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From Summitry to Panarchy: Issues of Global, Regional and Indigenous Environmental Governance in the Pacific

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There is a perception in much of the Pacific that environmental issues are going off the agenda. There may be many reasons, with over-governance, over-commitment, too much money, too little money, lack of indigenous community involvement, misunderstanding of local needs being just some of the ones given. Some feel that such a failure of environmental governance could lead to a type of anarchy or 'panarchy', but such a belief ignores positive instances of indigenous communities taking control, alone or in tandem with appropriate experts, demonstrating that national and local community projects can have very successful outcomes. More shared understanding of local knowledge and a willingness to engage by donors, communities and regional organizations could, if factored into Pacific environmental management, lead to more productive outcomes. These possibilities are outlined with reference to examples from environmental projects in Fiji and the Republic of the Marshall Islands that demonstrate the range of indigenous community and national responses to large-scale environmental projects.

Keywords

Environment, governance, panarchy, biodiversity, Pacific, Pacific Plan

Introduction

In recent decades there has been an abundance of literature on the Pacific which casts the countries, and various regional organizations, as examples of 'failed states', and poorly functioning entities. Variously, the blame has fallen on geographic size, isolation, corruption, and uncomprehending donors (e.g. Naidu, 2003; Frazer & Bryant-Tokalau, 2006). There has also been comment on the failure of aid agencies (multi-lateral, bi-lateral and charitable) to use the knowledge and information readily available within the Pacific (Ward & Lewis, 2004).

This paper will examine the management of and responses to environmental projects to try and assess why the large sums of donor aid being spent in the Pacific on the environment are producing at best uneven returns, and at worst duplication and competitiveness of donor effort, loss of community engagement and even failure of projects. It will focus in particular on regional and global approaches to environmental management in an attempt to demonstrate that despite the wealth of detailed locally based research and study, as well as a great deal of local knowledge and understanding about ecosystems and resources, little of this translates into policy in practice or sustainable outcomes.

Exploring global responses to environmental management and governance, this paper will look at what has become an apparent necessity, that of states being required to respond to global conventions and plans. The demands of dealing with, for example, the Millennium Development Goals, has however led to an era of ‘summitry and conventionry’ which could ultimately lead to ‘panarchy’ – a response to pressures of local and global environmental reform which can be deemed both locally appropriate and yet sometimes destructive. The paper then goes on to examine Pacific ways of avoiding panarchy, including both regional and local responses. Presenting case studies from Fiji and the Republic of the Marshall Islands, local solutions are demonstrated that may have as much, if not more, chance of success than many global plans.

Gloomy Perceptions of Pacific Environments

Pacific island countries are sometimes said to be over-governed, over-funded and under-achieving in environmental responsiveness. The deterioration of the physical environment, along with discussions of, for example, corruption in the logging industry in the Pacific has been widely documented (Bennett, 1995; Bryant, 1993; Hughes, 2003; Kabuataulaka, 1998; Turnbull, 2003). There are many reasons for the deterioration, both global and local. In current parlance, governance is a key issue, but poor governance, as perceived by donors and regional Pacific organizations, may have been avoided if more attention had been paid to local knowledge and practice. Hviding for example comments that even when non-government organizations (NGOs) and foreign institutions do work with local groups, they can indulge in practices which ‘run counter to indigenous notions of hierarchy, leadership, land tenure, and kinship structure’ (2003, p.3). Even then as traditional practices are constantly under going transformation it is likely that the project managers and developers are unaware of what constitutes ‘traditional practice’ in the areas where they work. Aid donors whether global or non-government, often understand little of the area in which they are working, preferring a romantic view of wilderness or untouched forest, to the reality that for many villagers, ‘nature’ is not a term that means conservation. Villagers, for example in Marovo lagoon as discussed by Hviding need conservation organizations as a means to development – to receive supplies of chain saws, clinics and roads – while conservationists and donors need the villages and their projects in order to have conservation funding continue in a sustainable way (see Bryant-Tokalau, 2001; Hviding, 2003).

Despite all the research and production of reports, particularly in Melanesia on deforestation, mining and fisheries, the tension of Melanesian nations seemed almost to have caught donors and regional organizations by surprise. There are many who have been warning Australia and New Zealand for years of the impacts of logging companies, corruption, and ethnic tension but the response has now only come in the form of crisis management, and then discourses on the failure of aid. There has been a consistent failure of those who give aid, to see the connections, and indeed the ‘arc of instability’ and the perception of threat via near neighbors were really not apparent until the Bali bombings of 2002. Australia’s current concern for Melanesia and now the whole of the Pacific has essentially come out of its concern for security (Henderson, 2004, p. 10). It might even be said that earlier reports on tensions surrounding resource mismanagement and the likely consequences were to no avail until 2002 when individuals of a donor country were killed in significant numbers.

Overall, then, some of the issues facing environmental projects in the Pacific involve the oft utilized blanket regional approach which has not always suited small island, community level involvement of indigenous populations (Bryant-Tokalau, 2004; Griffen, 2006). However, with discussions of Pacific regionalism and an attempt by some donors and academics to seek more appropriate solutions to local issues, there may be some changes in environmental aid and approaches. It is now obvious, for instance, that the hitherto prevailing model of management of the ‘environment’, with all its connotations and definitions and the failure to adequately use local indigenous knowledge, is leading to ‘mutual uncertainties’ (Hviding, 2003). In addition it is recognized that over-governance of environment through excessive layers of reporting and consumption of peoples’ time could lead to a situation of ‘panarchy’ through ‘summitry’ (Bryant-Tokalau, 2005), meaning that societies have resorted to trying to escape rigid hierarchical structures, and develop new indigenous approaches which may well follow ‘unpredictable paths’ (Hviding, 2003, p.1). As will be shown, though, such a response may come at a cost to transparent practices.

Global Responses to Environmental Governance

Since 1972 and the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, the global community of multi-lateral and bi-lateral donors has sought to solve issues of resource management and deteriorating environments through global conventions and aid assistance to regions and states. Through countless global conferences, regional fora and the ratification, adherence to and obligations of global conventions, the intention was that by setting parameters for resource use, 'environments' would improve and regenerate. Donors also sought to ensure that future generations would not only enjoy healthier and more prosperous lives, but would come to understand the value of natural resources to total human development.

Globally, the organizations dealing with environmental issues are represented by United Nations (UN) agencies, NGOs and others. Currently there is the UN Environment Programme, approximately twelve other United Nations bodies with interests in the environment, the Secretariats to global conventions, and more than 500 multilateral environmental treaties (Gemmil, Ivanova & Ling, 2002, p.1). Such complexity may be seen as unlikely to be conducive to good environmental management, let alone an integrated approach to environmental issues. Importantly, however, the global recognition of the transboundary nature of environmental problems demonstrates the power of global environmental governance, or the 'globalisation' of the environment (Jasanoff & Martello, 2004).

Current global efforts to re-focus aid delivery have come about partly in response to the proliferation of treaties, and confusion surrounding donor approaches to environment. Perhaps the most important shift in the past decade (aside from the need to deal with terrorism and poverty) has been the move towards 'mainstreaming' the role of natural resources and the environment into the overall goals of poverty reduction. New Zealand Aid, the Asian Development Bank, World Bank and others are constantly re-thinking aid delivery, not only to the Pacific, but globally, although it is possible that much of this re-thinking and re-focusing of aid will lead to few, if any, changes in the way business is done. Rather it is likely that only when there are some fundamental shifts in governance, particularly with respect to the way that small island countries govern themselves and respond to global requirements, will there be genuine ownership and delivery of projects aimed at improving environment.

Summitry and Conventionry: The Demands of Global Environmental Governance

Good environmental governance is about sustainable and equitable management of resources, but in few of the analyses produced to date has there been a critique of the levels of governance required. Formal governments, donors and NGOs have been discussed almost as competing interests. Regional organizations and institutions seem to be tacitly accepted as the most practical, cheapest, most efficient way to deal with the Pacific (as well as the Caribbean, Mekong Delta, Mediterranean, and former Soviet countries among others). Certainly there are many advantages of regionalism. Groupings of small countries may make some impact on the global stage, for example in anti-nuclear protests, climate change impacts, trade, whale sanctuaries and so on. Training institutions can operate more efficiently; regional airlines may be more profitable than those of small nations. Indeed, with the establishment of the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) in 1982, the hope and intention for the Pacific was to protect and improve the environment and ensure its sustainable development through such multi-lateral country and donor co-operation.

There is also growing exposure of Pacific countries and their indigenous communities, not only to the requirements of global conferences, treaties and their attendant donors, but also to NGOs, both local and global. New NGOs are created all the time, and these days it is much easier to get support from them than it was a decade ago. This is largely in response to bad government – the need for more civil action. This being so, there are many layers of governance in the Pacific: more, possibly, than in the rest of the developing world. Because some of the countries are quite small, they are acutely aware of the demands placed upon them by having to respond to all these layers (Bryant, 1994).

How Pacific Island Countries operate with respect to managing environment and poverty, and sustainable development can be examined through details of their current responsibilities, as detailed in the table below. In terms of global commitments, for example, Pacific countries are well signed up to global conventions. In environment there is Climate Change (the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change), Biodiversity (the Convention on Biological Diversity), and endangered species (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, CITES), Wetlands etc. They are also very responsive to developing local responses to Agenda 21, State of the Environment reports and to the Barbados Plan of Action for Small Island States.

Table 1

Country Commitments to Global Treaties and Studies

- Biodiversity strategies (CBD)
- National Communications on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
- Reports on Desertification (some)
- CITES reporting (endangered species)
- RAMSAR reporting (wetlands)

- Capacity needs assessments
- Basel convention reporting (Waste)
- Barbados + 10 preparations (small islands)
- Suva Declaration on Sustainable Human Development
- Sustainable Human Development Situation Analysis Reports
- Pacific Employment and Sustainable Livelihoods Initiative (PESLI)
- Country Poverty Studies

(Source: Bryant-Tokalau, 2001)

Indeed, in the Pacific, rhetoric on environment and sustainable development, the training opportunities available, participation in global debates and conventions, the establishment of environment departments, regional approaches to environmental issues etc., has proceeded even more rapidly than could have been considered possible three decades ago. Nevertheless, despite the considerable investment of time, human resources and funds, environmental issues in the region remain challenging and continue to grow in scope and severity. Major examples include land degradation which has been recognized as a serious problem, as well as global climate change and likely impacts on sustainable land management. Policies surrounding these issues require urgent implementation if Pacific environmental and human resources are to coexist in a sustainable way (Bryant-Tokalau, 2000; UNEP, 1999, p. 6). The stumbling block is the capacity to put these policies into practice. Countries are more than well aware that, with ratification of conventions comes responsibilities, and with responsibility comes commitment and action. These latter, however, require there to be a sufficient, committed and available pool of local people.

Tackling Local Issues with Global Plans: The Millennium Development Goals

Since the year 2000, most able public servants have become involved in broader government activities relating to the global strategies of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (UN, 2000). This involvement is in addition to all the other global, regional and local environment treaties and commitments noted above. Despite the intent of the MDGs, the sheer burden of reporting on progress towards them can be difficult for Pacific Island Countries where economic performance has declined in last decade, and may not improve substantially by 2015. Hence, whilst the MDG goals are important and laudable, the question for small island states is how to practically achieve them, raising the question as to whether global conventions and donors expect too much of small island states, and whether governments are able to fulfill their reporting obligations, let alone meeting intended targets. Governments, however, do not really have a choice about becoming involved in such global targets, given the targeting of aid by donors and the fact that progress is measured against the goals.

By 2004, when the Pacific reviewed progress on the issue of environmental sustainability and the MDGs, despite the high recognition of the importance of environmental sustainability, problems persisted (UNDP, 2004). There were reported continuing difficulties of data collection, such as for greenhouse gas emissions and energy efficiency, and limited progress on monitoring remaining forest cover and biodiversity protection. Although there were some improvements (for example in access to good sanitation) several countries had also deteriorated in terms of environmental quality as demonstrated by outbreaks of water borne diseases. Poor data availability is also a continuing problem in the Pacific. There are available general commentaries on the environment and other issues, but detailed statistics are lacking. Some of the problem arises from the lack of sufficient technical and other trained local people in the countries themselves and the high dependence on aid assistance, both monetary and technical. Part of the blame can also be attributed to the constant push for governments to respond by reporting towards global goals, set by global organizations, with an associated move away from supporting local communities in their attempts to meet these same goals. Such a path ultimately leads to disengagement of communities from broader political processes and may ultimately lead to Panarchy.

The Pay-off: Responding to Global Conventions and the Turn to Panarchy

As seen above, Pacific Island nations are not always able to successfully adhere to the demands of international conventions and achieve levels of development expected by donors. These failures could easily be blamed on ‘poor governance’ but the difficulty for Pacific nations dealing with current and potential environment issues is also likely to be a result of issues such as size, availability of relevant expertise, and time. The debate over inadequate success in environmental protection and good management parallels in many ways the debate over democratic governance and the role of the state (see, for example, Henderson, 2003, pp. 234-5).

To comprehend the failure to instigate practical action, the example of Tuvalu may be cited. With a population of around 10,300 people, small government departments, few human resources and the commitments of writing reports, traveling to global conferences and enacting the various regional and global treaties, it is hardly surprising that not all obligations can be met. The commitments are high for any country but for one of Tuvalu’s size can be counterproductive.

To produce substantial reports requires meetings, consultation, research, travel, and a great deal of time. It is not uncommon for environment officials to travel for approximately three out of every four weeks in a month. They may contribute to one meeting, move onto another, and have a consultant (increasingly local) produce the final report. Such extensive travel is not wasted of course, as Pacific voices are increasingly heard in some global arenas – particularly climate change – and so a form of co-existence develops between the donors and the government officials, but the question still remains: what is the impact in the home country of the extensive travel and reporting requirements of global treaty obligations? What is in fact achieved?

Such reliance on global conventions and meetings, whilst important for obtaining global perspectives on environmental issues, has placed great demands on the small island Pacific nations. The 'balkanisation' of treaties has meant that staff are too thinly spread, frequently failing to act on connections between different environmental issues (Najam et al, 2004, p. 29). In addition the birth of summitry (Bryant & Bailey, 1997, p. 79) has meant that small countries with small pools of expertise are unable to meet local commitments to protect their physical environments because of the enormous demands of time, presentations and reporting required if they are to participate in (and benefit from) being involved in global summitry. From this failure, it is only a short step to *panarchy.*

Panarchy, as coined by Gunderson and Holling, is an attempt to get away from the rigid, top-down nature of hierarchy. Deriving from Pan, the Greek God it conveys the spiritual power of nature (Gunderson & Holling, 2002, p.74), but can also be destructive (panic). The paradoxical nature of Pan may be a useful comment on Pacific environment governance, torn between pressures of economic reform and global (and local) desires to protect the environment. Drawing on panarchy, as opposed to hierarchy, may also be a comment on the more recent global recognition of community-based indigenous approaches in dealing with environmental issues (despite the hierarchical nature of most Pacific societies).

Summitry, Panarchy and Environmental Governance

Issues of treaty proliferation and summit fatigue have led this author to suspect that the approaches of Pacific communities to relevant environmental governance may be more akin to a type of 'panarchy' than the more formulated (but not easily defined) 'sustainable development' approach favoured by the international community. Sustainable development, in its very broadest sense, is recognized as fundamental to the future well-being of Pacific nations (see Pacific Islands Forum, 2004). Although the phrase, 'environmental governance' is less frequently heard in the Pacific, it is essentially at the core of the environmental debate, as well as being integral to sustainable development. Sustainable development is increasingly focusing on the need for 'partnerships' and the need to more actively involve and listen to communities in carrying out good national and community management, whilst lessening the top-down approach of donors and governments. There is a great deal of rhetoric, however, and during the preparations for the Rio plus 10 World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 in Johannesburg, there was certainly a great deal more. The Pacific is involved in this debate, at all levels. But the outcome for good environmental governance has yet to be assessed.

To consider issues of environmental management in particular, the danger of substantial rhetoric, particularly at the global and regional levels, may be that ‘one size is assumed to fit all’, and that nothing, fundamentally, will change. There has already been considerable debate in the Pacific over the role of community organizations, the churches, and traditional structures in managing resources. Much of the discussion has focused around the need for a more participatory approach to resource management, to the need to listen to communities, to the failure of governments, private sector, international NGOs in understanding the needs of communities – a type of panarchy whereby a range of methodologies are tried in an attempt to find relevant local solutions (see, for instance, Siwatibau, 1997; Halapua, 1997; Henderson, 1997). There is also a great deal of romanticism about the ability of communities to sustainably manage their own resources in a manner not possible for donors, business and others. Most analysts these days, however, recognize that communities also have their own realities. They too suffer from corruption and greed and do not always manage the ‘equitable distribution’ of resources so desired in the name of democracy and good governance (Filer, 1997; Hau’ofa, 1993; Scheyvens, 1999).

The ‘problem’ of environmental governance may further be to do with the fact that due to the source of donor assistance, and the initial channels of delivery, the ‘environment’ is often viewed by donors as either a matter for the State, and groupings of States (as in regional organizations) when working on issues of national or regional policy, and only a matter for the community when small, local projects are to be considered.

In Melanesia, for instance, where countries have been considered widely to be ‘weak states’ and where the bureaucratic, centralized structures of western democracy have been imposed on smaller, self-managing societies (Larmour, 1996), the issue of environmental governance in any case is almost anathema. Here global and regional approaches, targeted solely at governments, which are themselves severely stressed, frequently fail to deliver the intended outcomes. In almost all projects currently delivered by the UN for example, it is governments and regional organizations that manage and execute the projects, with very small attendance and attention being paid to communities, in particular the landowners. The UN and other multi- and bi-lateral donors have good rhetoric concerning the ‘promotion of environmentally sustainable development to reduce human poverty’ through mainstreaming, but despite the rhetoric and genuine attempts to more directly assist women, children and other vulnerable groups, donor assistance remains severely hampered in its delivery. This is partly due to the nature of the ‘state’ and partly to do with the donor agencies' own internal limitations, whether bureaucratic, technical or a genuine lack of comprehension of local situations.

In contrast, much of the global and international non-government assistance in Melanesia is more directly targeted to community, land-holding groups and is sometimes more successful in the long-term, particularly when delivered in partnership with a range of local groups from women's organizations through to small village-based cooperatives (see Bennett, 1995; Clarke, 1990). Both local and international NGOs have done a better job in building capacity and in delivering assistance, possibly because opportunities for corruption are considered to be less when governance is more transparent, but more importantly the communities have more of a sense of ownership and stewardship of resources and may then be more inclined to manage them carefully (see for example Hviding's work on Marovo lagoon, 2003).

Panarchy Avoidance: Pacific Regionalism

A key approach to managing the region's natural resources, and thus eventually pave the way for sustainable development, has conversely been through regional organizations. These agencies, known as the Council of Regional Organizations for the Pacific (CROP), comprise eight regional organizations tasked with a number of specialist areas of assistance to Pacific Island Countries. With respect to the environment and sustainable development since Rio, Barbados and the World Summit on Sustainable Development, each of the regional agencies is mandated to co-ordinate activities and to collaborate on projects. Whilst this collaboration may be seen in a positive light, there is also a great deal of overlap and territoriality in regional organizations. In fact the nature of their roles and value to the countries has, for several years, been a matter of major debate in the region and there have been a number of reviews of the individual organizations (e.g. Hunnam & Tuioti on the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), for AusAid 2000; Pacific Islands Forum, 2004).

The regional approach is often considered to be very useful for dealing with the vast global responsibilities. It can respond to the issues discussed previously, such as the possibility that global conventions and donors expect too much, that governments sometimes lack the capacity to deal with all the issues, and that a united voice of several countries is more powerful in the global arena. These are of course all valid issues, but in recent times countries and observers have questioned the roles and mandates of regional organizations, and the donors that fund them. Questions such as independence at the negotiating table of regional organizations and the countries often arise. Both Kelsey (2004) and Naidu (2003) have, for instance, written on the blunt tactics utilized by donor nations in trying to get their own way in areas such as closer economic relations and climate change, and at other levels, away from the global outcomes of negotiations, the benefit of regional organizations to communities and the involvement of wider interests are constantly raised. The need for management duplication in the secretariats or each organization is another point of discussion, such as in the Pacific Island Forum's 2005 'Pacific Plan' which attempts to redefine the roles of the regional organizations in the Pacific (Huffer, 2006, p. 158).

The areas of responsibility of the regional bodies have also become blurred over the past decade as the nature of development has been better understood (or perhaps less well understood) as being all encompassing, making it less easy to task one organization, such as SPREP, with doing 'everything environmental', and another, such as the Forum, to deal with political issues. After all, what causes poverty if not the inequitable distribution of resources? (Bryant-Tokalau, 1999). The links with governments are clear (as governments give the regional organizations their mandate), but with non-government organizations the relationship is sometimes difficult.

The South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP)

Until the AusAid review of the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) in 2000, there had been few genuine attempts to assess its role in the region. Descriptive listings of projects, highlighting the positive outcomes of regional negotiations (e.g. Yabaki, 1997), whilst valuable in providing a good overview of SPREP's work, have done little to further the debate on what is the best approach to managing the environment and natural resources of the Pacific, maintaining and supporting indigenous knowledge and practices, and of how one regional organization may link with other players to further sustainable development.

Donors frequently reflect upon the regional/national approach towards dealing with the Pacific environment (and in other areas). An examination of both the New Zealand Overseas Development Assistance (NZODA) Review of Development Assistance (MFAT 2001) and the AusAid Review of SPREP (Hunnam & Tuioti, 2000) demonstrates that both agencies are concerned that to do business in the Pacific there needs to be more effective liaison between the donors and the regional agencies, as well as actually delivering at the national and local level. New Zealand is now very clear on the focus of its overseas development assistance (ODA). Clearly the role of large non-government organizations also bears observation. Gibson, in a presentation to the University of Otago Foreign Policy School, outlined a 'report card' for non-government organizations whereby they are assessed according to levels of cooperation, communication and country to region linkages. The outcome of this preliminary assessment shows in turn that NGOs have their limitations. The fact that some large non-government organizations have become 'regions without countries' (Gibson, 2004) should be a matter of concern and indeed a basis upon which to judge the effectiveness of NGOs in delivery of aid with an outcome.

With regards to the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) in particular, this was established in 1982, at first under the then South Pacific Commission in New Caledonia until it became an independent intergovernmental organization based in Samoa in 1992. It achieved full autonomy in 1994. Initially the SPREP work programme and budget were submitted to and approved by the (then) South Pacific Commission, but since autonomy, and under the SPREP Agreement, the organization is independent, guided by its member states. The work programme is focused around the activity areas of climate change and sea-level rise, protected areas and species, natural resources management, education, renewable energy, pollution control, biodiversity, coastal and watershed management and pesticides (South & Veitayaki, 1999; SPREP, 2001).

By the 1990s, as is demonstrated in the table below, SPREP was obtaining the majority of its funding for environment projects from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) – around 60% of SPREP's budget came through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), one of the implementing agencies of the GEF – and the large, regional projects funded by UNDP/GEF were managed by the Samoa office of the UNDP.

Table 2

Global Environment Facility Pacific Regional Environment Projects 1990s-2000

- The South Pacific Biodiversity Conservation Programme (around US$10 million, with A$5 million from AusAid),
- Pacific Islands Climate Change Assistance Program (US$2.44 million)
- Strategic Action Programme for International Waters (US$12 million).
- Pacific Island Renewable Energy Programme (US$780,000)

(Source: Hunnam & Tuioti, 2000)

Although the intent of establishing a regional environment programme was well considered, especially for the early 1980s and the 1970s when the idea was mooted, there is now a need for the nature of the organization, and its mandate, to be re-cast. This is in the light of changing circumstances, globally and nationally, which have meant not only that countries and communities have been widely exposed to changes in environmental governance, but also that they no longer feel that they need someone else to provide all the expertise in every area. If they do not have the capacity, they would prefer to choose who should assist rather than having assistance imposed.

SPREP and Country-level Environmental Governance

In Melanesia, for example, the separation of the States from regional and global attempts to assist is more marked than elsewhere. Melanesian countries were reluctant participants in several regional institutions, but perhaps most particularly in SPREP. For some years the organization was viewed as too far away, too remote in understanding the needs of the countries, and unable to provide the direct contact needed in the complex societies. Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Fiji and Solomon Islands as the Melanesian members of SPREP, have benefited less than others from its establishment, and projects in those countries are fraught with management difficulties. On the whole, it could be said that SPREP needs the Melanesian countries more than they need SPREP (Bryant-Tokalau, 2001).

This is because the modus operandi of SPREP included emphasis on complex large, expensive projects with several 'integrated' components as they benefited several countries rather than just one. Indeed economies of scale, consistency in delivery, cultural appropriateness, and local consultation possibilities were cited in the review of the organization in 2000 as reasons for the preference for regional delivery (Hunnam & Tuioti, 2000, pp. 12-13). However, in the review it was found that once specific project areas were examined, the rationale for regional delivery was less strong. Several donors have also commented that the broad term 'environment' was difficult to define, particularly at the regional level, and that there was insufficient liaison and collaboration with donors despite several efforts throughout the region and with donors to 'mainstream' environment (and other thematic issues such as biodiversity) into the broader planning process. The general conclusion of the review seemed be that SPREP, as the agency with the focus on the regional environment, needed to 'provide expert advice to its member agencies, regional organization partners or donors' (Hunnam & Tuioti, 2000, p. 13). What could also be added here is that many of the SPREP projects appeared to ignore the detailed historical and ethnographic work which had been carried out for many years with Pacific communities. Failure to engage with not only communities, but also the widely published and available materials on, for example, Solomon Islands (see Bennett, 1995; Hviding, 1995), has meant a more shallow and limited understanding on the part of agencies than is necessary.

The Australian Aid review did not attempt to assess SPREP's role in different parts of the Pacific region. As an observer of SPREP since 1983 and having participated in numerous meetings and conferences, it is very clear to this author that there is dissatisfaction by some groups of countries with the way that SPREP delivers its programmes. For many years the Micronesian countries, for example, felt under-served, partly because of distance, but also because some were later signatories to some global conventions than in other parts of the Pacific (and were thus ineligible for some assistance). The

Melanesian countries, on the other hand, have always been SPREP partners with on-going projects, but have not been actively engaged, in the sense of fully participating in SPREP meetings etc., and have preferred to go their own way in project management. This can be a matter for debate and further study, but explanations include the fact that Melanesia is very different in the way that it is governed, including at the local level. When this is applied to resource management, there is perhaps nothing more telling than the fact that in Vanuatu, ‘there are 49 conservation areas. The Vatthe conservation area established by SPREP through the South Pacific Biodiversity Conservation Project, is not only the most elaborate and most expensive, it is also the least successful’ (Siwatibau, 2001, Pers. Comm.).

A radical view, but one that is frequently heard behind the scenes, although rarely in open meetings, is that ‘SPREP has grown strong at the expense of the national units and their ability to manage their national environment and resources’. This is serious comment. It is often charged that SPREP feels it knows best what the region needs. It may well do so, but the countries and communities are also very experienced, having been exposed to global meetings and trainings frequently due to SPREP assistance. Now that the countries have been exposed, have ‘matured’ in the environmental sense and have more capacity to fulfill global obligations, it is time for SPREP (and other regional organizations) to re-think the approach away from large regional projects, to providing assistance and information needed by the Pacific, and as outlined in the AusAid review. Unfortunately, however, as one head of agency commented recently, ‘there have been some lessons learned and one is the lesson of “country-drivenness”, but the other lesson learned is that SPREP isn’t listening’ (anon., 2001).

Another concern expressed by members was that SPREP has retained too much ownership of some projects, to the extent that local and national beneficiaries in Pacific countries have not gained as much as they should have from the experience of planning or implementing the project or from monitoring the results and drawing their own lessons. This is a particular issue in the Pacific where natural resources are owned and used under customary tenure systems. Even more than national government, local people and communities need to have control of programs targeting their resources. Some respondents expressed concern that ‘execution by a regional organization does not add enough value but consumes a large proportion of the budget’ (Hunnam & Tuioti, 2000, p. 21). A major share of the blame for this approach comes from access to specific types of donor funding, some of which has been provided only at the regional level for reasons of economies of scale. Until 1997 money from the Global Environment Facility, through one of its implementing agencies, the UN Development Programme, was available only through large, regional projects. Initially this was a pragmatic approach to dealing with many small island states. However as time passed, and as indigenous populations of Pacific countries became more highly trained and skilled in global environmental politics, the need for the regional approach lessened and for national responses grew.

The United Nations and the Global Environment Facility

Through the Global Environment Facility (GEF) large amounts of money can be accessed even when only small amounts are required. National level GEF projects are managed largely by governments, and some non government organizations. These began later than the regional projects in the Pacific, commencing in 1997 through the Suva United Nations Development Programme Country Office. The first of these was assistance to countries to develop their biodiversity and climate change strategies, several of which have now been completed. Each of the strategies was funded at between US$2-300,000 with additional funding fairly easily available. Between 1997 and 2001 thirteen GEF projects, including the biodiversity and climate change strategies, were developed by national governments and NGOs with assistance from the Suva UNDP office. Larger projects of around US$750,000 in community conservation and renewable energy were also developed in Federated States of Micronesia and Fiji. The total value of Global Environment Facility funding through the Suva UNDP office was around US$6,000,000, with a further $2 million in the pipeline at the end of 2001. A major fisheries project in Solomon Islands, jointly with the Asian Development Bank, and worth a total of around US$5 million is currently stalled. Several other projects at the community and national level are under development. Countries were also invited by GEF to apply for assessment of capacity building needs (note, not actual capacity building), and, despite the fact that some said they did not want any more assessments, the project went ahead.

Notably, although GEF funding is relatively straight forward (if time consuming) to access, it has been difficult for Pacific nations to receive smaller amounts of money until recently. Small Grants (an additional funding category under the Global Environment Facility) were not available to Pacific nations until 2004, even though the amount available of US$50,000 was a more realistic figure given size and capacity. Smaller amounts of funds would also encourage more local NGO participation.

In the late 1990s the Global Environment Facility alone put around US$50 million into the Pacific. Despite the significant amount of funding, it would appear that the impacts of these projects may be less significant in their results than what is already going on in communities. The total amount of funding for environment projects by all donors means that they can be very influential in terms of directing community governance. There is very limited analysis of donor influence at the community level, but even a listing of donors providing environmental aid should raise some concerns.

Apart from the multi-lateral funding of the UN agencies (including the Global Environment Facility), the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, there is also funding from bi-lateral donors, particularly Japan, AusAid and NZAid, as well as Denmark, Norway, Canada, Korea and China (both Peoples' Republic and Taiwan). Major NGOs and grant agencies such as The Nature Conservancy, The MacArthur Foundation, The WorldWide Fund for Nature, and Conservation International, also wield considerable influence in the Pacific, both in developing and managing environmental projects and in providing funds. This international surge in interest in the Pacific's biodiversity has come about largely because of the recognized importance of the region's natural resources both for the future of the planet, but also because of the significance of resources for both trade and research, and recognition of the perils facing small island states.

In 2004, for example, through the Conservation and Sustainable Development area of the MacArthur Foundation's Programme on Global Security and Sustainability, US$800,000 was awarded to the University of the South Pacific's Institute of Applied Sciences in support of the Locally Managed Marine Areas (LMMA) work in the Pacific. Whilst some of the environmental projects developed from the considerable donor and NGO funding achieve excellent work and maintain the communities at the forefront (such as the LMMA), it is difficult at this time to assess genuine outcomes in terms of community sustainable development.

Panarchy Avoidance: National projects

In the late 1990s, in response to ratifying the Convention on Biological Diversity, countries were expected to produce a National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, and report to the Conference of Parties. Unlike earlier commitments to global environment issues, such as the NEMS (National Environment Management Strategies) that were coordinated regionally through SPREP, the Biodiversity Strategies were developed at the national level with funding from the Global Environment Facility. The GEF funding has come through the United Nations Development Programme in Micronesia and Polynesia, as well as Fiji, but in Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea, UNEP and the World Bank have provided funding and oversight. There have been varying degrees of success with these. Vanuatu simply got on with it, finished and moved on to the serious business of protecting its biodiversity. PNG and Solomon Islands became bogged down and neither Strategy has been produced. Fiji finished but never moved to the next stage, partly because of political turmoil, but largely because of failure to continue to involve a wide range of people, even though communities and local NGOs were strongly involved from the start. Micronesian countries, on the other hand, have proceeded rapidly with full community and government support for their strategies from the beginning of the process. They too have proceeded to the next stage of practically applying the findings from their strategies.

As shown in the box below, the Republic of the Marshall Islands is a good example of how countries in Micronesia have chosen to work alone on this Plan and report, rather than under either the mantle of SPREP, or a team of international consultants. Whilst I would be hesitant to attribute the energy of the Marshall Islands to a reaction to earlier nuclear testing and the resultant degradation of the atolls, both from nuclear activity and alienation from land leading to extreme overcrowding, it is notable that a country earlier depicted as having high numbers of children not receiving formal education and facing severe overcrowding and problems of nutrition (UNICEF, 1991) definitively rejected too great an involvement of external donor assistance. (Unfortunately, for all that the indigenous Marshallese produced the report themselves, the only review of the report (Kroeker, 2004) credited an American researcher and artist as the primary author when in fact the process was much more local and inclusive. Such a perception is not only incorrect but also indicates that even journals purporting to promote Pacific scholarship can get it wrong if there is lack of familiarity with the process.)

Box One

Marshall Islands Biodiversity Study

The Republic of the Marshall Islands, like most Pacific Island nations, is a signatory to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). It was also part of the larger SPREP project (SPBCP) on biodiversity, but felt that little of that trickled down to the country and the broader community. In 1997 RMI decided to produce its own report. Although there was wide consultation and the material being produced was very detailed and useful, it was felt by local staff on the coordinating committee, staff of the Environmental Protection Agency and others involved that the entire process was too heavily directed by the international consultant (who had been chosen by RMI, in consultation with UNDP Suva). It was decided to remove the consultant and to continue working with national consultants and staff, in association with technical staff in the UNDP office in Suva (in background and for guidance and reporting only).

The process worked well. The final report was the first of its type for RMI. It is beautifully presented, with useful case-studies in both Marshallese and English, and with original drawings of flora and fauna throughout. The report is widely used, has been summarized and translated into Marshallese and is available to schools and others who wish to use it. Essentially the RMI has produced a report that is not only useful to the country itself, but which has also fulfilled the country obligations under the CBD, and can be used as a model for other countries working on their own biodiversity strategies.

(Source: Bryant-Tokalau, fieldwork 1997-2002)

The Fiji case

As in the Marshall Islands, the Fiji committee convened to work on the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan consisted of representatives from a number of government departments, NGOs, academia and private (local) consultants. Again, the UN recommended approach that involved employing an international consultant, as well as locals, was rejected. The Suva UNDP office rather worked with the Department of Environment to produce the application for funding and a locally employed team implemented the project under the Ministry of Environment. The committee decided that as well as producing the required strategy and report to the Convention on Biological Diversity, it was important to gather good technical information in the form of background reports. Six working parties or technical groups were convened to carry out stock-taking, gap assessment, and the drawing up of recommendations. The groups looked at marine and botanical biodiversity, terrestrial invertebrates and invertebrates, traditional resource use and conservation, value and economic benefits of biodiversity, and protected area selection. Given that the process of producing the Biodiversity Strategies should involve a great deal of consultation in order to be useful at the local level, six community workshops were held in a number of different settings, including a rural village, an urban squatter settlement and on three islands (Fiji Government, 1999). Also conducted were two national workshops and a public awareness campaign using radio, television and newspapers to inform the public of the Biodiversity Strategy.

Whilst it could be argued that in a nation of more than 900,000 people the level of consultation was minimal and unlikely to reach a wide range of people, the Steering Committee did make considerable effort to obtain a range of views and as much background information as possible before finalizing the plan. The final product was potentially very useful for developing policy to conserve and manage Fiji's biodiversity. Unfortunately, the process after completion was where the Biodiversity Strategy lost direction. Under Fiji government process such a paper has to be endorsed by Cabinet before it can be cleared for use. A cabinet paper should be produced and presented. The paper was not produced for almost twelve months and when it was finally ready the coup of 2000 intervened. Staff of the Department of Environment lost momentum, and the Fiji Strategy remains un-endorsed by Cabinet. Despite the absence of a formal endorsement, however, a number of positive outcomes have occurred. Significantly, the Ministry of Fijian Affairs has publicly supported the development of a biodiversity indigenous, or *taukei*, warden scheme as a direct result of the Biodiversity Strategy, a development which began informally during the consultation process. In addition, Fiji biodiversity experts have spent time with the Federated States of Micronesia, assisting them in the process of developing their own Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (BSAP). On the whole, as shall be demonstrated below, other community activities are more likely now to receive support and recognition than a few years ago. The BSAP process thus continued a movement of good biodiversity protection.

National Linkages with the Wider Environmental Community

The process of producing documents in response to global treaty commitments is problematic for small island states, and whilst the Fiji biodiversity strategy project may not have been satisfactory in terms of the final report, the process itself was useful in the sense of raising awareness and providing a base for the development of new environmental policy. Unfortunately the reports produced by the various working groups are gathering dust and unpublished, but with a great deal of other activity currently underway in Fiji (for example the World Conservation Society, WWF Pacific, MacArthur Foundation projects etc), they may be a useful contribution. The cost in terms of people's time and energy needs, however, to be recognized and is the subject of further analysis elsewhere. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly in the regional context, is the fact that the work carried out by both Fiji and the Republic of the Marshall Islands (as well as other nations) was for several years ignored by the SPBCP (South Pacific Biodiversity Conservation Programme), a regional biodiversity project managed by SPREP. This project ended in December 2001 after operating for nine years, but during the period 1997 to 2000 – whilst Fiji and the Republic of the Marshall Islands were producing their own strategies – the regional project operated separately and was not integrated in any way at the national level. Indeed there was no relationship between SPREP and the Steering Committees of the national projects when each could have very usefully informed the other. Even the Conservation Round Table, a body established to co-ordinate Pacific conservation activities, failed to notice or refer to national experts and committees in their first few meetings, despite the fact that people involved in conservation at both the regional and national level were present. It was almost as though it was a case of 'if SPREP isn't doing it then it isn't happening'.

The development of the National Biodiversity Strategies, working directly with Global Environment Facility through one of its Implementing Agencies (UNDP, UNEP and World Bank), clearly demonstrated that by the late 1990s there was a shift in the way countries wanted to operate in environmental matters. Instead of recognizing that this was a sign of the increased capacity, understanding and maturing of countries, the shift led to tension between some regional organizations and national government officers, as well as between some NGOs and regional bodies. The concern that the large regional organizations need to be reformed is reflected in the way the environment has been managed. Whilst regional NGO support to countries has been generally positive in that it has encouraged ownership of the national biodiversity strategy process, regional institutions, such as SPREP, appear to have felt threatened by the fact that within countries representatives of all sectors (governments, landowners, private sector, NGOs), and not only members of environment departments, meet regularly to share information, discuss ideas and actually implement projects in a timely manner.

Such a difference in approach was articulated in the AusAid review of SPREP for example, where it was noted that the regional organizations, such as SPREP, provide a ‘convenient, official vehicle for organizing projects … And that a large regional project is considered easier to administer than a series of separate projects in individual small countries’ (Hunnam & Tuioti, 2000). Although AusAid revealed a number of defects in regional delivery, it was never suggested that the regional approach was inappropriate, rather that it should continue in certain areas. In the environmental field it is appropriate for both methods to be employed, recognizing that countries have a pool of expertise that should be utilized.

From Global to Regional to Local: The Case of Verata

Whilst projects at the national and regional level continue to be developed with a view to sustainably managing the environment in communities, at the local level indigenous communities are in some cases simply ‘getting on with it’, apparently outside the realm of regional and national politics. A good example of this has been the bio-prospecting project in the village of Verata, in Tailevu on Viti Levu in Fiji. This project is now internationally known from being a recipient of the ‘Equator Initiative’ award at the World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002 for its ‘outstanding community efforts for poverty reduction and biodiversity conservation’ (UNDP, 2003).

The groundwork to the project commenced in 1996 when the Institute of Applied Sciences at the University of the South Pacific (USP) in Fiji applied for funding from the Biodiversity Conservation Network (BCN). This network is a consortium of the WorldWide Fund for Nature, The Nature Conservancy and World Resources Institute (with funding by the United States Agency for International Development). The BCN was initiated in order to support biodiversity conservation efforts in the Asia/Pacific Region, and to evaluate an enterprise-based approach to community-based conservation (Aalbersberg, 1999).

Running parallel to the development of Fiji’s Biodiversity Strategy (and with many of the same people involved), this project involved the eight villages in Verata tikina with a view to creating a bio-prospecting enterprise to provide income from clam extracts to the community to support conservation and development needs: needs previously met by the harvesting of marine resources. As part of the enterprise it was decided, in consultation between the community and the USP, to develop a bio-prospecting agreement and a community-based marine resource management plan. Biological and socioeconomic monitoring of effects of the project would be carried out by local community members and research undertaken by the University to add value to biological extracts before their being licensed for study by pharmaceutical companies overseas.

The project has succeeded in not only bringing fairly distributed commercial returns to the people of Verata; it has also been successful in conserving the biodiversity of the area. In addition, people have been trained in monitoring their own reefs and already there are positive signs of the reefs returning to a previously healthy state. The project also has implications for international bio-prospecting agreements as well as for protection of intellectual property for the people of Fiji.

In particular the Fiji Government and the University of the South Pacific developed a policy on bio-prospecting, the first of its kind in the Pacific to be developed between a community, a research institution, and a government. In order to guarantee long-term sustainability of the product being provided to the Strathclyde laboratory, the people of Verata, guided by their chief, the *Ratu mai Verata*, developed a marine resource management plan which included a ban of taking turtles and coral extraction, a moratorium on granting commercial fishing licenses, size limitation of gills nets and the declaration of no-take refugia to support an enhancement of marine populations. Twenty Verata people were also were trained in biological monitoring techniques and tasked with monitoring changes in '*kai koso*' (*Anadara sp.*) and '*mana*' (*Thalassina anomala*) populations, both in the no-take refugia and control areas. After just eighteen months it was found that the '*kai koso*' populations had increased by 600% in the '*tabu*' area and 200% in a similar area where harvesting has continued.

The Verata project is now part of the Locally-Managed Marine Area Network (LMMA) and its Fiji counterpart, FLMMA. LMMA is a network which formally commenced in 2000 to bring together marine conservation practitioners working throughout Asia and the Pacific in order to share information and knowledge. LMMA is built upon a premise of co-management with various groups involved in marine conservation. These may include the community, traditional leaders, local government, occasionally the central government, and sometimes (as in the case of Fiji) a local university and researchers (see www.lmmanetwork.org, accessed 17th June, 2008). Members of the LMMA network include projects in Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Federated States of Micronesia and the Philippines.

The Fiji LMMA is successful both in the way that it has replicated its work and lessons learned regionally, and that at the Fiji level it has, since its inception in 1999, grown to include communities in six districts and cover 10% of the inshore marine area of Fiji. According to recent monitoring, the involvement of communities in the network has led to increases in the number and size of clams, crabs, and other species harvested adjacent to *tabu* areas, where fishing is prohibited. Household incomes are estimated to have increased by as much as 35% over three years and catches have tripled (Aalbersberg &

Tawake, 2002). If these results continue over time, then the potential for long-term sustainability and the clear relationship between well managed environments and poverty reduction is recognized. The success of the network can be attributed to its participatory and collaborative focus, which has ensured that local people are at the center of the network's operations. Interestingly, the Fiji government is reputedly on-board in the sense that national policy incorporates some of the FLMMA approaches into overall coastal management. Although this is yet to be assessed in the long-term, it is important to note that community level activities are indeed recognized for their long-term possibilities for sustainability and common-sense approach.

New Regional Approaches as the Price of Aid

The necessity to respond to a plethora of global conventions, opportunities for accessing funds, participation in global and regional meetings and conferences, as well as membership of regional and local organizations, can place untenable demands on small countries with limited resources and expertise. Obviously such commitments are seen as necessary to enable Pacific countries to work towards sustainable development, but prioritising such efforts is almost impossible given the 'global governance' of major issues. Nonetheless, despite donor demands (and perceived lack of achievement), it has been demonstrated that local communities are able to operate within the donor sphere and succeed in reaching practical outcomes where larger organizations often find it difficult. The case of the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme, global funding bodies and international non-government organizations all bear closer examination in this respect.

There is no doubt that in order to deal with the many isolated and scattered communities, as well as relatively small country populations in the Pacific, regional projects can be very effective. In terms of convenience, cost saving, training opportunities, and a more effective voice on the global stage, it can sometimes make sense to treat the Pacific as a single unit in certain situations. All Pacific Island Countries have benefited a great deal from training and participation in global fora. Much of this capacity building has been due to national involvement in SPREP regional projects.

It could, however, be said that the regional approach has laid the groundwork and that it is time to release the apron strings. That is, now that the Pacific countries have been exposed, have 'matured' in the environmental sense and have the will to fulfill global obligations, it is well recognized that regional organizations need to re-think their approach, away from large regional projects, to providing the assistance, support and information needed by individual Pacific countries. Dealing with the Pacific as a region, not only in environment and poverty alleviation, but in all respects, is a matter of widespread debate at present (Huffer, 2006), but there remains a danger of over-simplifying the debate and neglecting to comprehend the true situation at the local level. Donors have been warned of the dangers of the 'harmonized blueprint approach' for example (Naidu, 2003), where the regional approach – including the push for a 'Pacific Plan' – is just another layer of global governance.

The Pacific Plan, which includes sustainable development as one way forward for the Pacific in the future, whilst noble in sentiment, has as its focus trade agreements and closer economic relationships. Such relationships, if well managed will certainly benefit countries, but a major complaint from communities and NGOs has been the lack of adequate consultation and the fact that the process is clearly driven by Australia and New Zealand (Huffer, 2006). In terms of environment and sustainability in an over-arching sense, some specific goals are included which most people would support – for example, dealing with urgent issues of waste management and clean water (Pacific Islands Forum, 2005, p. 14) – but issues of regional management and governance still apply. As Huffer has pointed out, unless issues of traditional knowledge and cultural identity are included, and communities have the opportunity to comment on and be involved in the Plan, it will face difficulties in achieving its goals (Huffer, 2006, pp. 158, 173-4).

To reach a conclusion upon the most appropriate strategy for Pacific nations working towards true sustainable development, it is fruitless to blame the regional organizations and the countries themselves for taking up all the opportunities made available through global convention ratification and the funding that accompanies their agreement. Most nations are concerned about their future development, but for small Pacific nations the need to marry environmental health, poverty alleviation and a strong economic base is paramount. An additional key concern is how much local expertise is utilized in reaching good, sustainable outcomes that will benefit all local populations.

To date, the very high levels of funding involved, particularly in relation to environmental projects and Conventions, overrides many other considerations and can lead to misuse of funds and projects which have no practical outcomes. As has been demonstrated however, by the example of Fiji and Marshall Islands, countries are rejecting the old style of employing solely external consultants and experts, and even moving away from reliance upon regional organizations, except in a collaborative role. These two cases show, that despite management difficulties, it is possible to have outcomes which lead to the expansion of community expertise and give a sense of ownership which is crucial to long term sustainability. The Verata project in Fiji, as an example of a community based operation working collaboratively with both local expertise, other countries in the region and international institutions, is not the only successful local operation which can be cited in the Pacific. Indeed the Pacific is filled with local, small-scale, community operations, many of which successfully train people at the community level, which go unrecognized, unless they fail.

This shift towards recognition of the value of more local control and recognition of locally-based expertise raises the question of linkages between expert knowledge, public policy and sustainable development. No longer should international donor agencies, regional organizations, governments and NGOs be in competition to inform public policy. Instead more emphasis should be placed on utilizing local expertise given that there are many people in the Pacific carrying out research, publishing and contributing to broader studies. In the environment field, since countries and communities took control of their own reporting and hired who they want some of the work being carried out is receiving global recognition (e.g. Verata). No longer are people working on the periphery with limited input into global change. People from NGOs throughout the Pacific present papers in the global arena, such as in meetings on climate change, small island issues, sustainable livelihoods and biodiversity loss. Some Pacific experts are also being used to assist other countries, both outside and within the Pacific, to develop, as demonstrated above, their Biodiversity Plans. The expertise is already present in the Pacific, though in small numbers, and can most usefully be utilized for practical, local use, not only for global reporting. The challenge now for Pacific Island Countries is to coordinate and publicize such local expertise and ensure that it is recognized and utilized towards truly sustainable development.

To meet the challenge, aid donors need to make themselves aware of the rhythms of life in small, localized Pacific Island societies. Aid, and the reporting of the use of aid, will never be effective if there is no understanding of how the project funds fit into the daily life of local communities. It is not enough to merely ‘involve’ local indigenous people in project development; it is the enactment of projects, the understanding of the multiple demands on people in their home environments in terms of, for example, historical ties and practices, reciprocity, concepts of gifts, exchange and political maneuvering, that need to be understood. Until they are, aid projects may possibly be viewed as yet another gift that can never be reciprocated (exchanging consultants’ reports in return for funds?) and will therefore not be successfully achieved in the eyes of the donors. But they may very well be successful in the eyes of local communities. The receipt of aid and the ability to turn the project to the advantage of the local community is demonstrated with the Fiji and Marshall Islands cases. Environmental projects may not be exactly similar to the ‘cargo cults’ of Melanesia, but they are a long way from being small handouts to ‘grateful recipients’. It may well be that Pacific communities have evolved a type of environmental project panarchy, not intended by donors, and ‘gone it alone’ to achieve desired outcomes.

The unbundling of environmental governance issues of the Pacific requires more considered attention. There is a great deal of material on the (mis)management of both resources and aid in the Pacific, but more understanding of environmental aid and global requirements and the relationships and power plays within communities, traditional values and historical and contemporary resource management could provide fruitful grounds for further research, and importantly, more appropriate outcomes for donors, governments and the communities.

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