

Articulating Sustainable Development

in Vanuaso Tikina, Gau Island, Fiji

by Joeli Veitayaki

Articulating sustainable development in Pacific Island countries require appropriate, innovative and logical attention. Given the dependence of Pacific Islanders on their environmental resources, it is critical that the development activities undertaken by people contribute towards the maintenance of a healthy natural environment that sustains their livelihoods and aspirations. This responsibility demands that resources are strategically used and that governance be employed to complement the lack of capacity to manage environmental resources, which remain the mainstay of life in these islands.

Oceanic Societies have peculiar characteristics and aspirations that need to be incorporated into attempts to improve their lives. This requires good governance to organize people to address the challenges associated with their resources and their uses. This necessitates the pursuit of sustainable development to improve people's lives as well as maintain the integrity of their ecological environment to provide critical support services.

In this presentation, I share some actions undertaken by the people in Vanuaso Tikina (district) to safeguard their future when environmental, economic and social and cultural conditions change and possibly worsen.

Oceanic societies such as those on Vanuaso Tikina in Gau Island expect to face greater challenges to support and maintain their communities, manage their resources and participate in modern living. Given

their isolated locations, small resource base, and vulnerability, oceanic societies need to be innovative in the choices they make. The people have their traditions, knowledge and practices that have allowed them to survive in the islands for centuries. The people know the safe as well as the vulnerable parts of their environment. They have social and trading relations, conservation methods, resource management practices and even resettlement arrangements.

Good governance is required to enable



people to attain sustainable development. Many communities can no longer sustain their societies given the current state of affairs where resources are depleting, the returns from the produce are not coming back to the communities, the wastelands are getting larger and the people are getting more and more numerous. Governance involves how to limit the use of resources to sustainable levels, enforce the conventions, laws and regulations, culture values that emphasise respect for

each other and the environment, and design appropriate blueprint for all. Political will is important because governance require leadership at all levels. Governance must emphasise that development and all human activities rely on the natural environment that is beginning to show the impacts of human abuse and wasteful use.

Sustainable development is a system of change to improve local living conditions where by the exploitation of environmental resources, the focus of investments, the orientation of technological development and institutional changes are made to ensure the securing of present as well as future needs. Sustainable development emphasises the improvement of the quality of life of people (assuring equity in the distribution of benefits flowing from development) and development that is environmentally appropriate, making proper use (and sometimes non-use) of natural resources and protecting essential ecological processes, life support systems and biological diversity'. Thus, sustainable development 'entails a continuous process of decision-making in

which certain questions are asked and whereby the "right" choices and decisions are made. There is never an end-state of sustainable development since the equilibrium between development and environmental protection must constantly be readjusted'.

Mositi Vanuaso

The people of Tikina Vanuaso of Gau Island, the International Ocean Institute-Pacific Islands and the University of the South



Page 30. Centre: Vegetable gardens in Vanuaso. Above left: Some of the Vanuaso village community members attending a workshop organised by government, USP and NGOs. Above: Sunset from Vanuaso village. The mangroves are a couple of years old which were planted to help protect/prevent coastal erosion.

Pacific have collaborated on this community-based sustainable development initiative since 2002. The initiative emphasises self determined and initiated development activities that local rural communities can undertake to promote the idea that environment management make ecological, economic and social and cultural sense. It has to be undertaken because it is for the people's own benefit. There are no alternatives because this environment is the same that the present generations will give to their children.

The development project activities emphasise the people's aspirations and needs, governance and the articulation of sustainable development. Innovations that are part of the initiative include the securing of sources of food and livelihood, responsible leadership, good governance and sustainable development. The initiative emphasises the participation of women and youths to create the changes that are necessary. Principles of precautionary approach, integrated coastal management, adaptive management, iterative learning and sustainability are being attempted and promoted. Little changes such as the ones mentioned here are needed to create the necessary wholesome alterations to the manner in which societies, governance and sustainable development are addressed in islands and continents throughout the world.

Vanuaso Tikina, with its five villages of Lekanai, Vanuaso, Nacavanadi, Malawai and Lamiti and settlement, Naovuka, like the rest of Gau Island, Fiji is relatively isolated with a population of 2000 to 3000. Gau Island, which lies 90 km east of Suva on Viti Levu, the main island in Fiji, is the 5th largest island in Fiji but is relatively isolated and has some undisturbed natural environment.

A rugged mountain range runs along the interior of the island. Coastal lowlands and river plains feed off this central highland. Gau

Island has a virgin cloud forest in its interior where the endemic indigenous bird, Kacau or Fiji Petrel is found.

It is also the source of a wide range of endemic plants and contains the sites of ancient settlements. The forests cover nearly half the island and have never been logged providing the people with clean water and air, wild food, building materials and specialized goods such as herbal medicine, farming implements, materials for pillows and cushions and scent for oil.

Like many islands in the Pacific, a barrier reef encircles Gau; these reefs provide the people with a variety of sea foods and other resources that have provided sources of income as well as building materials.

The people of Vanuaso Tikina have faced environment conservation challenges in the management of their coastal habitats such as coral reefs, mangrove forests, sea grass beds and littoral forests. For this reason, the people invited the University of the South Pacific to help them address these challenges. Since 2002, the villages in the Vanuaso Tikina have collaborated with the USP and International Ocean Institute and to manage their environmental resources to prepare them for the difficult and challenging times ahead when people lose some of their environmental resources.

This initiative is called Mositi Vanuaso. The Fijian word mositi connotes an attachment to something of value. Mositi Vanuaso evokes a common commitment to protect and manage the resources of the Tikina of Vanuaso, which are intimately linked to the welfare and livelihood of its people. The engagement started with the partners working on ways the people can better the use of their resources. This is essential because the people own the resources and depend on them for survival.

Therefore, any change to the status of the local resources will affect local people, who because of their position, must look after their sources of livelihood.

The USP organised and conducted a resource management workshop for Vanuaso District where the participants discussed their aspirations, their challenges and their opportunities. The workshop participants produced action plans on what they were to do and showed commitment by declaring no take areas in each of the six villages and settlements and agreeing to resources management practices such as the banning of fish poisons and the protection of mangrove forests. The plans produced at the workshops were later endorsed by the all the villages and were the target of the follow up activities.

Regular follow up activities are organised to convince people that while there is little they can do to encourage the fishes to reproduce in their protected areas, there is a need to compliment the management of marine resources by addressing the land-based sources of threat. The target of the intervention is the rehabilitation of coastal habitats that have been most affected by the changes in rural communities undergoing modernisation.

Improvements of livelihood of the villages in Vanuaso Tikina involve supporting the villagers to articulate integrated management and sustainable development. Some of the targeted outputs of the initiative include the use and adoption of: proper land use guidelines, better managed coastal habitats, protected water catchments to avoid contamination of drinking water, well managed disposal of waste, healthy water and safer drainage, rehabilitated coastal vegetation, a participatory manner of



Above: View of Vanuaso and hills of Gau from sea. The grassland area at the back used to be prone to fire every year. Villagers have planted native trees over this area in an attempt to bring back the old vegetation and prevent further erosion and depletion of land affecting the marine resource. **Insert:** Fish harvest has improved and people are beginning to see the advantages of conservation and sustainable harvest.

making decisions, an integrated resource management approach, use of appropriate and safe development technology and adoption of new sources of livelihood and income.

Mositi Vanuaso promotes integrated and adaptive approaches which are the basis of the collaborative work and partnership undertaken in Vanuaso Tikina. The result and outcome of the Mositi Vanuaso initiative is expected to benefit the current and future inhabitants of the Tikina.

The people of Tikina Vanuaso now manage their inshore and marine fisheries and are consolidating their activities by addressing the sources of threat on land. In addition to trying to care for their environment, which is the basis of all development activities; the people are trying to have alternative sources of livelihood and income. Different potentials exist in different villages and this need to be carefully planned and implemented to ensure that the natural endowments is the basis of the development activities.

Some of the main accomplishments of Mositi Vanuaso initiative include:

- The observation of long-term no-take marine areas in all of the six villages. In 2006, Fiji Fisheries provided giant clams from Makogai to all of the protected areas.
- A stone breakwater built to protect the coast in Naovuka.

In past cyclones, tidal waves caused devastation in the village. The breakwater now protects the coast and has resulted in reduced coastal erosion.

- The planting and management of coastal forests and native hardwood sources are undertaken in all the villages to protect the villages and provide supply in the future.
- The coastal forests are rehabilitated because of their importance. Native hardwood trees namely Vesi, Dilo, Dakua and Dakua Makadre and Tavola provide shelter from salt spray and also reduce coastal erosion.

- Mangrove forests are now protected and planted because of their importance to the fisheries resources and to the protection of coastlines.

- Reducing deforestation by controlling the cutting of trees and unnecessary burning has been promoted.

- Wild fires, which have been common and very destructive, are now strictly monitored and banned.

- In the homes, a smokeless stove has been promoted to the villagers. The more efficient cooking stove reduced firewood requirement and smoke inhalation.

- The protection of water catchment areas is critical to the health of rural settlements. Care of animals such as cattle and pigs can threaten the health of villagers and should not be raised in water catchment areas.

- Care of domesticated animals – (that roam around freely damaging the best farming areas are addressed by trying to improve animal husbandry. Proper care of these animals has allowed people to plant crops in nearby lowland areas.



Above left: Native tree species seedlings supplied by the forestry department. Above: Drainage improvement project in Vanuaso village, Gau. The old drains were wider and more open.

- The involvement of villagers in the decision making process is showing encouraging signs with the women and youths taking more active interest in village development activities.

- Village waste and effluents is being addressed by digging pits, building the drains through the villages and promoting better waste management practices such as sorting and composting.

- Planting of Pandanus – voivoi used for making mats, and buildings is now emphasised in areas where it is becoming a major source of income for the villagers. Mats are now bringing into the district up to about \$1,000 per month.

- People are now planting these plants to ensure abundant supply.

- In Lamiti, the villagers have been farming a village taro garden to provide income for the village.

- The Malawai Village Youth Council now operates a Cattle farm. The Youth provided the land, labour and the post. The French Embassy provided the funding to purchase the wire and staples and the animals. The Project has been in operation since 2003 and the villagers now keep their income in a Unit Trust account.

- Villagers are able to dry and sell copra outside of Gau for cash to help with education, house.

The success of Mositi Vanuaso has been internationally acknowledged

twice since the project began. The project, which is a part of the Fiji Locally Managed Marine Area or FLMMA Network, won the Equator Initiative for successfully integrating Poverty Alleviation and Resource Conservation at the World Summit in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2002. Project Mositi Vanuaso also won the National Energy Globe Award in 2007 for Fiji. This award acknowledged the positive effect of the people environment management activities.

The Energy Globe is intended to inform the international public about as many sustainable projects as possible, which are reproducible. It is awarded to projects from all over the world which make careful and economical use of resources and employ alternative energy sources. The best reward for the partners involved with Mositi Vanuaso is the quality of life ensured the people of the tikina. Collaborative partnerships like this have much to offer Fijian and Pacific communities and will be a model for future development efforts.

Dr Joeli Veitayaki, is the project leader and Director of the Marine Affairs division of the Marine Studies Program at USP. In this position he is keenly engaged in the Local Managed Marine Areas Network. This network carries out practical projects in coastal communities to assist in the development of sustainable local marine management strategies.

PND Medical Clinic

Honiara's most affordable medical clinic with a professional service. When in Honiara and in need of medical attention, come see us for your health needs. Located on the second floor of the Ritaleven Building along the Princess Highway, PND is accessible from anywhere in Honiara.

PND
Medical Clinic

PO Box R63, Ranadi,
Honiara, Solomon Islands

Location:
Second floor Ritaleven Building, Princess
Highway
Phone (677) 25188