

# The Importance of Human Resource Development: Context of Fiji

By: Ms. Shana Khan\*

## Introduction

Sustainable development is a foreign word for Pacific Islanders yet it is used in the Pacific context. It is difficult to say who is at fault when resources are depleted. In the context of Pacific society, however, resources are interconnected with the life of Pacific Islanders because many Pacific Islands operate at a subsistence level. My essay will identify ways to develop human resources using existing institutions because establishing new organizations is expensive and countries like the Fiji Islands have adequate pre-existing institutions. This essay will discuss how good governance can lead to sustainable human development. Good governance involves integrating research into policies, turning vision into action, changing the curriculum, formal mentoring, informing about technological change, and involving the society in decision-making.

## Good Governance is Part of Development

Good governance has become an essential component of development for all Pacific Island Countries (PICs) due to increased corruption and exploitation of human and natural resources. Practicing good governance can create the potential for an integrated Human Resource Management framework that will offer insights into what has and has not worked well for the Fiji Islands.<sup>1</sup> Since human resource indicators require improvements in governance, a system of governance will enable the Fiji Islands to maintain accountability, allow participation, and establish systems of checks and balances in order to achieve social and economic well-being. Development practitioners believe that when articulating the concept “human development” in governance issues, people should be the center of development so that a more integrated citizen-focused service delivery can occur. Such advocacy will enhance the pro-poor and pro-environment state policies that can promote balanced economic growth and social development.<sup>2</sup> The Fiji Islands could be a pilot country and other PIC governments might follow and adopt complementary social and environmental policies in order to guard against increasing levels of poverty and environmental degradation.

## Concern for the Environment is an Important Part of Good Governance



The Fiji Islands is located on 18°00'S 175°00'E. It has a relatively low population given its land resources. It has a land area of 18,270 square kilometers and a population of approximately

\* Ms. Shana Nigar Khan is a citizen of the Republic of the Fiji Islands. She is a student at Victoria University of Wellington in Wellington, New Zealand.

<sup>1</sup> Decision-makers should understand that participatory governance goes further than a commitment to governance.

<sup>2</sup> Prasad, B. C., M. Reddy and V. Naidu. 2002. *Trade, Environment and Economic Development in the Forum Island Countries (FICs) A New Pathway to Development?* Available: [http://www.devnet.org.nz/conf2002/papers/Reddy\\_Prasad\\_Naidu.pdf](http://www.devnet.org.nz/conf2002/papers/Reddy_Prasad_Naidu.pdf)

905,949 as of July 2006.<sup>3</sup> The country needs to adopt group-based programs for environmental improvements that can identify the required support for difficult population groups. The Fiji Island's low-lying areas, Vatuwaqa and Walu Bay,<sup>4</sup> are heavily populated and industrialized, and are likely to experience some of the most severe impacts of global warming and the greatest constraints in implementing adaptation measures.<sup>5</sup> At the international level, the Kyoto Protocol was designed for global action on greenhouse gases and global warming but at the local level, the Fiji Islands has to find resources that can be adapted to changes in climate and extreme weather conditions. For example, the country's current Sustainable Development Bill does not include detailed guidelines on actual agricultural policies because agriculture has not been seen as a threat to the environment. Therefore, the group-based programs can deal with both natural and human induced environmental problems.

If policy makers want to deliver messages about environment issues, they need to choose their language carefully. Terms such as "sustainability" and "human development" do not exist in local languages of PICs. People need to know, in the language appropriate to them, about the cost of environmental degradation and the benefit of conservation. When human resource strategies are designed, local institutional mechanisms should be strengthened to provide for the flexible movement of land and other resources in response to environmental degradation. People should see the costs and benefits as a social responsibility.<sup>6</sup>

### **Integrate Research into Policies**

Before setting up new policies on the environment, research on issues such as mining, eco-tourism and forestry is essential. Integrating research ideas into the Human Resource Management and Human Resource Development policies will ensure the stability of social capital. Once the research is completed, policies can be designed. Without research, policies may not suit the targeted group. For example, a Performance Management System (PMS) was adopted by the Government in 2004 to initiate efficiency in every sector of the workforce, but the strategy failed because the Government did not have sufficient funds to pay the overall workforce. As a result, not only were labor and money wasted in implementing PMS, but resources such as paper, time and effort were exploited in preparing the individual work plan. Without integrating economic policies with environmental policies, the Fiji Islands will not be able to protect and manage their environment and human resources.

### **Turn Vision into Action**

The Fiji Islands needs to turn individual vision, derived from research in terms of policies, into action and ensure an alignment of performance. Leaders can get together and build coalitions and collaborative relationships amongst their peers and other parts of the society, especially with those who have the knowledge and the political clout to make things happen. A learning environment will be created when people start to give feedback on the actions of government leaders. A process of transformation will improve human development activities. More job opportunities will be created for local people and deprivation will be reduced.

---

<sup>3</sup> Fiji Country Profile. 2006. Intute: Science, Engineering and Technology, 2006. Available: <http://www.intute.ac.uk/sciences/worldguide/html/881.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Both areas are in Suva, the capital city of the Fiji Islands.

<sup>5</sup> Strachan, Janet and Maryse Roberts. 2003. Poverty, Environment and Sustainable Development. *The Round Table* 371: 541-559.

<sup>6</sup> The government of the Fiji Islands, with assistance from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) like Human Rights Movement and World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), could appoint a special committee and educate people on the importance of sustainable development. They could look into recycling existing resources in urban and rural areas. For example, urban areas could implement composting programs, through which the ecological balance would be sustained and families could eat fresh fruit and vegetables and share the surplus with others.

## **Education is the Key to Success**

The education curriculum needs to be upgraded. Leaders need to realize that for the people of the Fiji Islands, “education is culture.” Providing education to people is the most effective agent in human development. Education can be formal or informal, in the classroom, or at a distance. Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) is widespread in rural societies in the Fiji Islands, so providing basic materials such as primitive tools could motivate people to get interested in traditional knowledge. The *Turaga*<sup>7</sup> of various clans and the Government have been reviewing the blueprint with more emphasis on western knowledge at the expense of traditional knowledge. In fact, traditional and western knowledge should go hand-in-hand to encourage equal participation from indigenous and non-indigenous people. In addition, distance education can be provided in remote areas for bridging, part-time, and home-based study, while classroom-based education could provide both theoretical and practical frameworks in semi-rural and urban schools. Currently, in the South and Central Pacific, the University of the South Pacific (USP) is the only regional provider of distance education. It has an immense area of coverage, collective ownership, and an indigenous location. Unfortunately, due to its complex and underdeveloped organizational structure, USP is not highly recognized in the international community. Therefore, its curriculum needs to be redesigned in order to accommodate both local and international standards.

## **Mentoring Should be Provided**

Formal mentoring should be provided for leaders. It could be another mode of knowledge delivery. My experience with providing formal mentoring at Victoria University of Wellington (VUW) in New Zealand is that it is very fruitful for students. It is one-to-one and students tend to learn more from mentors since they have the opportunity to ask questions freely and clarify difficulties they face in their studies or personal lives. This method of education should be adopted in the Fiji Islands as well, because many leaders, especially those with limited education, need some type of guidance so that a just society can form.

## **Inform about Technological Change**

Modern scientific knowledge and data collection methods should be disseminated to all categories of users. It is essential for the Fiji Islands to learn to manage in the knowledge age, otherwise the pace of technological change, particularly information and communication technology, will be underdeveloped, especially in rural areas. Today most of the Fiji Island’s outer islands are heavily dependent on radio, while tools ranging from radio and televisions to satellite and computer technology are used in urban areas. Technology receives greater emphasis in urban areas where it is integral to the economy. Rural economic growth is based on agriculture and tourism, and technology does not currently play a large role. This shows a gap in information and communication technologies between urban and rural areas. This gap needs to be reduced, so that the Government, which currently uses the media in nation building, can provide rural communities with equal opportunities to participate actively.

## **Involve the Society in Decision-Making**

**Indigenous involvement.** The major reason for the coups in the Fiji Islands is the Government’s ignorance of indigenous needs.<sup>8</sup> The traditional approach of forcing people to adopt western lifestyles has been part of the country’s history. It is imperative that the Government and non-indigenous people adopt a community-based approach and comprehend the culture of indigenous communities, specifically with respect to traditional resource use and the structure of the traditional society governance. Ratuva states that “ethnic equity should be obtained through economic restructuring” and intra-communal resources should be distributed

---

<sup>7</sup> Turaga is when the chief makes decisions for the village.

<sup>8</sup> McAllister, Ian and Clive Bean. 2000. The Electoral Politics of Economic Reform in Australia: The 1998 Election. *Australian Journal of Political Science* 35 (3): 515–521.

equally to “ensure socioeconomic equity within the Fijian community itself.”<sup>9</sup> Gounder, however, argues that “most traditional communities have not fully understood the environmental issues and the scientific base of inter-relationships in the ecosystem.”<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the first step for the indigenous community is to learn about these issues and relationships. Since the “traditional resource-use practices are based on empirical knowledge of localised [sic] natural and cultural systems,”<sup>11</sup> indigenous people should be consulted regarding their willingness to adopt western modes of knowledge.<sup>12</sup>

**Rights of civil society.** The statement that “Fiji is viewed as an indicator of conflict in the Pacific”<sup>13</sup> together with the speech of the Fiji Island’s president, Ratu Josefa Iloilo (footnote 10) make it clear that the nation needs to connect at the micro and macro level in order to build peace. Trust and empowerment are needed to connect ethnic groups,<sup>14</sup> in this case indigenous Fijians and Indians,<sup>15</sup> institutions of Government, and marginalized populations, which include minority ethnic groups and even women and children.<sup>16</sup> Time and money can be saved from engendering reciprocal trust and it can be invested in other social capital. For example, for sustainability, donors need to change their policies from their interest to the recipient country’s interest. The role of aid should be to provide positive development. Nevertheless, if trust and empowerment between the Government, local people, and international institutions are not built, social unrest can take place as happened, for example, in 2000 and 1987. Coups in the Fiji Islands have increased the insecurity and dilemma of indigenous Fijians’ and Indians’ social identity.<sup>17</sup>

The highest priority should be given to the prevention of humanitarian crises to eliminate inequalities. Community leaders from diverse institutions such as the central and local government, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and religious groups need to demonstrate styles that are inclusive and allow community groups, regardless of ethnicity, to utilize the skills, knowledge and ideas of all the members of society. Religious faiths and traditions can be the source of values and can play vital roles in upgrading humanity and providing a sense of balance and consciousness of right and wrong. Leaders should integrate different cultures, styles, sectors and disciplines in order to embrace diversity. By constructing networks, leaders can sustain broad dialogues and promote and realize a vision of the Fiji Island’s multi-cultural society (footnote 3) in which all communities feel comfortable about each others’ respective rights and freedoms. For example, USP has introduced a governance program that provides scholarships and conference grants to encourage more postgraduate students to enroll in peace-building programs. Such programs should be implemented at the undergraduate level as well. While NGOs sponsor public conferences to discuss such issues, they should take their messages directly to the media and the public and interact more effectively and efficiently with state institutions in real dialogue.

---

<sup>9</sup> Ratuva, Steven. 2002. Economic Nationalism and Communal Consolidation: Economic Affirmative Action in Fiji, 1987 – 2002. *Pacific Economic Bulletin* 17 (May).

<sup>10</sup> Gounder, Rukmani. 2002. *Ethnicity, Land Property Rights, Conflict and Development Assistance: A Case Study of Fiji*. Available: [http://www.devnet.org.nz/conf2002/papers/Gounder\\_Rukmani.pdf](http://www.devnet.org.nz/conf2002/papers/Gounder_Rukmani.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Veitayaki, Joeli. 1997. Fisheries Resource-Use Culture in Fiji and its Implications. In *Culture and Sustainable Development in the Pacific*, edited by Anthony Hooper. Available: [http://epress.anu.edu.au/culture\\_sustainable/mobile\\_devices/index.html](http://epress.anu.edu.au/culture_sustainable/mobile_devices/index.html).

<sup>12</sup> While indigenous people have sufficient knowledge about fishery resources, which enhances sustainable utilization, they lack infrastructure because many remote areas do not have proper road and telephone links to the main markets. Therefore, the Government should involve them in a discussion of their needs rather than imposing top-down ideas. Instead of the Government supplying modern technologies to increase production, they should consult with the villagers and provide sealed roads and landline networks.

<sup>13</sup> Gounder, Rukmani. 2005. Neglected dimensions of development: inequality, conflict and aid. *International Journal of Social Economics* 32 (1-2): 60-76.

<sup>14</sup> Fijians, Indians, Chinese, Europeans, part-Europeans, Rotumans and other Pacific Islanders.

<sup>15</sup> Also known as Fijian and Indo-Fijian, respectively.

<sup>16</sup> When trust lubricates co-operation, resources are liberated and people do not have to monitor others’ actions.

<sup>17</sup> This example is relevant to other PICs, such as the Solomon Islands and Tonga, where institutions have become divorced from the people. After such crises, governments struggle to develop relevant policies and become strangers to their own people.

## Conclusion

Efforts from different parts of society are needed to understand the changes that take place in human resource development. These efforts can influence the successful implementation of sustainable development. The institutions that fail to recognize links between people and resources fail to understand the structures and processes of development goals. Therefore, the Government, by adopting good governance at every level, should be a key player in building effective strategies to develop a nation.

Human are the core of development,  
but their lives and the environment needs improvement.  
By being one people and one nation, is recourse,  
to build effective institutions to develop human resource.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Poem was written by the essayist.