**Good Government in the Pacific**

*Presentation to ADB Pacific Staff, Manila, Sept 9, 2005*

***Introduction***

* My own interest: MicSem as research-pastoral institute in region, with strong involvement in community education (videos, radio, articles, website, photo albums). Goal: assist people in making relatively painless transition to modernity, while encouraging them to remain rooted to their traditions.
* ADB has its own culture, as does each island society (and Catholic Church). Don’t propose to overhaul that culture, but simply draw attention to points that need attention in light of my experience in Micronesia.
* ADB has dual role: lending bank, and development-oriented institution. I can understand the problem that this split personality can entail. My interest is less with loan than with development, of course.
* Two segments to my presentation: First, general reflections on the role that ADB is playing and could play in Pacific. Second, thoughts on issues related to good government in the Pacific, specifically in Micronesia (eg, Palau, FSM, and RMI). Encourage feedback after each segment (or even during it!)

***General Approach to Development in the Pacific***

Technical assistance is usually packaged as short-term consultancies. Most are designed for specialists who will draw up reports on what needs to be done and how to implement the project.

(eg, extension of pumped clean water, or design for setting up a public health system with effective clinics)

Yet, the main problem is often not “What ought to be done” or “How to go about doing it,” but Why the project is so essential, and

How to jump the social/political hurdles that impede the plan.

In other words, dealing with the difficulties of

* Selling the measure to decision-makers (without seeming to bully them–ie, the Bank made us do it; walking them through the logic of the plan in context of development), and
* Keeping them on-track in the face of political opposition.

(eg, reduction of govt workforce in FSM in mid-90s)

Government leaders will then have to sell the project to their people, and sometimes will need all the help they can get in doing so. Problems here are two-fold:

* Forestalling objections by showing that the project is in the long-term interests of people
* Working out cost/benefit analysis on the reform or project (ie, social costs must be understood and faced)
* eg, long-term land leases to foreign investors (when assumption is that foreign investors are predators who will rake off profits that are rightly due to locals)
* Allaying people’s fear that they are selling out their culture in order to achieve some short-term good
* Eg, land registration in RMI, which can be seen as yet another step toward the loss of culture, while antagonizing chiefs in the process
* Fear of devastating impact of cultural change–“domino theory” represented in some classical anthropology literature. (my attempt to redefine culture in MC issue to show that it cannot be lost).
* Proposal for video series on effects of modernization since WWII. Would focus on Micronesian islands, but intended for general Pacific. Goal: deepen understanding of past adaptation, so as to promote confidence in the future.

The role of foreign consultants in the Pacific is much larger than conceiving grand plans and presenting them to leaders. It involves several other elements, all of them important:

* Hand-holding and personal support for the government leaders, help in building the political will needed to implement the plan (eg, Kevin O”Keefe’s trips to Chuuk to deliver the bad news)
* Serving as a convenient excuse for political leaders who need someone to blame for an unpopular measure (The “Killer George” strategy in govt.)
* Acting as the truth-sayer, or articulating the real issues when this may be difficult for an islander to do. (Remember that in the Pacific not everything is open for public discussion. Sometimes, it is the foreigner who must say “The Emperor is wearing no clothes.”)

Corollary: Personal trust requires a long time to build up in the Pacific. Hence, perhaps longer-term assistance is needed rather than short-term consultancies, with its parade of different experts–if the real goal is nation-building, not just selling loans.

* Long-term assistance through EMPAT was as much a success as anything the Bank has done in Micronesia.
* Objections to long-term assistance: fosters dependence. Impatience with extended presence. But the battle has usually just begun when the consultants leave. The second phase is the problematic one.
* Belief in “local counterpart” taking over needs to be reexamined. Perhaps naive, even if all funding organizations believe in it.

***Good Government in the Pacific***

Good government is an essential condition for respect and foreign aid in today’s world. Rightly so, since nothing much works in the country without it.

* Related to “good government” are the two other shibboleths: transparency and accountability.

Yet, this is sometimes seen by island nations as yet another neo-colonial demand on the island government to conform to someone else’s standard. (Reputation of World Bank and IMF as vanguard of international enforcers)

What is “good government?”

* Requires suitable government processes that allow for people’s input into their government–by choosing their leaders and by providing feedback to them during their term of office. Modern apparatus of government must be in place and working.
* Requires that people have access to information on what the government is up to. Without this, they can’t exercise effective control over leaders.

*1] Government apparatus*

In Micronesia the machinery of a representative government is in place, by and large. There are a few structural or constitutional impediments, but these are rather minor. Examples:

* FSM Congress. President comes from the congress and is elected by them (not decided upon by party in power, as in parliamentary system). President is hostage to the Congress.
* Representation in the Marshalls. Candidates can run from three or four different islands, representing a people with whom they have tenuous ties.
* Multiplicity of governments in Palau: 14, each with state flag, constitution and elected governor. Some have just few hundred people. Funds are allocated to “states” without the means to provide proper accounting.

But the more serious problem is how well this machinery runs. Its workings can be subverted by cultural considerations, by attitudes. Examples:

* Elections. If kinship rules in the choice of candidates, then the cream will not necessarily rise as it should.
* Auditor’s Office. They may check on spending, but what about the follow-up on irregularities? Problem everywhere in Micronesia except Palau (with Special Prosecutor’s Office).
* Conflict of interest. Government officials have business interests that often overrule the good of constituents.
* Repayment of favors. What is branded as corruption by foreigners is understood as repayment of obligation to another. (eg, plea of former governor of Guam indicted for taking bribes–*chinchule*)
* Enforcement of laws. Even-handed treatment conflicts with deference due high titles and senior kin member.
* Lack of bureaucracy. If bureaucracy means a “faceless” organization, then this is all but impossible in the islands where everyone is tagged with a social identity known to everyone else.
* Problem of removing anyone. Firing is very difficult, even if an employee is performing poorly or not at all.
* To-each-his-share attitude. Grants and other funds are divided equally, irrespective of the real needs or merits of the parties. (eg, CIP money to municipalities in Chuuk during Compact 1–*ichietiw*)
* Inability to separate political and personal. For many islanders, there is no private *persona* separate from the position one holds. Hence, all criticism is personal.

Conclusion: Modern apparatus of government is a necessary but not sufficient condition for good government.

Extended examples: Chuuk and Kosrae

Chuuk: state in FSM, population of 53,000, reputation as the sinkhole of Micronesia, often classed with Solomons and PNG as “failed states”

Land registration project: consultant shows up to help state in surveying and mapping. But the problems in Chuuk go far beyond technical area.

* Land records office burned down last year.
* Schools and dispensaries in very poor condition. No sense of community ownership of these. (photos of school buildings assembled in slideshow for US govt officials)
* Problem of obtaining rights to airstrip land and land for public buildings.
* People reclaiming land that was once sold or leased to government.
* Easement rights for running sewer pipes or water pipes through land contentious, with large amounts of compensation demanded.

Layered problems in Chuuk with performance of government employees, morale, repair of public buildings, school standards (much lower than rest of FSM). But land problem has to be solved first. As it is, another over-riding problem may be indirectly solved: powerlessness of government.

Traditional Chuuk: egalitarian society of “Big Man” type. After WWII, when population was 10,000, there were 100 polities, each with fewer than 100. No formal links between them. Onflicts resolved by war or negotiations or both.

How does a society like this without a tradition of political stratification submit to a government? Chuuk did willingly under colonial rule, but now difficult for governors to enforce their programs.

Is unification of Germany and Italy in 19th century a parallel? Chuuk (and Melanesia) have trappings of centralization. But how does this authority become real?

Kosrae: state in FSM, tiny population of 8,000, remote and without resources, no private sector (even when compared with Chuuk).

History of bad investments:

* Chinese fishing plant closed when foreign companies moved out
* Fuel farm begun to offer competition to Mobil and bring down fuel prices (but fuel recently hasn’t passed testing standards for Continental Airlines)
* Bottled water industry under consideration

Present problems:

* Little private industry, nearly all of that service.
* Transportation cutbacks in recent months: Continental Air cutting service, and shipping companies reducing scheduled ships
* Shelves of stores nearly empty, no new businesses.

Economy always has been dependent on government employment (more than in other states)

* 1 of 10 people work for government; ratio has not changed in years
* Hiring of government employees regarded as offering employment to individuals and income to families, not so much by providing quality services.
* Hence, RIF’s take shape of cut in hours (40 to 26 per week) rather than in getting rid of excess employees.
* Quality of government service actually worsened as a result of this strategy (especially in schools, which were closed all day Friday).

*2] Access to information*

The flow of information from the government to the people is vital to permit them to steer their leaders. Without this information flow there can be no accountability to the people.

But what end of the information do we direct our energies to improving: the outflow from the government, or the inflow at the people’s end?

* In the past we have assumed that if we had proper accounting procedures at the government end, and a vibrant media at the other end, the information flow would naturally take place. Hence, projects to develop proper record-keeping in the government, and efforts to stimulate media growth in the Pacific.
* But people still do not have access to what they need because “public information” is not genuinely public. Transparency means not just good record-keeping, but allowing people to have access to these documents. Here, again, cultural attitudes may impair the openness that is so important in a modern government. In traditional Pacific society, information could be valuable and dangerous.

Illustration of the problem:

(Perhaps show this one segment of the MicSem video here)

(eg: tracking public projects money cited in my article; access to birth and death figures from Health Services)

Traditional attitudes toward knowledge carried over today:

* Specialized knowledge (eg, medicine, genealogies, navigation) as precious commodity. Carry-over of attitude manifest in lack of transfer of knowledge in offices today
* eg, what was learned at an off-island conference not shared;
* eg, proprietorship over database (knowledge as means to personal advancement)
* Information could be used as a weapon to harm people. Hence, reluctance to release anything that could fuel opposition to a person in authority. (“Why do you need this information?”)
* fear of jeopardizing personal relationships
* less concern with veracity of information than with attribution to individual (question usually asked: “Who told you that?”)
* Information could reflect badly on the nation. This often outweighs the hope that the information could stimulate reforms.
* Reaction to criticism of government: “Why hang the dirty laundry in public?”
* Cultural conflict on the understanding of public criticism: Western perspective and Pacific attitude (“We all know this, but it should not be said in public.”)
* This only intensifies government suspicion of the media today: they are seen as ready to twist or distort anything to do damage. Media is sometimes perceived as the enemy.

***Conclusion***

The campaign for good government, like most attempts to change societies, must be fought on two fronts:

* apparatus for good government, and institutional conditions for transparency and accountability–ie, machinery of good government
* proper functioning of this apparatus, which depends on attitudinal change. This is the battle within–a struggle to wrestle with cultural attitudes that inhibit needed reforms.

If ADB is intent on reform, it will need some help:

* all the allies it can get to complement what it is doing on structural reform
* cues on the timing of programs, and ways to pitch them
* assistance in building political will to implement difficult reforms.

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