

Appendix

Community Governance Assessments: Key Findings

- ***The priority governance issues that the communities identified were the governance process, land, security, employment, and provision of services.*** In all four countries, there was general dissatisfaction with the processes inherent in modern governance systems and a feeling that the traditional system was more effective in meeting daily needs. Land issues are related to ownership, access and security. Land disputes are increasing with the decline of traditional knowledge, chiefly authority and the practice of good governance. Security is related to land ownership and the benefits derived from resources on the land.
- ***For the most part, local communities do not understand how the national governance processes and institutions work, nor how communities can avail themselves of services, except through the traditional system of kin/family connections to elected national leaders.*** The practice of using community committees within a modern governance approach has added to confusion because of the large number of leaders, authorities, and responsibilities within the communities. The links between traditional and modern governance systems are complex and communities often misunderstand them. However, the communities expect that their national government representatives will deliver basic services such as health, education, and access to public utilities.
- ***Traditional governance systems are generally similar across communities.*** In most PDMCs, the traditional systems of governance are hierarchical, male-dominated, and operating with consensual methods of decision making and conflict resolution *within the context of a few leaders or community elders*. Roles and participation within the systems are narrowly proscribed. However, communities are losing their knowledge of traditional custom and values; respect for the

authority of chiefs and elders is declining, especially among the young and among more highly educated members.

- ***Community members see the modern system of governance, with its top-down approach, unilateral decision-making, corruption, and inadequate service delivery, as incompatible with traditional community patterns of governance.*** At the same time, the traditional governance systems in all four countries, dominated by a few chiefs and community elders, do not encourage collective and collaborative thinking nor representation and participation of minorities (particularly women and youth) in decision-making processes.

Major Observations

- ***Traditional custom and values still have a strong impact on the conduct of the electoral system and national governance;*** community members continue to expect "favors" from their (perceived) leaders, either elected or holding senior public service positions.
- ***The decline of knowledge of community values and respect for chiefly authority are seen as contributing to the proliferation of land disputes at the grassroots level and to crime at other levels of government.*** As land ownership becomes directly linked to security and wealth, and as traditional knowledge, chiefly authority and the practice of traditional governance values decline at the grassroots level, land disputes are increasing. Related to this is the lack of paid work and income-producing opportunities and the perceived marginalization at the village level: young people tend to drift to urban centers in order to seek employment, creating the modern problems of urbanization and squatter settlements and associated crime and drug abuse.
- ***All communities have strong expectations that both the national and lower levels of government will provide basic services.*** As the distribution of goods and services by the chief under the traditional system is no longer practiced in

many communities, local people look to the national and other levels of government to provide various socioeconomic, educational, and development services. Community members suggested that a more consultative and consensus-building approach to determining priorities and modes of delivery, though more time-consuming, would make it easier for them to understand and accept final outcomes; it would also help them to play a part in maintaining the infrastructure, enabling the continued provision of those services at the local level through, for example, the traditional practice of contribution-in-kind or cash.

Traditionally, community members were expected to contribute time and resources to their leaders; in return, those leaders provided services, protection, and assistance (Box A1). In many communities today, that practice is changing. In Vanuatu, for example, participants reported that people in their communities usually dedicate about one day a week to community work, or offer a cash contribution instead. With the introduction of community committees, requests for contributions now come from many different bodies. Individuals and families perceive this as a considerable burden and are less willing than before to contribute any service.

Box A1: Traditional Local “Government” in Samoa Works Well— But Could Work Even Better

Local “government” as practiced in Samoa is a good example of traditional practice. Villages comprise a number of extended families (*aiga*), each headed by a family *matai* (leader or member of the chiefly caste). Each village has a village council (*fono*); a family *matai* represents the *aiga* in the council, which elects one of their number as head *matai*, or *pulenuu* (similar to a mayor). The *pulenuu* must be approved by the Ministry of Interior, which has limited fiscal responsibility for village councils.

Village councils regulate village life, maintain order, and look after village facilities, such as school buildings, health clinics, and roads. Through the *pulenuu*, the government provides a “fee” to the village council for maintenance of village roads that connect to the main roads. Village councils have the power to fine offenders, either via a food offering, or in more recent cases, monetary fines, which go into a village fund. Dissatisfied villagers can bring a complaint to the village council; if they do not receive satisfaction, they can bring the action to a special court, the Land and Titles Court. This court, however, is overburdened and has a huge backlog of cases.

The lesson from Samoa is that, to the extent that Pacific islanders want to preserve their traditional and customary way of life, the system that works fairly well in Samoa can be made to work better and more democratically. The following suggestions are offered for consideration by governments and assistance may be sought for pilot projects:

- Some financial resources could be provided directly to village councils to reduce the burden on individuals (who fulfill their civic obligations in the traditional way by labor or money contributions) and to enable the councils to help poor or disadvantaged families for specific purposes (such as civic contributions, provision of school textbooks and paying school fees to help one parent families).
- The Land and Titles Court could be supplemented by other simpler conflict resolution mechanisms at, say, lower provincial or district levels, with appropriate funding and with consideration given to modern concepts of gender equality; such forums may well be closer than modern court systems to traditional concepts of “community good,” consensus-building, communal obligations, and sharing of resources. The practice of conflict resolution through the traditional chiefly authority in some Palauan states may be worth further study.

The Samoan government was reported recently to be considering the creation of local government posts for women, called *Sui o le Malo*, or “government representatives,” with functions similar to those of the *pulenuu*, to ensure gender balance in the interface between government and village communities³⁰.

³⁰ *Pacific News*. 2004. 4 June.

The Samoan example reflects the perceived values of both the modern and traditional governance systems, but the lack of structured interaction between the two leads to confusion, conflict, and ultimately—and increasingly—lack of respect for and participation in both systems, as community members become disenchanting.

- ***One Pacific island country is now entertaining—perhaps out of desperation— suggestions for incorporating elements of the customary governance structure into their modern government.*** In Vanuatu, the country's Association of Non Governmental Organisations (VANGO) called for change in the Vanuatu Constitution to include chiefs in the formal government structure, urging

*political leaders... to review the Constitution and enact legislation that will give the position of 'Head of State' to the President of the National Council of Chiefs... Mr. Ngwele [of VANGO] said the chiefs have played an important role in calming national crises. The involvement of chiefs in quelling the Vanuatu National Provident Fund riot, the conflict within the police force, the coup attempt and numerous [other] conflicts proves that our chiefly system still commands the authority and respect of our people. These interventions showed that the traditional system and structures of governance developed over thousands of years still work in Vanuatu."*³¹

³¹ Pacific News. 2004. 31 May.