

23. The importance of culture in achieving sustainable development

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Sustainable development occurs within cultural contexts. Therefore, culture must be integrated into sustainable development strategies. In addition culture is a driver of sustainable development. The cultural sector promotes economic growth through cultural tourism, handicrafts production, creative industries, agriculture, food and medicine, and fisheries. Traditional agriculture and food preparation practices enhance food security. The interlinkage between cultural and natural heritage is a foundation for environmental sustainability and biodiversity preservation. In Pacific communities culture is the foundation of well-being, inclusiveness and resilience.

One of the key challenges in the Pacific is to create understanding among governments and donor partners of the contribution of culture and the culture sector to sustainable development and well-being. As in the case of other sectors, this requires improving the evidence base (i.e. compiling cultural statistics); strong policy support; and a clear understanding of the role of culture as a cross-sectoral issue.

Key Issues:

- **Economic benefits of culture:** Culture contributes to economic development in many sectors, including tourism, creative industries, agriculture, food and medicine, and fisheries. Additionally, cultural practices provide food security and social safety nets for vulnerable populations, including women, children and elderly. The implementation of the Pacific Regional Culture Strategy at the national level provides a framework for culture as an engine of sustainable development.
- **Valuing culture:** There insufficient quantitative and qualitative evidence to support the economic and social benefits of culture. The lack of evidence has often resulted in an undervaluing of culture. The first Regional Cultural Statistics Meeting was held in 2011 to build capacity in the area of cultural statistics. The Pacific should to continue to work toward collecting data and improving the evidence-base on linkage between culture, well-being and sustainable development. This would help enhance awareness of both the non-monetary and monetary contribution of culture.
- **Trade, marketing and access to finance:** Strong pro-cultural policies for institutional capacity building; marketing of cultural products and protection of Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs); financing of small- and medium-sized cultural enterprises and initiatives; and promoting international trade of cultural products are necessary to harness the full potential of Pacific cultural industries.
- **Gender and human rights:** Culture in the Pacific has been used to justify inequity, discrimination and violence, especially against women, minorities and children. This is unacceptable and a misuse of culture. As noted in The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, culture should not be used as an excuse for

behaviour which is not in accordance with human rights. Pro-cultural policies should support culture as an enabler of tolerance, empowerment and diversity.

- **Bio-cultural diversity:** Cultural activities and expression, including language, are integral to cultural preservation and social cohesion. The cultural practices rely on biodiversity, access to land and availability of natural resources, including both terrestrial and marine. Implementing cultural preservation policies, as well as infrastructure and facilities, including festivals, museums, etc., can support the preservation of traditional knowledge and the promotion of ethical and informed heritage tourism.
- **Policy environment:** Culture is not only a sector, but it cuts across all dimensions of development policy. Synergy between policies and strategies for the preservation of culture, environmental sustainability and other areas are necessary for effective and efficient delivery. Cultural preservation must occur at all levels, national, regional and local, to be effective.

Background:

Culture – the foundation of well-being in the Pacific

Culture is a way of life; it includes cultural practices, norms and life-styles; it influences how people think and act. It is central to individual and collective identity and sense of belonging. It provides the social fabric that bonds communities and families; and is imperative to social cohesion and sustainable livelihoods. As such, culture is necessary not only for the confidence, creativity and happiness of people and communities, but for their survival. The Vanuatu Alternative Indicators of Well-being pilot study highlights the importance of culture for well-being, environmentally friendly lifestyles and traditional social safety nets.

The Rio+20 outcome document, entitled *The Future We Want*, “acknowledged the natural and cultural diversity of the world and recognised that all cultures and civilisations can contribute to sustainable development”. Furthermore, the Rio+20 stressed the important link between welfare and culture¹. Pacific Leaders have recognised the positive contribution of cultural diversity in the Pacific Plan (2005) by stating “We treasure the diversity of the Pacific and seek a future in which its cultures, traditions and religious beliefs are valued, honoured and developed.”².

Well-being

Historically, economic development, as measured by Gross domestic product (GDP), has been primary objective of national policy-making. However, global leaders are now challenged to shift the developmental paradigm and put the well-being of people at the centre of sustainable development. The United Nations General Assembly confirmed “that unsustainable patterns of production and consumption can impede sustainable development”, and recognized “the need for a more inclusive, equitable and balanced approach to economic growth that promotes sustainable development, poverty eradication, happiness and well-being of all people” in resolution, 65/L.86. The global movement toward valuing the well-being, or happiness, of people is evident in numerous initiatives

¹ *The Future We Want*, United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 20-22 June 2012.

² *The Pacific Plan*, Pacific Island Forum, 2005.

across the globe, including the Bhutan Gross National Happiness initiative, the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission report³, the OECD How's Life initiative on subjective well-being⁴, the Earth Institute World Happiness Report⁵, and in Melanesia the Vanuatu Alternative Indicators of Well-being pilot study⁶.

Culture as both an enabler and driver of sustainable development

The Pacific is extremely culturally and linguistically diverse: it is home to one-third of languages in the world⁷. These languages provide a basis for cultural expression and hold a wealth of information related to biodiversity in the Pacific. Traditional agriculture, fisheries and food and medicine preparation have long provided Pacific people with sustainable food security and healthy lifestyles, and can continue to do so in the future. Traditional and contemporary crafts, arts, including music, dance and film, and cultural festivals can serve as a sustainable source of income and employment.

Recognising the important role of culture in reinforcing a collective Pacific identity and strengthening regionalism, Pacific leaders established the Festival of Pacific Arts (FOPA) in 1972. FOPA provides a meeting place for the custodians of Pacific traditional and contemporary cultural expression, contributes to the enhancement of the living heritage of the Pacific and enables cultural stakeholders to exchange views, skills and knowledge .

Cultural diversity is a source of creativity⁸ and personal and community well-being. Cultural and creative industries represent one of the most rapidly expanding sectors in the global economy with a growth rate of 6.9 % in Oceania⁹. Handicraft producers make up seventeen per cent of Tonga's labour force. The Rio+20 reaffirmed the potential of eco-tourism and cultural tourism as a sustainable development tool. Cultural tourism - that relies on tangible and intangible cultural assets - accounts for 40 per cent of world tourism revenues. Globally, the tourism sector grew an average of 7 per cent per annum between 1998 to 2008, making it one of the world's fastest growing economic sectors.¹⁰ Thus there is great potential to further develop cultural tourism in the Pacific. There are many examples of positive contributions from community-based cultural tourism and eco-tourism in Melanesia.

Pacific leaders have recognised both the social and economic value of heritage tourism and promotion. Pacific island countries have committed to implementing The Pacific World Heritage Action Plan (2010-2015) and the Pacific Heritage Hub (PHH) at the University of the South Pacific (USP) has been established to function as a regional facility for cultural and traditional knowledge

³ Stiglitz J.E., A. Sen and J.-P. Fitoussi (2009), Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, http://www.stiglitz-sen-fitoussi.fr/documents/rapport_anglais.pdf.

⁴ How's life? OECD: <http://www.oecd.org/statistics/howslife.htm>

⁵ World Happiness Report, Earth Institute, 2012:

<http://www.earth.columbia.edu/sitefiles/file/Sachs%20Writing/2012/World%20Happiness%20Report.pdf>

⁶ Vanuatu Alternative Indicators of Well-being, Vanuatu National Statistics Office, 2012:

http://www.vnso.gov.vu/index.php/component/docman/doc_download/193-well-being-survey-2012?Itemid=18

⁷ Atlas of World's Endangered Languages, UNESCO www.unesco.org/culture/languages-atlas/

⁸ World Culture Report: UNESCO, 2009./

⁹ PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), 2008./

¹⁰ World Tourism Barometer, UNWTO, 2011: <http://mkt.unwto.org/en/barometer>.

management, capacity building and partnership development. Additionally, many countries are making Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) safeguarding a national priority.

Traditional governance systems, such as councils of traditional leaders in some of the Pacific countries, provide a link between local communities and central government which can act as a support system for sustainable development. For example, the matai system in Samoa is widely considered to contribute towards national stability¹¹. Community-based customary practices and laws, government-supported programmes, policy and legislations work to mutually reinforce the goal of sustainable development for the betterment of Pacific people. Additionally working within cultural systems is a necessary part of gaining community involvement and support. For example, in the case of climate change mitigation and disaster risk reduction strategies local communities and partners must work together to identify a vision that is respectful of the current culture. Additionally traditional and local knowledge can add tremendous value in risk identification and reducing vulnerability. Traditional knowledge also contains a wealth of information related to marine and terrestrial biodiversity in the Pacific.

To preserve and promote the role of culture as an enabler and driver of sustainable development, the Pacific Ministers of Culture endorsed the Regional Culture Strategy: Investing in Pacific Cultures 2012-2020, and the Pacific Culture and Education Strategy (2010-2015). These documents, together with UNESCO's normative instruments for culture, provide important guidelines for the development and preservation of culture and culture related industries in the Pacific at all levels. The Pacific Regional Culture Strategy highlights the economic opportunities of cultural industries in the Pacific, including in the sub-sectors of fashion, visual arts and MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Events)¹².

Culture has to the continuing potential to provide healthy, inclusive, sustainable livelihoods in the Pacific. This needs to be recognised and well-reflected in policies and investments that support protect and promote those aspects of Pacific cultures that make a positive contribution to the realization of these and other sustainable development goals..

¹¹ Asian Development Bank, 2000: Pacific Studies Series – Samoa

¹² SPC/ McComb, F: 2012: Development and Marketing Strategies for Pacific Cultural Industries