

Domains of Social relationships and Influence in Pacific states

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Introduction

1. The general topic asked of me to speak on can be summed up in these questions:

How might Pacific women and young people,

- 1.1 participate better in national decision-making?
- 1.2 be integrated better into national decision-making?
- 1.3 have their voices heard in national decision-making?

The above questions imply a sense of dissatisfaction with the nature, alignment and extent of impact by women and youth in national decision-making in Pacific countries. Stated another way, it would seem that whatever women and youth are doing (as participants in societal decision-making in their countries), these are not deemed adequate, for whatever reason.

2. Rather than follow the script as stipulated in the programme abstract, I have instead chosen to ‘manata galia’ [think around the topic in search for its substance and possible ways of dealing with it]. This choice is deliberate. In this way, I do not ignore, marginalize or not recognize any current positive participation by women and youth. Taking this stance, I can acknowledge the existence and value of positive participation by women and youth in the affairs of their countries. This approach, in my view, offers a more enabling view of societal participation. In contrast, an analytically critical approach may be valid for critiquing but it is not of much value in terms of achieving any desired changes of improving participation. Consequently, if you were expecting a critique of national decision-making by women and youth in Pacific countries then I apologize in advance because I am not engaged in such a critique in this presentation.

3. Instead, I have chosen to paint a more hope-filled picture of young Pacific Islanders (some of them women) who are active in decision-making and exercising purposeful influence within their Pacific contexts. I hope to recount for you the ongoing story of *Leadership Pacific* a leader development initiative that Pacific colleagues [Seu’ula Fua, Stanley Houma, Cherie Chu, Henry Elder & others] and I had initiated a few years ago and which has since, spurred us on with considerable interest and excitement. In sharing the story of *Leadership Pacific* I hope to draw out possible lessons for the discussions of this conference.

4. In parts of my presentation, particularly in my analysis of the status of decision-making performance, I shall generalize somewhat about Pacific countries. I therefore apologize in advance if your particular national situation of interest is not captured appropriately or accurately in my analysis.

[Discussions on the Leadership Pacific vision & Examples of application by leaders, here]

10. How do I explain the success of these young Pacific Islanders in exercising influence in their national contexts? To understand, we need to examine the three broad Domains of Social Relationships and Influence in Pacific societies. These domains act as the hidden (though not so hidden in actuality) circles of social relationships and influence.

Domains of Social Relationships & Influence

11. Domain 1: Pacific cultures & traditional systems

The domain of culture and traditional systems is embodied in FaaSamoa (for Samoans), Faka Tonga (for Tongans), *kastom* (for Solomon Islanders) and so on. Within national contexts, there is macro and multiple micro values with certain core ones generally highlighted as reflective of what is considered cultural or *kastom*. In this domain, chiefs, Big Men and women of status exercise influence and play certain key roles. They are able to say who or what is legitimate or not. This domain has its own institutions, complete with accepted protocols, 'logic' systems and processes of meaning and meaning-making. Within this domain, things happen in certain ways, according to certain rules, which may not necessarily be applicable in other domains. While structuring arrangements vary across Pacific societies, generally, the domain of culture and tradition organizes itself into tribes, sub-tribes, clans and confederations.

12. Decision making in the domain of culture and traditional systems is of a particular nature. As this relates to women (a focus of this presentation), the spheres of influence include women as the first educators of a community and women as guardians of resources and *falafala /kastom*. In such roles, women are often expected to model ordered values and right behaviors to all, at all times. As guardians, women are often seen as the keepers and sustainers of culture. In my view, decision making by women within these spheres of influence in Pacific countries is mixed. Some women are showing active performance while in other communities some women seem to participate rather minimally.

13. For the youth, the spheres of influence (in decision making) in the domain of culture and traditions are basically two-fold. First, young people are seen as servers of their cultural communities. They live to work- through community service- individually as well as communally, receiving instructions and guidance from elders, and making their own decisions while actually playing out service roles. Second, young people are particularly expected to serve the elderly, the vulnerable and the weak (including the children). In my assessment, for a whole variety of reasons, youth in Pacific countries appear not to be playing service roles well within these spheres of influence. The lengthy absence of young people from families or while at school, or preoccupations with newer value systems, have all contributed to the demise of youth participation as servers of community.

14. Domain 2: The Church/religious system

In Pacific countries this domain of social relationships and influence is predominantly Christian; though in places such as Fiji, sizeable populations are Hindu and Muslim. This domain has its own core values though in certain national contexts, denominational values can also be seen as distinct spheres of influence. This domain too has its own chiefs, in the form of bishops, pastors and members of the clergy. The Church domain, in its denominational form, has its own institutions, laws, protocols and processes of decision making and change mediation. Organizationally, the Church domain is arranged into units that are national (call these tribes?), district (sub-tribes) and local congregations (clans) in nature. Decision-making in this domain is done within and between these units using legitimized processes and appropriate behaviors that

belong to the domain. Examples of this domain are the Methodist Church of Fiji, the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga and the Church of Melanesia in the Solomons and more.

15. As stated, in the Church/religious domain, the spheres of influence are multi-leveled and semi-formal. At the top (within national church), membership is elitist and semi-closed. At the district and local levels, the arenas of influence are more open. Women are more able to access and exercise active participation at district and local levels. At national levels of the Church domain, women generally play minimal roles. In like manner, young people generally play minimal roles at national levels, while they appear very active at district and local spheres of influence.

16. *Domain 3: The Formalized, Institutionalized Modern systems*

The formal systems domain is embodied in government, economy, and education and justice systems. This domain is largely introduced to Pacific countries and has been adopted, though not often satisfactorily. These formal institutionalized systems have their own sets of core values; their own chiefs (politicians, civil servants, educated elites, industry bosses etc); and their own institutions (departments, schools, banks etc). The domain is organized in national, sectoral, provincial and departmental divisions, together with their own complex sets of networking for and influence on decision-making. Due to the introduced and global nature of this domain, the manifestations of this domain within a national context are merely representations of more global systems. Within Pacific countries, considerable attention and preference seem to be given to the domain of formalized institution as compared with domains 1 and 2.

17. As stated, because domain 3 is formalized and institutionalized, membership to the various levels and spheres of influence are also formalized; making it elitist and inhibiting open participation. As one moves from the local/organizational to the national and then global arenas, access into these spheres of influence become limited and constrained. For women, this domain is therefore, generally, unfriendly. Within Pacific countries, there is minimal women participation in politics and the economy while there seems to be adequate participation in the civil service and education. In contrast, youth are generally sidelined in the domain of formalized systems. Overall, despite the rhetoric, young people are not supported and hence only show minimal participation in the formalized sectors of the economy, government and education.

18. In Pacific countries, all 3 domains of social relations and influence are concurrently active; overlapping and interlocking each other. While I refer to each domain as distinct, this is only to identify and focus on their particularistic natures. In actuality, they are integrated at all levels of Pacific societies. Consequently, decision-making in one domain is influenced by factors from the other domains; processes in one are impacted by considerations in another, both for good as well as for ill. All three are frames of reference for individual and communal motivations and justifications of behaviors, actions and choices; thereby compounding the challenges for leadership and participation. If emphasis is given to one domain, such a perception is fundamentally flawed thereby rendering any interventions for change, ineffective from the word, go.

Lessons from renewed understanding

19. As stated, the nature of, the arenas for and levels of decision-making within the three domains vary considerably. Consequently, when, at a local level women or youth are making decisions, or are helping to educate the young, or when they demonstrate a virtuous *kastom* behavior, these actions are contributing towards the betterment of society. Because of this contribution, these

actions (of change) are important national actions of participation, in spite of the arena or level of the sphere of influence. In other words, all purposeful participation by women and youth are valuable and constitute national decision-making. Consequently, it is not just participation in Parliament or at senior civil service levels that are of value to a country.

20. Current performances by women and youth in the different arenas and levels of decision-making vary. In any national context, it is vital to see the actual and often complex picture of women and youth participation so that clarity of understanding is obtained; showing areas of satisfaction and strength as well as particular needy ones. With greater and more insightful clarity, opportunities can be more easily seized and more accurately and appropriately dealt with. Consequently, a longer term value is assured.

21. Also with greater clarity, wastage is minimized. Currently, considerable donor resources are put into interventions towards greater participation by women and youth in national government systems. My view is that these are mostly resource-wasting initiatives. My urging now is for donors to minimize wastage of 'theirs and our' resources and stop current strategies at improving participation by women and youth in national parliament. I am not against women and youth becoming members of and actively participation in parliaments. I am however in disagreement with the assumption behind such an agenda; the supposition that not being present is equated with not being equal. I also think that the strategy is ineffective, in the longer term, because it does not allow for people readiness and natural ownership of the change process. The sad reality is that some international agencies are pushing their own agendas and schedules or are not listening and cannot therefore 'get it'.

22. I am of the view that to achieve broad based appreciation of the value of women and youth and their need for improved participation in society, intelligent attention is needed. But intelligent attention requires sincere effort. A process to achieving intelligent interventions is this: First, obtain complete insight of the domains of influence and how these interact within a context. Second, identify and select smart choices of participation in the domains, arenas and levels for the choice groups. Third, in a timely manner take appropriate actions and implement, doing all these with whole-of-community commitment. The change results of such a process are potentially more purposeful and gainful as well.

23. Relative to the others, the domain of culture/ *kastom*/traditions is a primary or foundational one; thereby it has a trump effect on the other two domains. In other words, there is an order of societal influence in Pacific countries with the domain of culture being generally used as a default reference point for decision making. Such a conclusion about the paramount nature of the cultural domain presents opportunities as well as challenges as well.

24. Given the prominence of the domain of culture (Domain 1), the route to greater participation by Pacific women and youth in the formalized domain (Domain 3) is via the domain of culture; not outside it or of marginal value to the first domain. What this means is that aspirants for national positions in education or politics must first obtain legitimate, appropriate and adequate grounding in the domain of culture and particularly in its various and contextually complex senses of credibility.

25. Again, credibility in one domain is not the same as credibility in another, hence, the need for clearer understanding to distinguish particularities and similarities. Particularly for women and youth, care is essential and can be obtained through appropriate and adequate socialization of members of these groups towards insightful understanding of the domain of culture. With better

understanding, appropriate actions can be applied within the other domains so as to minimize undue trump effects on women/youth aspirations for change.

My advice to Pacific women and youth: (a) spend time and effort to understand culture and contexts insightfully; (b) dig deeper inwardly, first; (c) draw out any nuggets of gold (understandings, insights, tested truths etc.) which you will likely to find, then act on your aspirations, with other people-enablers.

26. It seems that rootedness in the domains of culture (1) and the church (2) enhances one's credibility for success in the formalized domain (3). In other words, when women and youth combine their understandings of and maturity in the domains of culture and church, their senses of credibility are enhanced; thereby making it easier for access and success of participation in formalized systems and environments. In this way, women and youth societal participation becomes more authentic and is easily sustained over time. Consequently, in Pacific societies, this principle is instructive:

Credibility in the Domain of culture + Credibility in the Domain of the church = Success in the Formalized systems Domain.

27. When leadership is perceived as influencing people's minds and attitudes and changing their habits and behaviors, then leadership must be viewed with a longer term strategy. Sadly, I note that there are too many Pacific "ap and daon" leaders—who are here today and gone tomorrow! The need therefore is for leaders who, over time, are able to increase their participation, enhance their value and multiply their societal contributions. Towards this kind of outcome, Pacific women and youth who aspire for greater involvement in national decision making must see this goal as a longer term strategy; with appropriate complementary preparation in all three domains; and not just in one or two.

28. Again, as I see it, participation is not just an activity. Rather participation, which is transformational, is a mindset and an attitude. Such a view means that participation must be properly routed and sequenced; following contextually accepted protocols and processes. Together with appropriate support, women and youth are better able to enhance their participation (with more ease) towards greater and more significant involvement in societal decision making. In such an endeavour, it is essential for women and youth to assume the mind and attitudes of learners. As learners, they can be more receptive, more purposeful and better able to establish and enhance their own credibility over time. Without a sense of credibility, women and youth are unlikely to be heard by their people.

Success explained?

29. Briefly, younger/emerging Pacific Islands leaders (whose examples I shared in the story of Leadership Pacific) appear successful because they are learners. They have spent time to study and understand the three domains of social relationships and influence in Pacific societies. They have noted the influences and processes within each domain. They have noted the interactions as well as the complex web of relationships within each and between domains. As students of leadership, these emerging Pacific leaders have noted the particularities of the applications of the domains in their local contexts. Armed with greater insight, these young leaders have been able to choose their actions of influence, seeing these as valuable contributions in spite of whatever the levels or spheres of influence. In this way, the sincere, unhurried efforts of these younger leaders have counted for credibility. In time, initial success becomes the platform upon which further

credibility is built. Over time, these younger leaders can become more and more influential within their wider societies.

30. Tagio tumas (Thank you sincerely)