

POLICY FUTURES STUDIES IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC

REPORT OF UNESCO AND WORLD FUTURES STUDIES COURSE ON PROSPECTIVE STUDIES FOR POLICYMAKING

UNESCO/University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji (Prospective Studies for Policy Making), July 5-12, 1993.

by Sohail Inayatullah

Sponsored by UNESCO in conjunction with the world futures studies federation and coordinated by Professor Tony Stevenson of the Queensland University of Technology, a one week course on prospective studies for policymaking was held in Suva, Fiji from July 5-10.

The 13 participants represented Pacific island nations from the Cook Islands, Tuvalu, Tonga, Samoa, Papua and New Guinea, Fiji and Kiribati. Resource persons for the course included retired director of the Institute of South Pacific Studies Ron Crocombe and Sohail Inayatullah, presently working as a political scientist and futurist in Hawaii. Florence Delimon represented UNESCO at the meeting.

The course was organized around three themes. The first was an introduction to futures studies. This was done by examining emerging trends and possible world futures and their potential impact on government policymaking in the Pacific. Futures methods particularly emerging issues analysis and scenario building were covered as well. These methods were then used by participants in the creation of their desired futures for the Pacific.

The second theme was the future of sovereignty in the Pacific. The critical question raised was: has political independence led to economic and cultural freedom or has it created a new elite? The third theme was the futures of education. Participants developed four scenarios for education in the Pacific Islands. They were: a status quo scenario, a 40% budget cut scenario, a high-technology scenario and a cultural revolution scenario. An incasting exercise using the following variables: budget; teacher/student ratio; infrastructure; curriculum; role of students; role of teachers; key actors; and general image, helped to further refine the scenarios.

Participants believed that the status-quo scenario reflected the present wherein students are treated as commodities and teachers are forced into the role of wardens. Curriculum design remains based on foreign colonial cultural categories. The main actor in this scenario is the government and the image of education is that of a prison system.

The second scenario attempted to infer the status of the educational system if there was a 40% cut in funding (from a long term recession or other factors). Education in this scenario would be

more focused on survival skills, it was believed. Classes might be held at community centers and at home instead of at schools. The role of the State in determining curriculum would decrease as an informal system developed, most likely spearheaded by the Church. Females might remain in school while males would probably be needed in the agricultural survival sector.

The third scenarios assumed the existence of low cost high communications technology allowing the Pacific to be intimately connected with the entire planet. Teachers would become facilitators with the most important ratio that of student to computer not student to teacher. Where individual computer ownership was prohibited, there would be tele-cottages where interactive classes would be held. While the image of education would be learning/knowledge based where small would once again become beautiful, participants feared that educational software would be monopolized by Japan or China. Given the advantages to the North-East, Pacific educational software design would find it difficult to enter this market. Nonetheless, this scenario was considered a positive future, ripe with possibilities for increased knowledge and greater community involvement.

The final scenario stressed the role of Pacific cultural categories. The question was what might education look like if it was designed in the Pacific Way by Pacific islanders? In general it was believed that the budget for education would go up substantially, that Church and community would have a much stronger role in shaping the nation's educational policies and there would be numerous Pan-Pacific networks. Finally, islanders would have a renewed sense of self and community as their historical frames of knowing would be legitimated. However, it was believed that for this educational future to be positive the curriculum must not only be local but also be globally eclectic as well.

Following this analysis, participants, using Tuvalu as a case study, examined the future of sovereignty in this small island nation. The basic problem is that Tuvalu's population is expanding at such a high rate such that there will be not enough land for citizens within 20-25 years. This could be further exacerbated by sea-level rise. The alternatives developed by participants were as follows:

1. Redefine identity (expand it, for example).
2. Rise of authoritarian governance (military rule).
3. Create a nation within Nation, for example, by buying land in Australia.
4. Encourage outmigration (the Hawaii case) so that Tuvalu's population remains the same.
5. Reclaim land.
6. Buy an island elsewhere and move the entire nation there.
7. Do nothing and disappear as a people.
8. Pray for divine intervention.

Developing on the above educational scenarios and sovereignty issues, participants developed a range of recommendations based on their preferred vision for the future. Each recommendation was assigned to a particular participant. These were as follows.

1. That Luke Paeniu of Tuvalu request his national Government to seek funding for:
 - (a) a research project to develop alternative future scenarios for atolls and other low-lying islands in the Pacific, given the probability of sea-level rise;
 - (b) a meeting of scientists, social scientists, particularly from the Pacific, as well as appropriate government and non-government organisations to explore alternative futures for the physical and cultural survival of the Pacific island populations.
2. That Atu Lageretabua approach the Government of Fiji, through the Ministry of Fijian Affairs, to:
 - (a) seek funding for the projects in recommendation 1, above, and
 - (b) seek agreement on terms and conditions for future development to be agreed to among commercial developers, land-owning units, the Fiji Native Land Trust Board and the Government of Fiji.
- 3.(a) That Pacific Governments, especially the Ministries of Education, and teachers and curriculum developers organise conferences at local and national levels, to examine and determine the current status of science and vocational education in respective Pacific countries.
 - (b) That UNESCO and other relevant aid agencies fund and coordinate a study on the status of science and vocational education in the Pacific region, the terms and references of the study to be:
 - (i) to collect, collate and analyse existing data;
 - (ii) to identify and ascertain the current situation;
 - (iii) to anticipate future trends; and
 - (iv) to formulate a report for presentation to a Pacific regional symposium.
- (c) That:
 - (i) Florence Delimon raise recommendation 3(b) with UNESCO; and
 - (ii) Ron Crocombe raise recommendation 3(b) with the meeting of UNESCO National Commissions in the Cook Islands on July 12, 1993.
- (d) That agencies involved with the study recommended in 3(b) examine the findings and recommend prioritised actions for the future.

4. (a) That Pacific Governments introduce long-range futures studies into the education planning process.

(b) That futures studies be incorporated into the curriculum, especially history, after primary studies.

5. That Pacific Governments re-examine the current status of maternity leave for teachers and the explore alternative child care arrangements for workers, such as the provision of child care facilities in or close to the work place.

6 (a) That Pacific Governments consider more closely the concepts of retraining trainers in education, innovative approaches to teaching and revolutionary alternatives to teaching methodology.

(b) That teachers in the Pacific region establish a regional Teachers'Institution.

The course concluded with participants looking forward to other opportunities to develop their foresight capabilities and for suggestions on ways to convince their respective ministries to adopt a proactive approach to governance.