

NHDR Write-Up: VDA Practitioner Course on Human Development

Pacific Islands NHDR

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1. 2006 Pacific Human Development Report:

The 2006 Pacific Human Development Report analyses and reports on recent progress towards sustainable human development made by fifteen Pacific Island Countries, most of which are members of the United Nations. These countries are Cook Islands, Fiji Islands, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. They form part of the diverse Pacific Island region in which there are some of the world's smallest island states, and some of the both the poorest and wealthiest developing countries, be that measured in trends of human development or per capita income.

There are great differences in the size of these countries and their populations, resource endowments, and environmental conditions. Other than their proximity on the globe, small atoll states like Tuvalu, with its population of 10,000 people and land area of 26sq. km, have little in common with the largest country in the region, Papua New Guinea, with its population of 4.5 million and vast endowments of arable land, forests, and minerals.¹ Yet despite the diversity, long standing economic and cultural connections encourage this type of regional review, as do other geo-political ties that are reflected and enhanced through regional institutions and organizations such as the Forum Secretariat, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, the South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission, and the University of the South Pacific.

2. Human Development in the Pacific Context:

Large strides have been taken in recent decades to improve human development throughout the Pacific, but some countries lag far behind others. In most countries living standards have come about with rises in life expectancy, school attendance, literacy, and per capita income, and declines in infant and child mortality, fertility, and population growth.

More progress could have been made had these islands and populations not been so vulnerable to global environmental and economic forces. The Pacific is highly prone to natural disasters, especially cyclones, droughts and volcanic eruptions. These impose a heavy economic toll, diverting funds away from all forms of development.² Some atoll countries already experience the outrider effects of global climate change and sea-level rise, such as higher tides and coastal flooding.

Meanwhile, the fast pace of globalization accentuates the economic vulnerability of the region, especially as most countries produce mainly primary commodities that have fluctuating but often low value on world markets. Pacific Island countries also face problems generated at home-the consequences, sometimes, of poor environmental management, political instability, insufficient government accountability, or ineffective development policies. Improving the quality of governance must be part of more sustainable and more effective development programmes.³

Throughout this decade most island countries in the Pacific have experienced little economic growth. Some have experienced sharp shocks to their economy, such as the flow-on effects of the Asian Crisis or, as in the case of Solomon Islands' round log trade, a contraction of their market and main source of foreign exchange. Some pressures on national economies are long-standing. The long term depression (despite recent price recoveries) in the coconut industry illustrates, for the atoll countries in particular, too- long reliance on conventional, low-value

¹ McGregor, 1999

² South Pacific Disaster Reduction Programme, 1998a, 1998b; Benson, 1997; Fairbairn, 1998.

³ Simons et. al., 1998:73.

commodities and too little investment in crop rehabilitation or market development. Generally around the region, population growth outstrips economic growth and fuels unemployment, problems compounded by the declining viability of the semi-subsistence sector that has traditionally absorbed surplus labour.⁴

In this environment, the generation of employment and economic growth and the maintenance of sustainable livelihoods are critical and central issues. Most Pacific Islanders are rural farmers, although urban populations are growing fast. Formal paid work occupies between 17 and 22 percent of the region's labour force, most in administration and service jobs. The gap is generally widening between the demand for and the availability of paid work or other cash income. Unemployment is becoming a critical issue, particularly for youth.

3. Measure to Improve Human Development in the Pacific Region:

The 2006 Pacific Human Development Report outlines 4 areas of priority areas for development: Economic Growth, Sustainable Development, Good Governance and Security for the Pacific through Regionalism. In terms of improving Sustainable Human Development I would adopt the following strategies:

- Economic Growth: Improve income earnings and livelihoods through better access to goods, services, employment and other development opportunities. Implement initiatives for better access to markets and goods, trade in services including labour, trade facilitation, enhanced transportation and communication, private sector development in the key resource sectors of fisheries and tourism.
- Sustainable Development: Enhance capacity and resilience of Pacific people and societies. This includes initiatives for improving not only educational standards but also practical (technical and vocational) skills that are relevant to job markets, in areas such as seafaring, hospitality/training, health care, and people, and support the fight against HIV/AIDS and STI, non-communicable diseases and other health threats.
- Good Governance: Support a safe, enabling, inclusive and sustainable environment for economic growth and personal development and human rights by promoting the development and implementation of national sustainable development strategies; regional support for good governance, particularly in the areas such as leadership, human rights, ombudsman functions, audit, transparent administration systems, and particularly decision-making mechanisms that includes the non-government groups, women and youth. This will support the maintenance of strong Pacific cultural identities and the protection of traditional knowledge and intellectual property rights.
- Security: Ensure safety of maritime and aviation and borders by promoting technical cooperation, regional police training, and other measures relating to drug and weapons control, quarantine, bio-security and safety. Another important dimension of the security and sustainable development environment relates to prevention, mitigation and adaptation with regard to natural disasters, pollution (through waste management) and climate variability and change and sea level rise.

⁴ Taylor et al., 1998.

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