**Nationhood in the Pacific and its Challenges**

ELDP in Guam, March 2018

Introduction

• Limitations: I can only speak knowledgeably of Micronesia, and not even all of that region. (Summary of my experience)

• My talk will look in both directions: past and future–lessons learned, and prospects for the future.

• Purpose: not to frighten, but to challenge–first, to offer a realistic view of the challenges that you face in building your nation; but also to point you toward ways in which solutions might be found.

• Talk meant to be a conversation: Don’t be afraid to stop me and respond at any time.

Building a Nation

* Administrators run government offices; but true leaders are supposed to be nation-builders. (Not always flashy, but underwhelming in the familiar island style)
* Look back at some of your own founding fathers–Compact nations:

FSM: Tosiwo Nakayama, Andon Amaraich, Bethwel Henry, John Mangefel

RMI: Amata Kabua, Henry Samuel, Dwight Heine, Oscar deBrum

Palau: Thomas Remengesau (peace-maker), Roman Tmetuchl

* But non-independent islands have their own leaders:

Guam: Carlos Taitano (Organic Act of 1950)

CNMI: Ed Pangelinan (hidden work of negotiation of Covenant)

American Samoa: chiefs under Tuisosopo Mariota after the war that kept his islands from being incorporated into the US

National Identity

* Important component of nation-building is history: Who are we as a people? What is our story? (Eg, Israelites in biblical times, oral history of clans and islands, American stories of trials and how they were overcome)
* Keep the history real! Use early myths (Puntan, Souwoniras and Soukachau, Isokelekel), but respect the facts during the historical period (eg, Marianas chiefly authority) as a foundation to build on.

Nationhood: Where we are now

* You represent a mix of Compact nations and US territories. Compact nations with political independence but struggling to build an economy; and territories with good measure of US support, but something missing–on borderline between self-rule and full integration into US. Long-term goal is one or the other.
* Guam’s complaint about presidential vote, land trust, contract worker openings. These issues only solved when territorial status is resolved
* Compact nations need funding program for future
* Building a nation requires time–not just a one-shot matter. Also requires dedication and attention of leaders, young and old
* Tasks at hand: 1) establish a government, and 2) generate an economy capable of supporting the government; 3) but complicated by the fact that while we’re at work creating all this, forces are changing our people and complicating their lives. Three separate but related issues–we’ll deal with them individually.

1) Government with Authority

• More than just a matter of crafting a constitution and setting up the apparatus of a government system. These are merely the mechanics of a government.

More important (but often overlooked) is *buy-in* by the people who are to be governed. If the government is to work, they have to relinquish control (island or village) to a central government.

• May seem obvious, but in fact this remains a major problem with a number of countries around the world. They are known as “failed states”–failed not because they don’t have the economy to succeed, but because the tribal or ethnic groups have not accepted the premises of a national government. So, the key component in a “failed state” is the absence of an effective national government.

• National government in failed states is seen as both an *obstacle* and an *opportunity*.

Obstacle: Imposition of authority at highest level that does not bring benefits to the people–eg, security, education, medical services.

Opportunity: Mind-set is to take care of our own–eg, looting the treasury to help our own small tribe, enduring out-of-power stints in the hope of being able to get back in office to assist our own.

• Breakdown of government services at time and anarchy until a strongman takes over and acts as nearly absolute ruler (while plundering the treasury). When he is brought down, often in the name of democracy, chaos ensues.

• Nations of this sort can be found in the Middle East and in Africa–where tribalism has never yielded to anything broader. Think of Somalia, Afghanistan, Sudan, Zimbabwe.

Melanesia is the most challenged part of the Pacific with this problem. (*Wontoks*)

Micronesia fortunate, because TT districts voted in 70s on common government. Still, FSM is most at risk in our part of the Pacific due to ethnic diversity (eg, current campaign for independence in Chuuk)

* Balance needed between strong central government and local authority: eg. For FSM nation and state; for Samoa territorial govt and village.

2) Self-reliant Economy

(Not an expert in this area–take these remarks for what they’re worth)

• The economy should be able to pay the bills for government services. In effect, this means that the nation, apart from providing the conditions in which people can feed, clothe, house and entertain themselves adequately, must generate a surplus capable of paying for its own government.

(Surplus was the mark of wealth in traditional times, and it was offered to leaders, and sometimes redistributed to those who worked hard to generate this wealth in the first place–eg, offerings at feasts, first-fruits)

• In most countries, the cost of government runs to about 20% of total GDP (ie, entire economy).

But Pacific island nations have a problem in developing strong enough economy to generate this much surplus. Indeed, this is the major problem of PINs. This is no surprise because of the usual problems afflicting island economies: lack of resources, small size, remoteness from markets, etc.

If this 5:1 (GDP to cost of govt) standard is used, Compact nation economies would need great expansion to be entirely self-reliant:

Palau: economy should be doubled

FSM: economy tripled

RMI: economy increased to 350% of its present size.

* Development strategies
* Exports, except for resources in certain cases (eg Nauru’s phosphate, PNG’s natural gas and minerals), are out of the question.
* Alternatives, such as MIRAB, employ another sort of export–labor. This is utilized throughout the Pacific, as population figures show (eg, no-growth population nearly everywhere in Pacific except Melanesia)
* Other options for growing economy: rentals. Fishing grounds under NPA generating income ($60m yearly for FSM), strategic rental under Compact, etc.

• As the national economy grows under these limitations, the cost of government services increases as expectations rise–eg, better education system, stronger police force, improved health system. Millennium Development Goals add to the price tag.

• Non-self-governing territories (with US federal programs and other assistance) have much the same problem. Note the recent financial crisis in Puerto Rico, the financial problems in Guam and CNMI (before the coming of Best Sunshine). Samoa? Statehood or independence will both require financial stability.

• Where to look for the answers:

Remittances (based on Samoa, Tonga and Fiji), but not so strong elsewhere

Foreign aid will be required for the indefinite future–but will wealthier nations recognize this as a principle?

(So back to MIRAB?)

3) Problem of Change

• Political and economic change often give rise to social changes– they often have a major impact on social organizational patterns, usually in unpredictable ways.

• *Example 1*: Impact of cash economy on traditional institutions. (TT in Kennedy era)

- Rapid growth of economy in 1960s: TT budget, jobs, income ($2m to $42m in 14 yrs)

- Self-support of household possible due to increase of jobs; this led to weakening of the lineage system (authority as well as land); reduced involvement of kin in parenting.

- Social consequences: suicide, delinquency, spouse abuse (*examples*)

• *Example 2*: Demographic change in Guam after WWII

- Tight village community on island before war and in early post-war years. Hundred pairs of eyes on kids; importance of shame; role of mayor in dealing with disturbances through mediation.

- Shifts in population after war: immigration from PI, Korea, Palau; split up of families as many moved to US for jobs; growing tourist industry; expansion of population to new areas (north part of island).

- Result: community less connected with one another; role of shame diminishes; mediation doesn’t work as well. Hence, island police system and prison called upon to maintain order. Traditional mechanisms less often used; tendency to resort to US court system with its neglect of community and its lack of direct reach right to family.

* *Example 3*: Western law vs. traditional system of dispute resolution

- Old means of resolving conflict and making peace: presentation of sakau to chief on Pohnpei; Chuukese custom of adopting killer into the victim’s family as restitution.

- Gains: involvement of community in conflict settlement; restitution and rehabilitation.

- Attempt of Chief Justice Ed King to balance traditional with modern court system. (example of rape of girl on Yap)

- Future: US-style court system offers restraint (prison for many), but not restitution and reconciliation. Even rehabilitation is dubious. (Look somewhere else for a model!)

* *Example 4*: Gender relations

- Traditional reliance on women’s input into decision-making, but with men taking nominal positions of authority: eg, in Palau, lineage women’s control of land and even chieftainship.

- Today equality demanded–positions in legislature, etc. Much less room for division of labor and authority. Could lead to war between the sexes.

• In summary, even as nation is setting up its political apparatus and struggling with its economic challenges, it has to be ready to cope with the social changes resulting from the former.

Formula for the Future

• Be prepared to look in two directions–utilize what remains of the traditional mechanisms where possible (*past*); and explore the possibilities that globalization might offer (*future*).

• Traditional mechanisms:

Be open to learning from the past and apply what you can to the present. You may not be able to restore the old village community, but you can take away some lessons on different methods of social control, the importance of shame, and the need to create some kind of real community.

- Revitalize the mediation systems (intervention of third parties before the police are called in–eg, Inafa Maolek)

- Utilize village organization system (as was done by many Micronesian migrants to the US mainland)

* Take care of your migrants; they still are part of your global community. They are still your fellow islanders.

-Don’t penalize emigration (denial of voting, land ownership, citizenship)

-Encourage visits back home regularly, so they remain invested in the islands (eg, Yap and Kosrae)

-Maintain network of islanders abroad–eg, through sports events each year

* In unity is strength. Consider gathering together sometime before 2023 for discussions on critical issues facing the different island groups–funding, greater self-government, and other such issues.
* Never be satisfied with ready-made solutions to your problems, especially when they are made to solve other people’s problems. Don’t stop thinking and learning.