development framework is likely to create a context in which indigenous peoples, including rural Fijians, are comfortable. It is in this context that I consider indigenous resource development in Fiji in terms of the development aspirations and expectations of the people. The primary focus is on the multi-dimensional training needs (at rural and national levels) of indigenous Fijians for the sustainable use and development of the emerging mahogany industry.

Contextual overview of indigenous resource development in Fiji

The potential of the mahogany industry to generate millions of dollars, along with issues relating to the possibility of land restructuring, have sometimes been said to have been the main triggers of the last coup in Fiji. The common factor between

mahogany and land restructuring is the notion of land (*vanua*), a notion which lies at the heart of Fijian identity. From a development researcher's perspective, what was particularly interesting about the 2001 coup was the way in which it could be seen to be related to indigenous resource issues. For example:

- Many of those who mobilized and marched with banners expressing their discontent and anger with the way in which issues relating to land and indigenous sovereignty had been treated were from the lower socio-economic echelons of Fijian society.
- There were clear indications that there was dissatisfaction with traditional authority and a general feeling of having been 'let down and left out' by those who exercised such authority.
- It was evident that needs and the support services designed to meet these needs were not adequately aligned.
- There were unambiguous expressions of frustration with inequality of access to goods and services, and with the double standards that applied to the redistribution of these goods and services.
- Increasing disquiet about the visible disparity between 'haves' and 'have-nots' was evident.
- Distrust of some Fijian leaders (who were accused of being too ready to compromise Fijian interests) was clearly growing.
- There were expressions of dissatisfaction in relation to the low-level of commitment to the enhancement of indigenous development and in relation to the lack of visible progress in this area.
- Many indigenous Fijians expressed a 'fear' of domination by Indians leading to the loss of identity, security and sovereignty.

As traditional alliances and old loyalties were realigned, and as new partnerships were formed, one key issue emerged: indigenous resources and indigenous development. It was this issue that underpinned resistance. Related to this issue was the issue of monetary compensation for historical injustices committed by the State in respect of the acquisition of indigenous resources. It was claimed that the State had used chiefly authority to obtain landowner consent to the selling of land and resources in return for a mere pittance.

The crisis in Fiji sent strong signals to the leaders of the day that institutions needed to be transparent and accountable. Among other things, indigenous owners of resources wanted to have a greater say in the development of these resources and in the distribution of the benefits of such development. In short, indigenous Fijians in rural communities wanted access to the same quality of life as their urban counterparts and they wanted to ensure that the process by which this was achieved did not undermine their status as resource owners. They wanted to be assured that the process would be both transparent and just. This could, however, be assured only if they were themselves centrally involved and this, in turn, meant that there was an urgent need for multi-dimensional training in the sustainable management of indigenous-owned resources.

Multi-dimensional training in sustainable management of indigenous-owned resources: Developing the concept

The notion of multi-dimensional training derives its fundamental assumptions from systems thinking. Each dimension, reflective of a subsystem, while distinct in its character and form, is a part of the others. Together they form a robust collection of training modules that blend into one another and are consistent with the ways of being of indigenous communities. In the case of developing countries which have distinct dual economic bases, communities exist in a state of flux, and development is inevitably guided by a worldview that is embedded in traditions and custom. Related to this is the need, in the case of indigenous communities, to ensure that organization is structured in such a way as to ensure that there is harmony among the social, political, economic and spiritual dimensions of communities within the broader framework of the living and dynamic ecosystem in which such communities exist. Such a framework, aligned as it is to systems theory, assumes a symbiotic relationship among these parts of society and, hence, among the dimensions of training.

A key aspect of the viability and feasibility of this concept of training is its ability to ensure that its multi-dimensional aspect is reflected in the way in which the components respond to the dynamics of rapid social change, something that is often beyond the control of these grassroots communities. Merging old and new ways of thinking and doing things provides an effective bridging process whereby rural-based communities have a greater success rate in terms of participation in a transitional market-oriented economy.

With this in mind, it is suggested that multi-dimensional training is appropriate for sustaining effective management of indigenous owned/based resources and sustainable community development because it is holistic, integrative, sustainable, partnership-oriented, focused, replicable and community-based, and because it includes a strategic human resource development component and involves a multi-pronged approach to poverty elimination. Each of these is discussed briefly below.

Multi-dimensional training is *holistic* in the sense that it recognizes that the sum total of the whole is made up of parts which cannot be individually addressed in isolation from each other. It is *integrative* in the sense that it acknowledges the inter-connectedness of the multiple dimensions of indigenous communities and attempts to incorporate this inter-connectedness into training packages by, for example, including different (but related) packages for school youth, adults and community leaders, and who represent the broader community, including migrant village kin.

It is *sustainable* in the sense that it focuses on grassroots learning aimed at facilitating popular empowerment, resulting in community ownership and, hence, commitment of the key stakeholders to the training and capacity building process.

It *promotes partnership* at different levels, including new alliances among local private training enterprises (PTEs) and between local and foreign PTEs, between PTEs and industry, and between those who own natural resources (i.e., landowners) and those who own the capital used to develop these natural resources (i.e., Government, business and private investors).

The distinct, but overlapping, levels mean this form of training is *focused* and geared towards the achievement of outcomes.

It is *replicable* in different areas of the same country, and in different grassroots communities of the Pacific region.

In attempting to develop a new and innovative ethos of upskilling, empowerment, economic growth and enhanced quality of life for landowning communities associated with natural resources, it includes training that is *community-based* and community-driven, the outcomes being community-owned. In the case of grassroots communities, an economic emphasis unaccompanied by a human resource development emphasis would have the potential to destabilize indigenous Fijian organization and polity.

Multi-dimensional training includes a *human resource development* component which, in the case of the multi-million dollar mahogany industry, necessarily involves an integrated strategy for self-development, long term stability and sustainability.

Finally, the concept of multi-dimensional training includes a rigorous *multi-pronged approach to poverty elimination* at grassroots level. The assumption is that the more informed people become through training and learning processes, the more equipped they are to make informed choices. This, in turn, increases access to those opportunities which can lead to significant increase in earning potential and significant enhancement of quality of life.

Multi-dimensional training in mahogany-based communities in rural Fiji: An illustration of concept application

Applying this notion of multi-dimensional training to mahogany-based communities involves the assumption that organization in rural Fijian villages adheres to a Fijian worldview. A multi-dimensional strategy complements village lifestyles because it builds on existing social frameworks and brings the added potential of new economic growth opportunities that reduce inequality and poverty. Although it changes aspects of the old world where subsistence living is the order of the day, it nonetheless fits comfortably with the demands of an evolving and transitional phase in a developing market-oriented economy.

The rationale for multi-dimensional training in the mahogany industry is grounded in lifestyle shifts which are currently underway on the ground. However, the complementary nature of land (*vanua*) and sustainability which are evident in mahogany-based rural communities are also evident in other areas of natural resource development so that insights gained in mahogany-based community development training can readily be transferred to other areas.

Although the three core levels of training outlined below are stable aspects of multi-dimensional training, it needs to be borne in mind that the specifics of particular population groups and their context, including environmental characteristics, demographic profile and infrastructural logistics, need to be taken into account in establishing multi-dimensional training programmes. Thus, for example, discussions with a head of one of the key landowning units currently boasting one of the larger stands of mahogany in Fiji, indicated that multi-dimensional training was considered

appropriate precisely because it was likely to be responsive to the aspirations and specific circumstances of the community. With a view to meeting the training needs and interests of this key landowning unit, I approached a small New Zealand firm which had expressed an interest in contributing to capacity-building and trade skills development in rural communities.² My aim was to form a partnership between academia and industry to facilitate a three pronged training approach involving: *trade skills development*; *supervisory and management upskilling*; and *community-based life skills training*. Each of these was to be designed to suit the local circumstances. Although *trade skills development* would relate specifically to timber and timber-related activities, *supervisory and management upskilling* and *community-based life skills development* would be more generic in nature and could be adapted to apply in the case of other resource-based training programmes such as, for example, programmes designed for the fishing industry (see *Table 1* below).

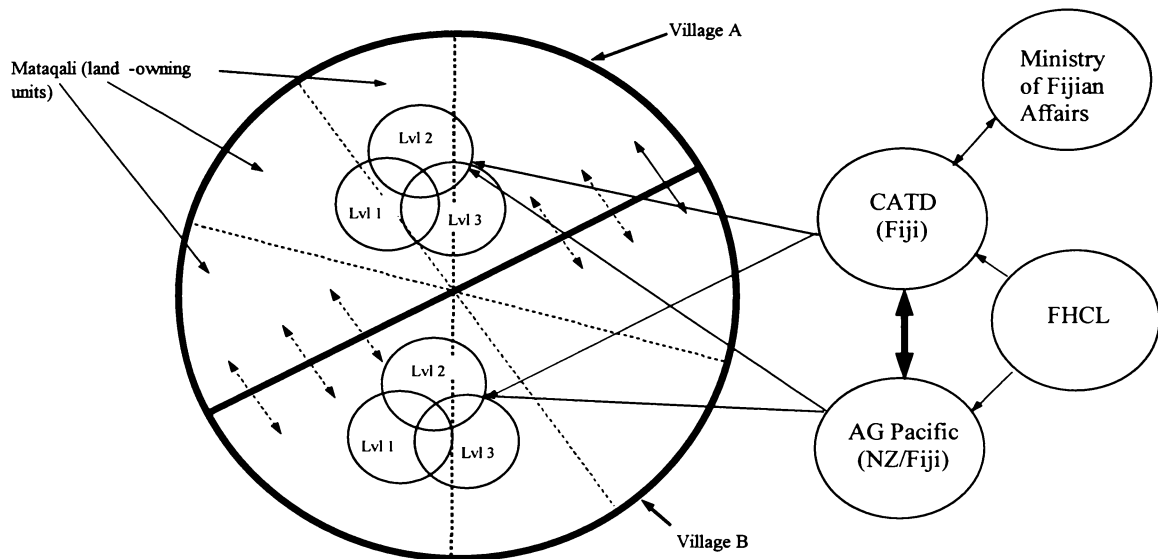
Table 1: Levels of training

Level 1 Trade Skills Development	Level 2 Supervisory & Management Upskilling	Level 3 Community-based & Life Skills Training
<p>A. Building trades</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Carpentry and joinery b) Blocklaying c) Masonry d) Tile laying and plaster e) Woodworking machine maintenance f) Power tools g) Wood fitting and finishing h) Stores and stock control i) Basic electrical wiring – domestic j) Plumbing – sewer and water licences k) Painting and decorating l) Landscaping <p>B. Engineering trades</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Welding – all stages b) Workshop fitting and machining c) Motor mechanic –all stages d) Security and sound systems e) Auto-cad f) IT support <p>All training modules will include an OHS component</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Supervisory skills b) Leadership for change c) Basic organisation and management skills d) Managing issues of change e) Options for effective community governance f) Setting up small business and entrepreneurial cell g) Savings for family investment h) Marketing and distribution i) Networking and communication j) IT skills development k) Needs identification l) Project management m) Monitoring & evaluation n) Developing annual community work plans o) Compilation of community resource inventory database re human and natural resource p) Good practices of resource management for sustainability <p>All training modules will include an OHS component</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Parenting skills/roles for quality family life b) Cornerstones of health for wealth & QOL c) Setting up functional literacy support centres d) Establishing homework cells for children e) Communal vs individual rights f) Understanding rights to participation, representation and governance g) Knowing gender issues h) Caring for the elderly i) Rural technology for reducing rural drudgery j) Computer literacy for knowledge transfer k) Networking, partnerships & strategic alliances for sustainable devt l) Savings, household budget, and money matters m) Collateral & credit options for economic growth n) Youth initiatives for income-generating <p>All training modules will include an OHS component</p>

The overlapping nature of the three types of training is a micro reflection of the macro interconnectedness of indigenous Fijian organization on the ground. Links to external stakeholders (both local and foreign) are seen as being critical to the eventual success of the community's industrial efforts. After all, indigenous rural Fijian communities will need to work with others in their attempt to create and promote value added options in the development of their resources.

The overall framework is indicated in *Figure 1* provides an example of the type of training model that could be applied in the context of a Fijian community aiming to develop a mahogany-based industry.

Figure 1: Locating Multi-dimensional training in a rural Fijian Context



KEY

- AGP Advance Group Pacific (foreign PTE)
- CATD Centre of Appropriate Technology and Development (local PTE)
- FHCL Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited

This hypothetical scenario shows two villages identified as A and B with each village comprising 4 *mataqali* (landowning units). The dotted arrows that cross A and B's boundaries indicate that these two villages will most likely share a common tribal ancestral deity and would in all respects come to reflect a large kinship organization in the area. The three intersecting circles in each of these semi-circles locate the multidimensional training in its rural context and implies here that a possible sixty percent of the training modules ought to be located and undertaken at community level.

This framework provides an initial step towards further consultation and dialogue along the way as stakeholders begin to see the merits of the approach. More importantly, it provides a template for innovative measures which can be adapted to any context in a way that relates directly to the specific needs and aspirations of an

indigenous community whose members are searching for maximum returns on their resource.

Of importance to note in the training framework is the relationship among the key stakeholders, the particulars of the training context, the linkage between the local and the global in terms of the specific local space that this intervention has come to occupy and the interconnectedness between the training paradigm and Fijian societal dynamics itself.

Key issues relating to the dynamics of sustainable development in Fiji

In this section, key issues relating to the dynamics of an indigenous development process that is particular to Fiji are examined and the wider implications of this type of process for peace, progress and prosperity are discussed.

Development intervention processes in rural communities in Pacific Island countries such as Fiji require understanding and acceptance of each of the following:

- Smallness in all respects is a fact of life that needs to be understood and well managed when undertaking development interventionist work with rural or island communities.
- While all rural subsistence economies are different in character and form, the rural populace is increasingly literate, increasingly mobile, and increasingly able to traverse rural and urban lifestyles.
- The ability to live and operate in a dualistic mode is due, in part, to historical circumstances and, in part, to a deliberately cultivated choice linked to a growing consciousness of indigenous sovereignty and Fijian identity.
- Many indigenous Fijians maintain contact with their villages and rural roots throughout their working lives, even in semi-retirement mode. Villages therefore have access to pockets of expertise on the ground that can supplement and or complement external training initiatives.
- Individual and collective owners of resources are increasingly aware of the potential returns on these resources and expect to be provided with appropriate support for the development of the skill and knowledge bases that will underpin value added development.
- Unequal distribution of the benefits of resource development and unequal access to opportunities for development remain, and are perceived as open wounds of a colonial legacy, wounds that can be healed only through a process of popular empowerment. While we cannot undo our history, we should never try to recreate it or perpetuate systems that disempower and destabilize.
- Grass roots communities form the base and foundation of our society. If the base is unstable, the nation is weak. If, on the other hand, it is nurtured in order to become robust and strong, it can provide the foundation upon which vibrant economic growth and lasting peace and national stability can be built.

Conclusion

Multi-dimensional training can play an important role in the development of indigenous-owned and indigenous-based resources in Fiji and in other Pacific Island states. It would appear to have greater potential to enhance sustainable development than any of its predecessors for two main reasons. Firstly, in incorporating old and new forms of thinking into its framework of human resource, it is well placed to encourage effective transitioning from a subsistence economy to a market-oriented mode of economic development. Secondly, in aiming to encourage empowerment and self-determination through training and upskilling, it acknowledges, and builds upon, core indigenous values, recognizing the significance of community ownership and the necessity of community operation of resources.

Endnotes

1. This article is a development of a paper presented at the Development Research Symposium: South Pacific Futures which was organized by *The Foundation for Development Cooperation* and held in Brisbane, Australia, in July 2002.
2. The information that forms the basis of this article was formulated in consultation with a New Zealand based firm.

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