

# Reweaving the Ecological Mat Framework

TOWARD AN ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK  
FOR DEVELOPMENT



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# **Reweaving the Ecological Mat Framework: Toward an Ecological Framework for Development**

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Adi Meretui Ratanabuabua comes from Deva mountain, Tuva river source, Vunamoli village, Nadi, Fiji. Her formative years were spent in Europe and Asia in British army postings. She is a Victoria University, New Zealand graduate and is an advocate for Arts and Heritage development in Fiji and the Pacific serving on many local, regional and international boards linked to UNESCO World Heritage and Intangible Cultural Heritage safeguarding. The IUCN World Commissions (CEESP) and on the IUCN (WPCA) development working group on indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLC's). She is an aspiring politician wanting to see and affect positive change in attitudes globally and in local communities on the care and conservation of our natural and cultural heritage resources as custodians who need to take assertive action now to benefit current and future generations.



Mr. Arnie Saiki is an independent researcher, writer and campaigner. He has been focusing on national accounting issues for over a decade and leading the Pacific Working Group on Data, Statistics and Valuation. In collaboration with the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat, he was a featured speaker on Pacific ecological regionalism at the World Bank Fragility Forum conference, SDG 16. He coordinated the Moana Nui conferences, a partnership between the International Forum on Globalization and Pua Mohala I Ka Po in 2011 and 2013. He has been writing and producing online content and organizing conferences for over a decade. In 2009, Arnie received a “We the People” grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities for his work on Hawai’i Statehood history, and he was the lead historical researcher for a federally-funded feature documentary, “State of Aloha.” He has been published in *American Quarterly* and several other publications. Arnie received his MFA from NYU, Tisch School of the Arts, and left the Performing Studies program at NYU as a PhD candidate.



**“The Magisubu (The Sea Eagle)”**  
*By: Benjamin Dickson*

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We congratulate PTC as it celebrates its 55<sup>th</sup> year of its establishment this year. As it turns a new leaf in leadership and vision, it is not a coincidence that this publication is produced at

this time. The college's vision of leadership for justice, and its clear trajectory to engage with the region's indigenous traditions, philosophies and spiritualities, and its contextual realities as vital to theological education, we hope that this publication will contribute to its vision.

It is our fervent hope that this publication will be received as a genuine attempt to assist our political, religious, traditional and civil society leaders in discerning a conducive development framework for their countries and, collectively, for the entire region.

### **The Authors**

## FOREWORD

In the Pacific relational context, life in abundance is at the heart of existence. Such abundance becomes the embodiment of harmony, the nucleus of spirituality, the benchmark of memory. Moreover, it becomes the reason for revolution and transformation. This culture of abundance is not a moral code. Nor is it an institutionalized system. Rather, it is a complex, relationally-laden mystery that goes back to the beginning of time—to God, the source of abundance. It is a mystery constantly manifested through our everyday culture of sharing but also deeply and inextricably connected with all that is, in and around us. It is a life affair that is neighbourly constructed, a language with an ecological accent. Multi-dimensionally driven and holistically envisioned, this abundance, a relational abundance, becomes the matrix of life. Thus to lose relationality is to lose life in abundance.

The ecological crisis threatening Pacific livelihoods derives from a pathological old *narrative of onefication* that, first and foremost, extracts all abundance to serve the civilization of the human. For colonization to function, a powerful narrative had to be created to justify the elevation of one life or one culture above others. It thrived on the ideology that all cultures have to be rescued from the depravity and backwardness of their ways and offered a more developed way—a way animated by the vision of endless growth. This ideology morphed into a powerful monarchical narrative that the survival of many lives is dependent upon rendering service to only one life—the human. Or one culture—the neoliberal capitalist culture. Rooted in the word ‘colon,’ meaning ‘to digest,’ colonization has transformed into a racially digestive capitalism that is best expressed in the Samoan saying *ole eleele le malieivai*, meaning ‘a land never satisfied of excessive consumption of streams.’ This hegemonic racist mindset invaded every hall of economic development and impregnated every Pacific mind with the idea that dependency is a virtue. Hence we had the beginning of an ecological racism, whereby one culture or one economy extracts and digests the lives and resources of all cultures and economies.

Where we are today in the Pacific is the continuation of the colonial project of *onefication*. This has resulted, as the authors correctly identify, in a destructive and unsustainable lifestyle—the commodification of life, the increased exploitation of extractive activities, the market-pushed consumerism that nourishes a few, increased poverty and violence, and a single-strandic way of understanding reality. Such a caricature—viewing life single-strandically—leads to

the compartmentalization of life, roles and responsibilities, all of which fall outside of the relational interconnectedness of the whole. Perhaps the most obvious example is the splitting of the *oikos triplets* of ecology, economy and oikoumene in policy-making and development frameworks. In fact, we run on this narrative only because it is abundant and familiar, despite the fact that it is destroying us.

It is no accident that this long awaited project was given birth under the shadow of the global COVID-19 pandemic. It invites us to listen to the scream of wisdom from the fluid relational cultures of the Pacific ecological *Aiga* (household) in order to ground a liberating development framework. This is an ancestral prompting provoking a shift from the *Pacific Way*, which has dominated development discussions since the 1970s, to *Pacific Solution*.

The proposed ecological framework is structured within the vision of Reweaving the Ecological Mat (REM) of the Pacific household. It recommends an *oikonomical* framing of development, a word coined by the authors to suggest the much needed reweaving of the *oikos triplets* of economy, ecology, and oikoumene if the Pacific is to be truthful to establishing a holistic development story. Constructed around three frames—theology, economics, and cultures and spirituality—the *oikonomical* framing aims to reintroduce a new/old way for measuring wellbeing and wholeness. Relationality is central to such measurement, as well as the full recognition of and respect for the balance and harmony of all diverse interwoven strands of life.

The proposed framework and its related methodology nuance a return to retrieve the Pacific multi-strandic consciousness, with its firm anchoring in relational imagination. It is a revolutionary consciousness that envisions a departure from the neat split categories we have set up to power and elevate ourselves over all other faces, both visible and invisible, of the Pacific ecological *Aiga*. In this way, it has the ability to revolutionize development such that it is driven toward a *de-onefication* of economy—one that embraces the diversity of small economies, small communities, and small ways of stewardship and resilience that promote abundance of life; one that gives power back to the everyday economies in the margins; and one which re-centres spirituality and ecological relational values.

What I enjoy about this project is its passion about how our revolutionary spirit of the present longs to meet the collected visage of the wisdom of the past in order to experience a neighbourly texture of life in the future. This is a texture that the theologian Walter Brueggemann refers to as a “great departure from the greedy, anxious anti-neighborliness of our economy, a great departure from our exclusionary politics that fears the other, a great departure from self-

indulgent consumerism that devours creation. And then an arrival in a new neighborhood, because it is a gift to be simple, it is a gift to be free; it is a gift to come down where we ought to be.” This realization of ‘where we ought to be’ is the initial step towards our *metanoia moment* where we acknowledge that we humans are not at the centre of the Pacific ecological Aiga. And by de-centring ourselves, we may realize that salvation is also about recovery from the addiction to extraction, from the selfish pull of consumerism, and from the digestive rulers and rules of the market-driven empire.

I wish to congratulate the authors and acknowledge the vision behind this REM project. This vision, I believe, will stimulate talanoa and titillate the minds of many generations, today and tomorrow, to become revolutionary members of the Pacific ecological Aiga. Enjoy!

**Upolu Lumā Vaai**  
Pacific Theological College  
Suva, Fiji  
09 July 2020

# INTRODUCTION AND SITUATIONAL DESCRIPTION

Winds of change have been seen, felt and accelerated across the Pacific in the past few years. These changes have come in various forms and magnitudes. No island country, no community, no church, in truth no one has been left untouched in one way or other by the multiple changes that have taken place, and are taking place. Concurring with a truism that “[s]ocial problems and issues, although they appear to be isolated pieces, are actually linked together in a larger system,”<sup>1</sup> this brief introduction and situational description is confined to *oikonomical* aspects. The term *oikonomical* is deliberately coined to embrace the three aspects of home (Greek *Oikos*), namely: economics (*Oikos-nomos*), ecology (*Oikos-logos*), and ecumene or ecumenical (*Oikoumene*). Economics, ecology and ecumene all belong together as they have to do with our only one and common home, Earth.

The Reweaving the Ecological Mat (REM) initiative is premised on the knowledge and experience that the neoliberal model of economic development is not appropriate for the Pacific. While it is acknowledged that this model of development has led to some improvements to human life in the Pacific, and across the world in general, it is not beneficial to the common good of the vast majority of the world’s people, including the Pacific. In real terms, it benefits only a very tiny minority of the world’s population—the richest and economically most powerful individuals and groups.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, this model, which is propelled by its obsession with endless growth, primarily based on non-renewable resource extraction and exploitation, is not compatible with but destructive to the wellbeing of our one common home, Earth.<sup>3</sup> Such a model thrives on “ ...

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1 Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice* (Washington, DC: Center for Concern, 1980), 10.

2 According to a recent study, only 0.9 percent of the world’s population owns about half of the total global wealth, while 56 percent own only 1.8 percent of the world’s wealth. See Jake Johnson, “Global Millionaires—Just 0.9% of Population—Now Own Nearly Half of World’s \$361 Trillion in Wealth, Study Shows,” *Common Dreams*, 22 October, 2019, <https://www.commondreams.org/news/2019/10/22/global-millionaires-just-09-population-now-own-nearly-half-worlds-361-trillion>.

3 See United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), *Global Environment Outlook 6*, 4 March, 2019, <https://www.>

sucking up the resources of the earth, cutting down trees, polluting water, pumping industrial waste into the atmosphere, ploughing up wetlands, and mining in ecologically sensitive spaces.”<sup>4</sup> To one extent or another, across the Pacific these and other impacts have been seen and experienced in various ways. Some of these are as follows (with a brief focus on the oil spills in Solomon Islands in February 2019):

Livelihoods have been impacted and affected by changes in lifestyle and populations that are increasingly reliant on processed foods and multiple household consumer goods. Foreign lifestyles that are both actively and subtly associated with production and consumption have driven a wedge between traditional subsistence livelihoods (sustained by forests, lands and marine resources) on the one hand, and the market-pushed consumerism on the other.

Across the bigger island countries of the region, transnational logging corporations continue to extract commercially viable species at rapid and irreplaceable rates. For example, in Solomon Islands a report recently commissioned by the Solomon Islands Ministry of Finance suggested that if logging continues at its current pace, natural forests will be exhausted by 2036.<sup>5</sup> Environmental destruction by commercial logging operations has been noted: disruption of forest biodiversity, soil erosion, pollution of rivers and streams, siltation of rivers, estuaries and coastlines, and the resultant effects.<sup>6</sup>

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unenvironment.org/resources/global-environment-outlook-6#:~:text=Published%20in%20time%20for%20the%20other%20Internationally%20Agreed%20Environment, which highlights several key messages, two of which are as follows: “Unsustainable production and consumption patterns and trends and inequality, when combined with increases in the use of resources that are driven by population growth, put at risk the healthy planet needed to attain sustainable development. Those trends are leading to a deterioration in planetary health at unprecedented rates, with increasingly serious consequences, in particular for poorer people and regions ... Furthermore, the world is not on track to achieve the environmental dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals or other internationally agreed environmental goals by 2030; nor is it on track to deliver long-term sustainability by 2050. Urgent action and strengthened international cooperation are urgently needed to reverse those negative trends and restore planetary and human health.”

4 Steve de Gruchy, “Oikos, God and the Olive Agenda: Theological Reflections on Economics and Environment,” <http://www.sacc.org.za/news07/oikos.html>.

5 Josh Gabbatis, “‘Untouched’ Pacific Island Forests Could Be Destroyed within 20 Years Due to Unsustainable Logging,” *The Independent*, 18 October, 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/environment/forests-solomon-islands-pacific-logging-china-deforestation-global-witness-a8589036.html>.

6 See, for example, Martha Macintyre and Simon Foale, “Global Imperatives and Local Desires: Competing Economic and Environmental Interests in Melanesian Communities,” in *Globalization and Culture Change in the Pacific Islands*, ed. Victoria Lockwood, 149–164 (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2003), 160. See also Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka, “Rumble in the Jungle: Land, Culture and (Un)sustainable Logging in Solomon Islands,” in *Culture and Sustainable Developing in the Pacific*, ed. Antony Hooper, 88–97 (Canberra: Asia Pacific Press and ANU E-Press, 2005), especially the section “Logging in Solomon Islands: A Background.”

While open surface (pit) mining operations are taking place in some of the bigger countries of the region—Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, New Caledonia, Vanuatu and Fiji, for instance—Deep Sea Mining (DSM, a.k.a. Seabed Mining [SBM]) is the newest concern and challenge for various countries.<sup>7</sup> The *Solwara 1 Project* was scheduled to be the first ever DSM operation in the region, but after much pressure, as well as the withdrawal of major investors, the operation was given a moratorium for ten years by the PNG Government.

Pollution of the world's oceans and seas is increasing at an alarming rate; this is exemplified by the plastic pollutants disposed into the oceans every day. According to the recent report by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation,

Each year, at least 8 million tonnes of plastics leak into the ocean—which is equivalent to dumping the contents of one garbage truck into the ocean every minute. If no action is taken, this is expected to increase to two per minute by 2030 and four per minute by 2050. Estimates suggest that plastic packaging represents the major share of this leakage. The best research currently available estimates that there are over 150 million tonnes of plastics in the ocean today. In a business-as-usual scenario, the ocean is expected to contain 1 tonne of plastic for every 3 tonnes of fish by 2025, and by 2050, more plastics than fish (by weight).<sup>8</sup>

In the Solomon Islands, on 5 February 2019 the vessel *MV Solomon Trader* ran aground on Kangava Bay in West Rennell, within close proximity to the UNESCO World Heritage Site there. The site, which comprises 370 square kilometers (143 square miles) of forests and a marine area extending 5.5 kilometers (3.4 miles) out to sea, provides habitat for 10 endemic plant species, 43 species of breeding land and water birds, and 730 species of insects. Prime Minister Rick Houenipwela said in a press conference that “The ecological footprint of the whole bay is already devastated with much of it unlikely to recover ... The impact on the marine life and the coral is already massive with much of it irreversible.”<sup>9</sup> Lawrence Nodua, a Solomon Islander volunteer with the UK-registered marine conservation NGO Oceans

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7 The countries covered in the 1985–2005 Japan-SOPAC Survey for seabed minerals included PNG, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, Tonga, Samoa, Niue, Cook Islands, Kiribati, Tuvalu, FSM, and Marshall Islands. See Akuila Tawake, “Deep Sea Minerals and Mining in the Pacific Islands Region: National DSM Stakeholder Consultation Workshop,” <https://www.zs-pastelka.cz/12/17245/mining+company+pacific.html>.

8 World Economic Forum, Ellen MacArthur Foundation, and McKinsey & Company, *The New Plastics Economy—Rethinking the Future of Plastics*, 2016, <http://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/publications>, 17.

9 Catherine Wilson, “Solomon Islands: Oil Stops Spilling but Environmental Toll Still Being Calculated,” 2 April, 2019, <https://news.mongabay.com/2019/04/solomon-islands-oil-stops-spilling-but-environmental-toll-still-being-calculated/>.

Watch, has said that “The spill has affected local communities’ food and water security ... Authorities have also warned them to stop eating locally caught fish and shellfish, critical components of their food supply.”<sup>10</sup>

The vessel was chartered by the Indonesian mining company Bintan Mining Solomon Islands Ltd, which was contracted to extract bauxite on Rennell Island. However, mining ventures have a troubled history in Rennell and Bellona Province. Allegations of improprieties and irregularities in the awarding of a mining license to another Indonesian company active on the island, PT Mega Bintang Borneo Ltd., led to its license being revoked in 2014. In fact, extractive industries, and logging in particular, have been the focus of accusations of high-level corruption and environmental destruction in the Solomon Islands in recent decades. Political patronage of foreign companies, extensive kickbacks, and the loss of revenue to hefty tax exemptions were and are the order of the day.<sup>11</sup>

In the midst of all of the above, what is having a global impact within a very brief span of time is the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Within just a few months, major global economic-financial players, movers and shakers, and services-including countries, governments, public services, the private sector with all its industries and commerce, economic/financial institutions and brokers, and so on-have all been impacted in one way or other. Even so, amidst all the negative impacts, what is noticeable is that the lockdowns, the scaling down (perhaps even closing down!) of exploitative extractive industries, the grounding of airlines and scaling down of the service industry, and many more pandemic-related changes have given breathing space for Mother Nature to regenerate and to live again!<sup>12</sup>

The foregoing examples are critically significant for the Reweaving the Ecological Mat initiative, because it (REM) concerns itself with the *oikonomical* aspects of development-economical, ecological and ecumenical-as integral and interconnected aspects of the Households of Pacific Peoples. This ecological framework for development is framed around three pillars, namely: *theological framing*, *economics framing*, and *cultures and*

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10 Ibid.

11 For insights into the multi-layered dynamism of the forestry sector in Solomon Islands, see Judith Bennett, *Pacific Forest: A History of Resource Control and Contest in Solomon Islands c.1800-1997* (Cambridge: White Horse Press, 2000); and Edvard Hviding and Tim Bayliss-Smith, *Islands of Rainforest: Agroforestry, Logging, and Eco-Tourism in Solomon Islands* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2000).

12 Multiple examples of stories have emerged about Earth having breathing space again because of the impacts of the global lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic. See, for example, Roshni Balaji, “Blue Skies, Clean Air: How the Coronavirus Lockdown is Rejuvenating our Environment,” April 2020, <https://yourstory.com/socialstory/2020/04/coronavirus-lockdown-environment-air-pollution-covid-19>.

*spirituality framing*. The concluding part of the paper highlights the REM-oriented and driven methodology in working toward an Ecological Framework for Development.

***“The Reweaving the Ecological Mat initiative concerns itself with the oikonomical aspects of development—economical, ecological and ecumenical—as integral and interconnected aspects of the Households of Pacific Peoples ”***



## PART 1: THEOLOGICAL FRAMING

Reweaving the Ecological Mat (REM) is grounded in deep and holistic spirituality, including but not confined to the following:

Firstly, all life on Earth is intimately and dynamically interconnected. The creation narrative in Genesis 2 underpins this interconnectedness of life. In the text, the Garden is described as a web in which every strand is interconnected. According to the text, life includes all forms—flora, fauna, avifauna, piscifauna or ichthyofauna and humanity. In this web, the source of life is the Creator (Heb. *Yahweh*, verses 7a, 9, 19, 21-22), the ground or earth (Heb. *adamah*, verse 6), and the Spirit or breath (Heb. *ruach*, verse 7b).

This view of life as transcending human life and including ALL life, whose origin is the Spirit of God, is supported by other texts in the Bible, such as Psalm 104:29-30 (*GNT*): “When you turn away, they are afraid; when you take away your breath [Heb. *ruach*], they die and go back to the dust from which they came. But when you give them breath [Heb. *ruach*]<sup>13</sup>, they are created; you give new life to the earth.” The “they” includes all the creatures that are mentioned in the first part of the Psalm—creatures on land, in the sea, and in the air. Arthur Walker-Jones<sup>14</sup> and Jürgen Moltmann both argue that *she*<sup>15</sup> is the same spirit in all forms of life. As Moltmann writes, the “... experience of the life-giving Spirit in the faith of the heart and in the sociality of love leads of itself beyond the limits of the church to the rediscovery of the same Spirit in nature, in plants, in animals, and in the ecosystem of the earth.”<sup>16</sup> In Pasifika, the Ecological Mat includes and embodies all of these understandings, as is evocatively and powerfully represented in the poem “The Density of Vā” by Cresantia Frances Koya-Vaka’uta.<sup>17</sup>

Secondly, Earth is home to God, humanity, and all creatures. This is the message of the two

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13 The Hebrew word *ruach* means breath, spirit or moving air.

14 Arthur Walker-Jones, *The Green Psalter: Resources for Ecological Spirituality* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2009), 91.

15 The Hebrew word *ruach* is commonly used in the feminine.

16 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (London: SCM Press, 1992), 9–10.

17 See Cresantia Frances Koya-Vaka’uta, “The Density of Vā,” in *The Relational Self: Decolonising Personhood in the Pacific*, ed. Upolu Lumā Va’ai and Unaisi Nabobo-Baba, 285–287 (Suva: University of the South Pacific and Pacific Theological College, 2017). It vividly speaks to this interconnectedness of all life in Pacific worldview.

creation narratives in Genesis 1–2. Earth (Creation as a whole) is willed into being by God and is a grand extension of God’s commitment, life and love, as Exodus 31:17 suggests: “... the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, *and was refreshed ...*” (*NRSV*, italics and bold added). It is also the message of Revelation 21:3: “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘See, the home<sup>18</sup> of God is among mortals. He will dwell<sup>19</sup> with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them’” (*NRSV*).

The Greek root for home is *Oikos*, and the three words—*economics*, *ecology* and *ecumene*—all derive from this word. With regard to the first two, Steve de Gruchy says, “Our English word economy is made up of two Greek words, *oikos-nomos*, meaning the rules of the home or the rule of the household. Our English word ecology is made up of the Greek words *oikos-logos*, meaning the study of the home or household, the study of the way things relate and are integrated to make the home work.”<sup>20</sup> *Oikoumene* derives also from *oikos*, and refers to “... the whole inhabited earth, the world the inhabitants of the earth ...”<sup>21</sup>

Economics, ecology and ecumene all belong together. The rules of the home are meant to relate in ways that would and should make the home work for the common good, and this home or *oikos* is inclusive of all its constituents, human and non-human. Human life and wellbeing and all its relationships (ecumene, ecumenical) are intricately connected and interconnected with economic relations (*oikos-nomos*) and the ecological web of life (*oikos-logos*).

Logically, therefore, a more legitimate and holistic measure of wellbeing must of necessity include human life’s interconnectedness with economics and ecology. It is from the foregoing understanding that the concept of *community of creation* or *Earth Community* is established and advanced.<sup>22</sup> Taking this further, there is certainly value and substance in Geoff Davies<sup>23</sup>

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18 In Greek, “the tabernacle of God ...”

19 In Greek, “He will tabernacle with them ...” The other Greek word is *skene* (Hebrew equivalent is *Shekinah*), and both mean God’s physical presence with God’s people.

20 Cited in the South African Council of Churches website, <http://www.sacc.org.za/news07/oikos.html>.

21 “Oikoumene,” [www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/com](http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/com).

22 See, for instance, Larry Rasmussen, *Earth Community Earth Ethics* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996); and Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990).

23 See Geoff Davies, *Economia: New Economic Systems to Empower People and Support the Living World* (Sydney: ABC Books, 2004): “Our impact upon the Earth can also be reduced through the creation or re-creation of functioning neighbourhoods and local communities, within which work, recreation, social interaction and even food production are added to the mere residing. ... We have seen that well-integrated communities of this type promise to be far less wasteful of energy and other resources than our present sprawling, car-dominated cities. We must strive to re-create healthy small communities as the basis upon which all larger social structures are built. Such communities might take

and others<sup>24</sup> call for nurturing small communities of life within larger socio-economic systems and structures.

Thirdly, the kingdom of God is for the Earth and takes seriously Earth's constituents. The parables about the kingdom of God in Matthew 13 support and underpin this view:

... <sup>3a</sup>a sower went out to sow ... <sup>24</sup>The kingdom of God may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field ... <sup>31</sup>The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field ... <sup>33</sup>The kingdom of God is like yeast that a woman took and mixed with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened ... <sup>44</sup>The kingdom of God is like treasure hidden in the field ... <sup>45</sup>Again, the kingdom of God is like a merchant in search of fine pearls ... <sup>46</sup>Again, the kingdom of God is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind ... (NRSV)

A careful and attentive re-reading of Matthew 13 immediately reveals that the images of the kingdom of God are drawn from farming, fishing, shell collecting, and work done by women and men—all of which are found on/in the land and sea. God's kingdom is not described as coming from on high down to earth. Rather, it rises quietly and imperceptibly out of the land and sea; it is established not by armies and military might, but by the common people; its colours are not gold and scarlet and purple, but earth tones: brown, yellow, green and blue; and its symbolism is not masculine (kings, swords, chargers, shields, spears) but feminine (water, soil, dough, women, a home).<sup>25</sup>

Reading and interpreting the kingdom of God in this way resonates very strongly with the Oceanic sense of attachment to and interconnectedness with the land and sea and air. The Lord's Prayer says it clearly: "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, *on earth* as it is in heaven ..." (Matthew 6:10, NRSV). As mentioned earlier, Revelation 21:3 affirms that God will dwell with God's people on Earth. Reweaving the Ecological Map is about recognizing and affirming that Earth is the locus of the kingdom of God, and therefore the land, sea and air, and all therein, are integral to a proper understanding of God's presence in our midst, and

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new forms, but if they are to serve our basic needs they must provide regular personal contact, supportive relationships and a sense of belonging and being valued for our humanity and our uniqueness" (462).

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996); Fritjof Capra, *The Turning Point: Science, Society and the Rising Culture* (New York: Bantam, 1982); David Suzuki, *The Sacred Balance* (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 1997); and Robert Theobald, *Reworking Success: New Communities at the Millennium* (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 1997). A very important aspect of some of these discussions is their interweaving of spirituality and the imperative to rebuild small communities.

<sup>25</sup> For a fuller exposition of this way of interpreting the parables of the kingdom, see Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1992).

of God's intentions for humanity and Earth as a whole.

Finally, fullness of life is connected with the environments in which we live, move and have our being. In John 10:10 Jesus says, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (*NRSV*). The images used by Jesus from verses 1-9, namely shepherd, sheep, gate, pasture, grassland, etc., are more about material and physical things, such as care, protection, safety, security, food and water, than they are about spiritual things—prayer, worship, fellowship, meditation, etc.

This understanding of fullness of life is supported by the Greek word Jesus uses in the text, namely *zoe*. The Greek *zoe* has three primary uses, namely: one's means of life (i.e., livelihood); life or existence itself; and lifestyle.<sup>26</sup> The renowned theologian Rudolf Bultmann wrote that "zoe denotes in Greek the physical vitality of organic beings, animals, men [sic] and also plants. Life is understood, not as a thing, but as vitality, as the nature or manner which characterizes all living creatures as such."<sup>27</sup>

In today's common linguistic understanding, fullness of life includes food, clean water, shelter (a home/safety), education, meaningful work (with fair and just wages), freedom to make informed choices, leisure time, inclusion and participation, health, dignity and respect, safety and protection, and freedom from violence. In the text, Jesus speaks of the sheep going out and coming in and, as such, being saved. Salvation in this context is very tangible—being saved from harm and hunger and thirst, being saved from wild animals, and being saved from thieves and robbers. Salvation is connected with the environment.

Environment—land, sea, air—is the most immediate and tangible form and symbol of the grace or *mana* of God for Pasifika peoples.<sup>28</sup> Tuwera and Bird<sup>29</sup> both argue strongly that in Pasifika we cannot speak of salvation without speaking also of the land-sea-air or the environment. According to Fugmann, salvation in Melanesia could be "described in terms of gaining or regaining the ultimate fullness of life ..."<sup>30</sup> From this perspective, salvation, on the one hand, constitutes and reflects the human desire for wellbeing and fulfillment in every aspect of

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26 See "Zoe," [http://www.wenstrom.org/downloads/written/word\\_studies/greek/zoe.pdf](http://www.wenstrom.org/downloads/written/word_studies/greek/zoe.pdf).

27 Ibid.

28 See Cliff Bird, "Re-conceptualising Salvation: Some Insights from a Solomon Islands Culture towards a Relevant Theology of Salvation Today," *Pacific Journal of Theology* II, no. 42 (2009): 23–39.

29 See Ilaitia S. Tuwera, *Vanua: Towards a Fijian Theology of Place* (Suva and Auckland: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, and College of St John the Evangelist, 2002); and Cliff Bird, "Pepesa—The Household of Life: A Theological Exploration of Land in the Context of Change in Solomon Islands," PhD thesis, Charles Sturt University, 2008.

30 Gernot Fugmann, ed., *Ethics and Development in Papua New Guinea* (Tacloban City: Divine Word University Publications, 1984), 114.

life, be it health, success, fertility, respect or honour; on the other hand, salvation is seen as the absence of forces that stand in destructive tension with life, such as sickness, death, infertility, poverty, dishonour—the life-denying and life-negating forces.<sup>31</sup> In other words, this understanding and experience of salvation is intricately connected with the environment—with the salvific benefits and values of the land-sea-air life-community. This is the holistic understanding of “fullness of life” in the context of Oceania.

What the foregoing points to is that the vision of Reweaving the Ecological Mat connects and interconnects with all of life, including the economic relations and cultural-social lifeways of Pasifika peoples. As Upolu Va’ai and Unaisi Nabobo-Baba point out, personhood in the Pacific cannot be spoken about apart from one’s immediate surroundings: “We cannot talk about development in the Pacific without talking about how a person thinks and behaves. We cannot talk about the environment and society without talking about human beings’ attitudes ... personhood is so deeply connected to all of life that it cannot be treated in isolation from the interconnected web of life.”<sup>32</sup> Reweaving the Ecological Mat is an approach to and platform for development that is interrelational and holistic, and calls for the participation of all countries and peoples of Pasifika.

**“Environment—land, sea, air—is the most immediate and tangible form and symbol of the grace or mana of God for Pasifika peoples. ”**

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31 See Bird, “Re-conceptualising Salvation.”

32 Upolu Lumā Va’ai and Unaisi Nabobo-Baba, “Introduction,” in *The Relational Self: Decolonising Personhood in the Pacific*, ed. Upolu Lumā Va’ai and Unaisi Nabobo-Baba (Suva: University of the South Pacific and Pacific Theological College, 2017), 1.



**From left to right:** An uninhabited Island in Rotuma photo by Moiro Hereta, Port Moresby Metropolis area, An Artist doing a painting by IMR, View of Suva City behind the trees. Low tide on Nuku'lau island photo by Daphney Kiki. , Fijian youths ready after a Meke, Rev. Dr. Cliff Bird at the Reweaving the Ecological Conference, Rosa and Meretui at the Reweaving the Ecological Mat Conference, A Samoan girl performing the tau'olunga, The Pacific Theological College Chapel photos by Institute for Mission and Research.



**From left to right:** A Dyna used as Public Motor Vehicle overloaded with passengers in Port Moresby, A view of building in Port Moresby, a women carrying an eski going to the Market, table discussions at the Reweaving the ecological Mat conference in PNG photo by IMR. Sunrise colours through the bush, A girl carrying a cuscus photo by Maia Vai, the Eucharist elements, youths strategizing at the Reweaving the Ecological Mat Retreat, group discussion at the REM Conference, a man selling crabs at the Market photo by IMR.



**From left to right:** A cross the symbol of Christ in the PTC Chapel by IMR. A woman preparing the mumu photo, Sun rising through the pandanus and leaves photo by James Kiki. Pacific Youths performing a dance. Professor Elise Huffer talking at the Reweaving the Ecological Mat Retreat. A woman talking and a man listening. Pacific youths learning how to weave. Rev James Bhagwan at the Reweaving the Ecological Mat Retreat photo by Institute for Mission and Research, Burning tones on a fire for mumu, Sunrise at Aroma Coast, PNG Photo by Daphney Kiki



**From left to right:** Church leader contemplating at a REM conference. Pacific Children in kindergarten. Two women doing a presentation. Pacific Islanders dancing together at a gathering photo by IMR. A traditional house at Finschhafen, PNG photo by Rusila Nabouniu. Church leaders in PNG discussing at the Reweaving the Ecological Mat Conference photo by IMR. A stream of fresh water photo by Rusila Nabouniu. A woman doing a presentation photo by IMR. A Finschhafen traditional hauskuk. A kettle on an outdoor fire photo by Rusila Nabouniu



## PART 2: ECONOMIC FRAMING

Reweaving the Ecological Mat (REM) requires a deep understanding of the *value* of our ecological biodiversity, as well as the *cost* of depleting and degrading our environment. Too often this idea of value is woven into a monetary understanding of how much things cost. And while this may seem obvious, it is important to remember that what is not often measured are the hidden costs that undermine, devalue and alienate us from the true value of our biodiversity, which is our interaction with our environment.

When we speak about economics, we should be speaking about the values of our wellbeing, with a concern for environmental sustainability more than the accumulation of financial wealth, which is a perversion of the true meaning of economics. Ashoka Mody, professor of international economic policy at Princeton University, discussed *why economics matters* in a radio interview, and concluded: “It is because we want people’s lives to be better; where we’ve gone wrong is in pursuing the wrong kind of growth. We can do a growth that ultimately helps people’s lives, and makes the climate change problem less daunting than it is.”<sup>33</sup>

As stewards of our environment with a traditional understanding of the patterns of natural climatic cycles, many of us recognize that how we engage with our environment has everything to do with our livelihood, from how and what we eat to where we sleep and find comfort and security, to our notions of health, work and education. As the economy changes, however, so do we, and that includes how we interact with our environment, our communities, and how we understand our place in the world.

Although we have mostly adapted to the modern and postmodern changes in our economy, the downside is that many of us may have lost the intimacy we once shared with our environment, some becoming strangers to the land, missing or overlooking the subtle changes in our biodiversity. Changes to the fresh water table, salinization, pollution, contamination of the soil, the disappearance of flora and fauna—all of these factors contribute towards further alienating us from our deep relationship with our environment and increasing our reliance on industrialization.

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33 Ashoka Mody, “An Economist Responds to Greta Thunberg,” interview with Kai Rysdall, *APM Marketplace*, 24 September 2019, <https://www.marketplace.org/2019/09/24/an-economist-responds-to-greta-thunberg/>.

We know that nature is considered to be self-regulating and tends towards a balance. Yet the overwhelming industrial outputs and the demand for economic growth and financial wealth have tested those assumptions and forced us into the dilemma of unsustainability. We have known this for a generation, and now we have hit the tipping point of our inaction.

Addressing the United Nations in September 2019, sixteen-year-old climate change activist Greta Thunberg castigated policy makers and scolded, “How dare you? We are in the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth.” Her anger and frustration due to the inaction of global leaders and policy makers spoke to the world.

So the question is, what are we to do, how do we solve this? Policy makers understand that this has to be solved systemically. But the large economies have been unable to make a move because the too-big-to-fail banks, corporations and industries, and all the mechanics of the present economy have been unwilling to or incapable of budging. Moreover, for many of those who are in the seats of power, the accumulation of financial wealth is a greater priority than global sustainability. Many are unwilling to make the necessary changes and sacrifices that will reduce climate impacts.

How do we move forward? Reweaving the Ecological Mat underscores that it is up to the small economies to make the necessary changes that will return the planet to a sustainable place, and how we do that is to collectively change the way that we value our environment. This does not mean that we ignore the industrialization of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but that we use the tools of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to provide us with the means to shift towards a place that is sustainable. This requires that we work towards accounting for and restoring our environments, and investing in our labour and our ecological-economic baseline.

Most economists understand that there is a need to revise the way we account for growth, but many are so focused on the minutia of growth that they have lost the fundamental understanding of what economics means for people’s lives, just as we have mostly become estranged in our relationship with the environment. We have become as alienated from the land as many economists have from the practical objectives of economics.

Thomas Piketty, in his recent tome, *Capital in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, speaking about the history of national accounts, writes, “One of the primary objectives was to calculate the total value of the land, by far the most important source of wealth in the agrarian societies of the day, and

then to relate the quantity of landed wealth to the level of agricultural output and land rents.”<sup>34</sup> This occurred in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. As colonization advanced, national accounts began to aggregate the value of the colonies, understanding very well that territories provided far more wealth than what could be accounted for in the metropolitan state.

In the development of income and output, there is every reason in the world for the regions to begin accounting for their own data. As an article in *The Economist* pointed out, “The world’s most valuable resource is no longer oil, but data.”<sup>35</sup> In a speech by 2020 US Democratic Party presidential candidate Andrew Yang, he even argued for a Universal Basic Income of \$1,000 a month for all Americans based on the value of data assets.

Piketty asks, “Does the kind of social state that emerged in the developed countries in the twentieth century have a universal vocation? Will we see a similar development in the poor and emerging countries? Nothing could be less certain. ... Different choices are possible at equivalent levels of development,” he concludes, and “In any case, the question of what kind of fiscal and social state will emerge in the developing world is of the utmost importance for the future of the planet.”<sup>36</sup>

If we were to establish a data baseline that measures the point at which our interaction with the environment was more fully integrated, we could then account for those changes and measure them as offsets, or the amount at which our environment is out of line. Utilizing this data, we could measure and quantify the costs of reducing these offsets towards restoring our environment. In the Pacific, a Working Group on Data, Statistics and Valuation has developed an economic equation to address this called *Intemperate Accounting*.<sup>37</sup>

In remote islands and villages in the Pacific, some of these changes might seem small and hardly noticeable, but when we combine that with the 7.7 billion people in the world, and account for the varying degrees of industrialization and alienation, collectively these changes are vast and overwhelming. And although the idea of accounting for all of those changes may seem daunting and impossible to quantify, I would argue that it is precisely the *collective* act of measuring offsets that will lead us towards restoring our climate and valuing our ecological

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34 Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2014), 56.

35 “The World’s Most Valuable Resource is No Longer Oil, but Data,” *The Economist*, 6 May, 2017, <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2017/05/06/the-worlds-most-valuable-resource-is-no-longer-oil-but-data>.

36 Piketty, *Capital in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 492.

37 Arnie Saiki, “Intemperate Accounting,” Working Group on Data, Statistics, and Valuation, Video, 29 July, 2019, <https://youtube/dnOvSTsE8fw>.

biodiversity. We who inhabit the most remote islands, mountains, deserts and forests should be the first to set the value of our ecological data, because the economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will depend on us meeting our ecological and development goals. Since Pacific peoples are the most qualified to restore Pacific environments, what we need are the funds to develop infrastructure programs and services that will assist with this restoration.

How we may come to understand this could be through witnessing the loss of shoreline, the changing of our freshwater table, or the lack of sea cucumbers or other species. All of these changes should be accounted for, as such changes have inherent values that should be used to define our traditional economies. As we begin to frame our relationship to the environment as economic, we need to have an understanding of how things were historically, and establish a baseline of data that we can use to measure where we are now, predict what the changes will be in the future, and work towards restoring our biodiversity. If we are ever to restore our planet, it really does require the cooperation of everyone.

***“We who inhabit the most remote islands, mountains, deserts and forests should be the first to set the value of our ecological data, because the economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will depend on us meeting our ecological and development goals. ”***

In his recent book, *Economics for the Common Good*, Jean Tirole, winner of the 2014 Nobel Prize in Economics, asks, “Have we lost sight of the common good? If so, how might economics help us get back on track in pursuing it?” Following this question, he reminds us that “our collective aspiration for society requires, to some extent, a value judgment. ... Even if we were to agree on the basic desirability of certain objectives, we might still differ over the relative importance of equity, purchasing power, the environment, or work versus private life—not to mention more personal dimensions such as moral values, religion, or spirituality, where people’s opinions differ profoundly.”<sup>38</sup>

Over the course of just a few generations, we have come to understand in an intimate way that

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38 Jean Tirole, *Economics for the Common Good* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 2.

our traditional livelihoods and access to food have changed. In many respects, going to the market to exchange goods and foods has been a traditional part of our lives as Pacific Islanders for thousands of years. Reciprocity and exchange make our lives much easier, yet what are the hidden costs of the way we currently consume packaged, canned or fast foods? We know that in our own communities, diabetes, cancers and other diseases have increased over the generations, since these outcomes can be statistically confirmed, but what about the ill health of our environment? We know that there have been changes, but how can we account for these changes if we do not have a baseline from which to measure these changes, or offsets? Without the data, what records might we use to measure our relationship to production or reciprocity? Our traditional elders might be the only ones left who have a customary memory of crop output, planting seasons, markets, or the relationship we have with our ecosystem.

Classical Western economists like Adam Smith and David Ricardo based their economic frameworks on the fundamental principles of capitalism and the free market. Yet the way in which modern capitalist economies has developed has not only ignored the warnings of these free-market economists but has fetishized the accumulation of wealth. In 1776, Adam Smith published *The Wealth of Nations*, and wrote: “It must always be remembered, however, that it is the luxurious and not the necessary expense of the inferior ranks of people that ought ever to be taxed.”<sup>39</sup> How is it, then, that the richest people in the richest countries pay the least in taxes while continuing to promote the benefits of capitalism, yet continue to ignore its warnings at the expense of the health and wellbeing of peoples and the environment?

In 1817 David Ricardo wrote his *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*. In the original preface, he begins by stating, “The produce of the earth—all that is derived from its surface by the united application of labour, machinery, and capital, is divided among three classes of the community, namely, the proprietor of the land, the owner of the stock or capital necessary for its cultivation, and the labourers by whose industry it is cultivated.”<sup>40</sup> Just as with Smith, the fundamentals of Ricardo have been spuriously applied to maximize wealth for the few over the implied benefits for all the stakeholders.

This accumulation of wealth plays, in political economy, the same role as “original sin” in theology. As Karl Marx writes:

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39 Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (New York: Random House, Modern Library Edition, 1994), 958.

40 David Ricardo, *The Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004), 1.

Adam bit the apple, and thereupon sin fell on the human race. Its origin is supposed to be explained when it is told as an anecdote of the past. In times long gone by, there were two sorts of people; one, the diligent, intelligent, and above all, frugal elite; the other, lazy rascals, spending their substance, and more, in riotous living. The legend of theological original sin tells us certainly how man came to be condemned to eat his bread in the sweat of his brow; but the history of economic original sin reveals to us that there are people to whom this is by no means essential. Never mind! Thus it came to pass that the former sort accumulated wealth, and the latter sort had at last nothing to sell except their own skins, And from this original sin dates the poverty of the great majority that, despite all its labour, has up to now nothing to sell but itself, and the wealth of the few that increases constantly although they have long ceased to work.<sup>41</sup>

As we consider what it would take to measure the offsets of cities, urban and industrial areas that have long ago departed from their connection with natural environments, this data may appear immeasurable (and perhaps it is!), but as long as we can establish a methodology for accounting for a data baseline in our region, we would know that the value of our environmental data is directly proportionate to the assets and revenues of urban and industrial centres that contribute to environmental degradation and depletion.

In other words, the health of our planet may be dependent on cities and industries immediately providing capital for us to account for and restore our environment. There is no better example of how to achieve economic equilibrium in equitable and fair trade than by valuing all of the externalities around our ecological biodiversity in proportion to the assets of cities and large urban areas. As this exchange continues, the value of our ecological data will likely adjust to an equilibrium that will bring equity among the regions.

In 1955, the British economist James Meade published *Trade and Welfare*, in which this precise cycle of exchange was studied. Among a wide range of economic conditions, he analyzed how our economic welfare will become equitable under the assumption that ‘the same distributional weights are allotted to all citizens of the world.’<sup>42</sup> If we apply this to the valuation of our ecological data, this suggests that the exchange of restoring our ecological biodiversity against the production and consumption aggregates in industrial states has the

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41 Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1 (New York: International Publishers, 1972), 713–714.

42 James E. Meade, *The Theory of International Economic Policy: Trade and Welfare*, Vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955).

potential for being equitably valued in the global economy. As we look towards the future, it is reasonable to surmise that when the industrial states finally comprehend that the cost of their ecological malfeasance is both ecologically and economically unsustainable, developing countries will already have created and adopted resilient technologies that will both provide for equitable economic exchange and allow for communities to confront many of the challenges that climate change will bring.

The restoration of our environment in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should not be merely an act to provide assets and revenue for shareholders and policy makers from the large industrial countries. It requires a considerable development of international, if not supranational, economic-ecological organization by developing countries. Restoration requires a careful selection of domestic economic-ecological policies. While they aim to be effective for the attainment of economic-ecological sustainability within the various countries and regions, the major aims of this policy should directly influence the international economic-ecological order. In other words, it is up to the regional institutions, the states, and the will of the people to implement this change.

But if we can account for these changes in our own communities, and everyone, everywhere, accounts for the changes in their communities, then understanding those changes on a global scale and accounting for them becomes comprehensible and manageable. How we go about doing this is by changing the way we measure, value and account for our relationship with our environment.

Intemerate ecological accounting<sup>43</sup> provides us with a path forward. By establishing a data baseline that we can use to restore our ecological biodiversity, we are not only accounting for sustainability but also providing for labour, income, access and infrastructure to develop the tools we need to confront the global challenge of climate change. Intemerate means *pure*, *inviolable* and *sacred*, and the objective for this kind of ecological accounting framework is to shift the modality of economics from privileging industrial indicators towards ecological indicators defined and stewarded by those who are closest to them.

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43 See Arnie Saiki, “Transforming our Common Constraints to Development through Ecological Integration and Intemerate Accounts,” Regional Policy Consultation Submission to the Pacific Islands Forum, 27 February, 2018, <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Transforming-our-common-constraints-to-development-through-ecological-integration-and-intemerate-accounts.pdf>.

***“As we look towards the future, it is reasonable to surmise that when the industrial states finally comprehend that the cost of their ecological malfeasance is both ecologically and economically unsustainable, developing countries will already have created and adopted resilient technologies that will both provide for equitable economic exchange and allow for communities to confront many of the challenges that climate change will bring. ”***

Reweaving the Ecological Mat requires a regional approach that we can use to create a process for changing global carbon outputs, while at the same time creating livelihoods that will help us manage the various changes impacting our ability to remain in our homes.



**From left to right:** A Lake in between two mountains, Mt Wilhelm, PNG photo by Molly Hazame. Sun setting behind buildings in Suva City photo by Ropate Lesi. A typical Pacific family dining in Fiji photo by Iliana Biutu. The Huli wigman, PNG. The mountains in Eastern Highlands Province, PNG. A PNG elder with his bow and arrow and spears outside his traditional hut in Goroka, Eastern Highlands Province, PNG photo by Molly Hazame. The mountains of Fiji photo by Iliana Biutu. Indigenous ladies in face painting, hair feathers and shell necklaces. Pacific youths in traditional dress performing a dance photo by IMR. Mountains in Viti Levu, Fiji photo by Iliana Biutu.



**From left to Right:** Bamboo cooking on open fire. Corn grilling on open fire. A highlands traditional hut. a highlands warrior in traditional head dress. Grilling root crops on open fire. Plantain sales at the market. Cooking in a clay pot. The PNG highlands highway. Mourning party in white/yellow clay going to a funeral in Goroka. Children paddling a canoe.

*Photo credit: Molly Hazame*



**From left to right:** The Kanaki, Maohi Nui and Papua English students unite against genocide in West Papua photo by IMR. Tongan students at USP getting ready for a dance photo by Margret Wamala. Two men protesting against domestic violence in PNG photo by IMR. Tuvalu ladies in colourful traditional grass skirts. Tongan men dancing. Tokelau students at the USP Open Day photo by Margret Wamala. A community in Hela Province, PNG during a reconciliation. Fijian men during a sevusevu photo by IMR. Ladies from Kirabati dancing a traditional dance photo by Margret Wamala. Fijian ladies cleaning the mangroves in Suva photos by IMR.



**From left to right:** Mt Tavurvur Volcanoe crater East New Britain, PNG photo by Molly Hazame. A fresh water stream in Fiji photo by Iliana Biutu. Women selling fresh organic fruits at the Market photo by Maia Vai. A Methodist church building in Lopta, Rotuma. The sea crashing on the reef in Rotuma photos by Daphney Kiki. Two ladies carrying the mat to a Fijian reguregu. A dead seaweed floating in the sea by Margret Wamala. A presentation of claypot making at PIF's IUCN conference. a view of China Town in Honiara photos by IMR. A bilum hanging in a traditional hut with woven cane walls photo by Molly Hazame.

## PART 3: CULTURAL SPIRITUALITY FRAMING

Culture defines our identity as Pacific Island people. It is seen as being part of the lifestyle of people, but its role has been undermined and undervalued. In most cases, culture has been relegated to its visible expressions such as dances, handicrafts and folklore. *Regional Culture Strategy—Investing in Culture: Pacific Cultures*<sup>44</sup>

Reweaving the Ecological Mat (REM) also requires a deep understanding of the *value* of our cultures and traditional spiritualities in the Pacific.<sup>45</sup> This final section outlines the contours of these “cultural-traditional lifeways”<sup>46</sup> and, at the same time, weaves together the spirit of the foregoing sections.

### Interweaving of Cultures and Spiritualities

Cultures and spiritualities of Pacific peoples are integrally interwoven. This is a position that is well presented in literature on culture-religion (or culture-spirituality) discourse. That there was and is a deep sense of interconnectedness of all life means that there was and is no culture/nature dichotomy. The seminal ‘coconut theology’ of ‘Amanaki Havea in the 1960s,<sup>47</sup> the ‘grassroots theology’ of Leslie Boseto in the 1980s and 1990s,<sup>48</sup> the ‘*vanua* (land) theology’ of Sevati Tuwere in the 1990s and early 2000s,<sup>49</sup> the ‘eco-theology’ of Amaamalelele

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44 Pacific Community, *Regional Culture Strategy—Investing in Culture: Pacific Cultures 2010–2020* (Suva: SPC, 2018), [https://spccfpstore1.blob.core.windows.net/digitallibrary-docs/files/e2/e235f642fa0e6099f27ebedf78717fe6.pdf?sv=2015-12-11&sr=b&sig=zIQ8PRs%2FAWESB3MGJ7zJKL9xTrn%2FCGUVdoZYQyXG5hQ%3D&se=2021-01-12T20%3A54%3A30Z&sp=r&rsc=public%2C%20max-age%3D864000%2C%20max-stale%3D86400&rset=application%2Fpdf&rscd=inline%3B%20filename%3D%22Regional\\_culture\\_strategy\\_2010\\_2020\\_Phase\\_2.pdf%22](https://spccfpstore1.blob.core.windows.net/digitallibrary-docs/files/e2/e235f642fa0e6099f27ebedf78717fe6.pdf?sv=2015-12-11&sr=b&sig=zIQ8PRs%2FAWESB3MGJ7zJKL9xTrn%2FCGUVdoZYQyXG5hQ%3D&se=2021-01-12T20%3A54%3A30Z&sp=r&rsc=public%2C%20max-age%3D864000%2C%20max-stale%3D86400&rset=application%2Fpdf&rscd=inline%3B%20filename%3D%22Regional_culture_strategy_2010_2020_Phase_2.pdf%22).

45 Traditional spiritualities are seen as integrally connected with Christian theological thinking and understanding, as outlined in the first section of this paper.

46 This expression is from Ama'amalele Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology: AIGA—The Household of God, A Perspective from Living Myths and Traditions of Samoa* (Erlangen: Erlangen Verl. für Mission und Okumene, 2000).

47 Sione 'Amanaki Havea, “Christianity in the Pacific Context,” in *South Pacific Theology: Papers from Consultation on Pacific Theology, Papua New Guinea, January 1986* (Parramatta: Regnum Books and World Vision International South Pacific, 1986). Although Havea's theological thinking was only published later, he began to articulate such thinking in the 1960s and 1970s.

48 Among his publications, see Leslie Boseto, “God as Community—God in Melanesian Theology,” *Pacific Journal of Theology* II, no. 10 (1993): 41–48; “Toward a Pacific Theology of Reality,” *Pacific Journal of Theology* II, no. 12 (1994): 53–61; “Do Not Separate Us from Our Land,” *Pacific Journal of Theology* II, no. 13 (1995): 69–72; and *Lauru Land Conference of Tribal Community: Philosophy, Theology and Guiding Principles* (Suva: Pacific Conference of Churches, 1995.)

49 See the following works by Ilaitia Sevati Tuwere: “Making Sense of the *Vanua* (Land) in the Fijian Context: A

Tofaeono<sup>50</sup> at the turn of the millennium, and the ‘*moana* (sea/ocean) theology’ of Winston Halapua<sup>51</sup> in the late 2000s all underpin this integrated view of the world, and especially the inseparable relationship between Pacific cultures and spiritualities. What Franco Zocca says about such integral relationships in Melanesia holds true for the Pacific in general: “Among them [primal societies] it is not easy to distinguish between religion and culture. The first, in fact, is inseparably intertwined with the second.”<sup>52</sup>

In a watershed regional-global ecumenical conference at the turn of the millennium, the Pacific Church Leaders highlighted several pillars for upholding the resilience of Pacific countries, three of which are: *Pacific cultures*, *Pacific spirituality*, and *Pacific traditional economy*.<sup>53</sup> They declared that “the traditional economy and the cultural values underpin the Pacific Island Countries and protect them from the full onslaught of the negative effects of globalization.”<sup>54</sup> The deep yet pragmatic sense of interconnected life is reflected, even embodied, in various aspects of the cultures-spiritualities web of life.

### Belief Systems and Rituals

Belief systems and religio-cultural rituals underpin the integrated view of cultures and spiritualities in the Pacific. Totemism and ritual burying of an infant’s placenta are two examples. Cultural connections through totems serve as distinctive identity marks of families, clans, tribal groups, and their broader relationships. Totemism is also a mark of deep and solemn spirituality. Performance of required rituals connects a person, clan or tribe to their flora and fauna in nature and thereby enables people to connect to their totems—bird species, sharks, dolphins and turtles, for example. These totemic relationships between people and beings on the land, in the sea and the sky reflect the rootedness and relationality of the people to place and their environments, and the deep religio-cultural significance of what it means

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Theological Exploration,” PhD thesis, Melbourne College of Divinity, 1992; “Indigenous People’s Struggle for Land and Identity: An Account from Fiji,” paper presented, Indigenous People’s Struggle for Land Identity in the Pacific: A Joint Seminar of the World Council of Churches Indigenous People’s Programme, the Pacific Desk of the World Council of Churches, and the Pacific Conference of Churches, Suva, Fiji, September 2000; and *Vanua: Towards a Fijian Theology of Place* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 2002).

50 See Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology*.

51 Winston Halapua, *Waves of God’s Embrace: Sacred Perspectives from the Ocean* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2008), and “*Theomoana*: Toward an Oceanic Theology,” *Concilium* 5 (2010): 23–33.

52 Franco Zocca, “Toward a Positive Theology of Cultures,” *Catalyst: Social Pastoral Magazine for Melanesia* 31, no. 2 (2001): 232–244.

53 World Council of Churches, *The Island of Hope: A Pacific Alternative to Economic Globalization*, Dossier 7 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2002).

54 *Ibid.*, 134.

to be Pacific peoples. Totemism ensures that no harm is done to a totem by its family, clan or tribe.

Burying of the placenta has long been a significant pan-Pacific spirituality ritual. The religious-cultural concepts of land as *whenua* (Maori, NZ), *fanua* (Samoa), *fonua* (Tonga) or *vanua* (Fiji) also refer to the placenta, symbolizing the Womb. For instance, according to a Maori tradition, all life is conceived and given birth from the womb of Papatūānuku.<sup>55</sup> Islands are seen as placentas from Papatūānuku's womb. Traditionally, when a baby is born the placenta and umbilical cord are buried in a special place, hence the description *tangata whenua*.

In the Tongan understanding, in the world of the womb the baby is sustained by her *fonua*, the placenta. The baby is later born into the *fonua* (land), where she experiences life and builds relationships with the *fonua*—the entire ecology, including its human inhabitants. As part of the birth process, the remains of the *fonua* (placenta) that sustained the baby are returned by burial to the *fonua* (physical land). The *pito* (umbilical cord that connects the baby to the *fonua*, placenta), once it falls off, is also returned to the *fonua* (physical land) through a similar burying ritual. Upon her death, she is returned to her *fonualoto* (land within the land), or her grave.<sup>56</sup>

Across the Pacific, this traditional ritual signified and continues to signify the cultural and spiritual significance of the land-sea-sky web of life. All life is seen as originating in and from the depths of the land-sea, nurtured by the land-sea-sky, and returning to them in the end.

### **Interconnectedness of Land-Sea-Sky**

The sense of place and home are reflected in the pan-Pacific parlance that speaks of the land-sea-sky web. Across the Pacific, the terms *vanua* (Fiji), *fenua* (Ma'ohi Nui), *fonua* (Tonga), *fanua* (Samoa), *whenua* (Maori, NZ), *hanua* (Makira, Solomon Islands) and *hanua bada* (Motu, PNG) all describe an all-embracing understanding of land. For instance, the Fijian understanding that while “*vanua* literally means land—it encompasses many things and includes earthly turf, flora and fauna of a given place, rivers and mountains, fishing grounds

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55 “In Māori tradition, *Papatūānuku* is the land. She is a mother earth figure who gives birth to all things, including people. Trees, birds and people are born from the land, which then nourishes them. Some traditions say that the land first emerged from under water.” “Story—*Papatūānuku*—The Land,” <https://teara.govt.nz/en/papatuanuku-the-land>.

56 Sione Tu'itahi, “*Langa Fonua*: How a Tongan Kainga Strived for Social and Economic Success in Aotearoa,” MPP thesis, Massey University, 2005. For similar examples, see Tuwere, *Vanua: Towards a Fijian Theology of Place*, for the traditional Fijian concept; and Bird, “Pepesa: The Household of Life,” for a Solomon Islands perspective.

(*vanua ni qoliqoli*) and more<sup>57</sup> resonates across cultures and creation spiritualities in the Pacific Islands. Land, rivers, seas, oceans (*moana*) and the sky are integral components of the Pacific cosmos. Epeli Hau'ofa highlights the significance of the ocean to Pacific Islanders:

'Oceania' connotes a sea of islands with their inhabitants. The world of our ancestors was a large sea full of places to explore, to make their homes in, to breed generations of seafarers like themselves. People raised in this environment were at home with the sea. They played in it as soon as they could walk steadily, they worked in it, they fought on it. They developed great skills for navigating their waters, and the spirit to traverse even the few large gaps that separated their island groups.<sup>58</sup>

In elevating the importance of the forest ecosystem, a tribal member in Papua New Guinea asserts that "the forest is an entity, a true ecosystem in which all the species are in close interdependent relationship, guaranteeing its regeneration. The eradication of a species would inevitably lead to the collapse of this system and hence [imperil] their own existence."<sup>59</sup> Highlighting the critical importance of land understood in this way, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat has stated:

At the simplest level, land derives its centrality from its communal role as the source of livelihood and way of life through subsistence activities. Land provides family and communal living space. Land is a source of food, medicinal items, firewood, cooking utensils, building materials, clothing, tools, weapons and decorations. Even as traditional societies join the cash economy, land continues to be used for these purposes, although in some cases goods may be sold or exchanged rather than used by the community. This traditional role of land is equivalent to it acting as a source of employment and resources and a store of wealth.<sup>60</sup>

Tuwere and Bird speak of the interconnectedness of the rhythms and processes of the land with those of the ocean and the moon, and of how human life is intricately interwoven with

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57 Tuwere, *Vanua: Towards a Fijian Theology of Place*, 31.

58 Epeli Hau'ofa, *A New Oceania: Rediscovering our Sea of Islands* (Suva: University of the South Pacific in association with Beake House, 1993), 15.

59 Cited in Suliana Siwatibau, "Forests, Trees, and Human Needs in Pacific Communities," paper presented, XII World Forestry Congress, Quebec City, Canada, 2003.

60 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *Forum Eyes Only: Land Issues in the Pacific* (Suva: PIFS, May 2001). Note that terms such as "source of employment," "resources" and "store of wealth" used by the Forum Secretariat are neither neutral nor value-free but reflect the ways in which land is becoming commodified.

these rhythms and processes. Tofaeono highlights the interconnectedness of human life with the divine and other existences. Halapua, concurring with Hau’ofa, speaks of how the oceans and seas connect the islands of the Pacific rather than separating them. This land-sea-atmosphere web of life has readability characteristics that enable people to live in meaningful relationships with their environments and, as such, it is the very core of Pacific cultures and spiritualities.

For the Pacific Islands, the environment-land, sea, air-is the most immediate and tangible form and symbol of the grace or *mana* of God for Pasifika peoples.<sup>61</sup> This critical importance of the environment web (land-sea-sky) is further highlighted by SPREP in relation to climate change and natural disasters: “Our natural environment provides us with food, material for shelter, medicine and our economic income. If we strengthen our environment it can help protect us also. If we degrade our natural environment this means that when we do have

climate change impacts such as water surges or cyclones, we cannot rely upon our natural resources systems to support and protect us anymore.”<sup>62</sup>

**“The wellbeing and flourishing of shared life is either enhanced or hindered within the context of the environments in which we as Pacific Islanders live, move and have our being.”**

### **Interconnectedness and Wellness of Life**

In light of the foregoing, in both practice and understanding life and living are very much connected to this cultures-spiritualities web. All of life is interconnected. For the majority of people, daily life experience is still based on the interrelatedness of land, sea and sky. In this sense, the good life and the goodness of life are integrally interconnected with the web of land-sea-sky.

On the one hand, the good life in Pacific cultures could be stated as the human desire for wellbeing and fulfillment in every aspect of life-be it health, success, fecundity, respect, honour and interrelationality. On the other hand, it could be stated as the absence of forces that stand in destructive tension with life, such as sickness, conflicts,

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61 See Tuwere, *Vanua: Towards a Fijian Theology of Place*; and Bird, “Re-conceptualising Salvation.” This view resonates with John Donohue’s claim that “Grace in essence is a way of talking about God’s creative, life-giving, beneficent presence to and within all, both personal and impersonal entities, spiritual and material.” Cited in Anton Wessels, *Europe: Was it Ever Really Christian? The Interaction between Gospel and Culture* (London, SCM Press, 1994), 86.

62 “Working with Nature to Adapt to Climate Change Impacts,” SPREP Press Release, Majuro, Marshall Islands, 20 October, 2009.

infecundity, poverty, dishonour and death.<sup>63</sup> The wellbeing and flourishing of shared life is either enhanced or hindered within the context of the environments in which we as Pacific Islanders live, move and have our being. As Leslie Boseto has said, “[o]ur existence and our survival can never be separated from our land and sea. Our life in God is in creation. God is our bread of life and our water of life in our land and sea. Our tropical forest is the home and garden of many species as well as our human communities. Our land and sea are us and we are them. Do not separate us. If you do so, you are murdering us.”<sup>64</sup> Hau’ofa made this evocative claim: “We are the sea, we are the ocean.”<sup>65</sup>

Within this framework, customary livelihood practices, traditional knowledge and totemic associations govern the activities and interactions between indigenous peoples and nature, and these in turn are entrenched within indigenous notions of time and place.<sup>66</sup> In Samoan traditional cultures and spiritualities, for example, the concept of harmony recognizes that all living things are equal-human life is equivalent and complementary to cosmic, plant and animal life. In the balance of life, all living things share equal status and power. Human beings are not more powerful or greater than the heavens, the trees, the fish or cattle, and vice versa. In the organization of life, the multiple relationships-human beings and the cosmos, people and the environment, person to person-are premised on the search for balance, peace and harmony.<sup>67</sup>

This Samoan worldview resonates with those of other Pacific island cultures and spiritualities. Holistic wellness of life is captured well in cultural concepts such as *sautu* in the Fijian context. *Sautu* incorporates all aspects of life in terms of physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual wellbeing, and transcends the present into the future. This state of wellness of life includes having a wide and healthy network of relationships. In Papua New Guinea *tok pisin*, the expression *gutpela sidaon*<sup>68</sup> captures a similar conception of the wellness of the

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63 See Cliff Bird, “Together Towards Life and Contemporary Pacific Theology,” in *Ecumenical Missiology: Changing Landscapes and New Conceptions of Mission*, Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series, Vol. 35, ed. Kenneth R. Ross, Jooseop Keum, Kyriaki Avtzi, and Roderick R. Hewitt, 507–518 (Oxford and Geneva: Regnum and WCC Publications, 2016).

64 Leslie Boseto, “Do Not Separate Us from Our Land,” *Pacific Journal of Theology* 2, no. 13 (1995): 69.

65 Hau’ofa, *A New Oceania*, 4.

66 See Tuwere, *Vanua: Towards a Fijian Theology of Place*.

67 Tui Atua T. T. Efi, *Su’esu’e Manogi—In Search of Fragrance: Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta’isi Efi and the Samoan Indigenous Reference* (Apia: Centre for Samoan Studies, National University of Samoa, 2009), 104.

68 The words attributed to Jesus in John’s gospel, namely ‘fullness of life,’ ‘abundant life’ or ‘life in all its fullness,’ are translated as *gutpela sidaon* in Papua New Guinea *tok pisin*.

totality of life. This conception of wellness of life does not exist in an insulated sterilized form; rather, it is acquired only in relationships with one's environment.<sup>69</sup>

## Language of Wellbeing and Wholeness-Traditional Economy

The language of wellness and wholeness in Pacific cultures and spiritualities is relationally oriented. Moreover, languages and local vernaculars connect human wellness and wellbeing to a people's immediate environment. Language is attached to the rhythms of nature-rains, winds, planting, harvesting, fish spawning seasons, and so on-and how these influence the wellbeing of people. Modern economic and financial accounting terms and systems are foreign to and, in fact, non-existent in the language of wellness and how such wellness or wellbeing is measured.

The *kastom or lokol ikonomi* in the context of Vanuatu provides a pertinent example. This *ikonomi* measure of value is holistic and includes, for example: land and access to land both for present and future generations; the importance of bush and sea "resources" such as different plants and their uses for livelihoods and sustenance; the preservation of ancient trees, bush and sea areas that provide habitats for wildlife and marine life; rain catchment areas that hold rainwater in the ground; the cleanliness of air, land and water from fuels and chemicals; the preservation of important cultural sacred sites linked to people's identities; and the preservation of the natural barrier features that ensure safety and protection from natural hazards, now and in the future.<sup>70</sup> In the pursuit of increased GDP, we need to take all possible steps to ensure that this does not undermine our traditional economies.

Traditional Economy is the popular description of the sector which, for the majority of Pacific Islanders, is still the mainstay of life. In the Pacific, the land and sea comprise the traditional economy or the subsistence sector, and this is by far still the largest sector. The subsistence economy or *lokol or kastomikonomi* is resilient and has sustained "living standards when (as happens periodically) the monetary sector has contracted."<sup>71</sup> Just as life and wellbeing

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<sup>69</sup> A similar concept, *kino*, is discussed by Bird, "Re-conceptualising Salvation," in the context of Solomon Islands. *Kino* (wellness, or totality of life, or holistic wellbeing) is possible and attainable only in relationships: relationships between people, relationships between people and their immediate environments—land-sea-sky—and relationships between people and the divine other.

<sup>70</sup> Ralph Regenvanu, "One Blue Pacific: Investing in a Shared Climate Resilient Future Founded on Human Dignity and Wellbeing," public statement, Vanuatu Foreign Affairs Ministry, 18 January, 2020, [https://dailypost.vu/news/vanuatu-begins-preparations-towards-hosting-of-pacific-islands-forum/article\\_3710c758-3a77-11ea-b100-17b5cb271d97.html](https://dailypost.vu/news/vanuatu-begins-preparations-towards-hosting-of-pacific-islands-forum/article_3710c758-3a77-11ea-b100-17b5cb271d97.html).

<sup>71</sup> Te'o I. J. Fairbairn and DeLisle Worrell, *South Pacific and Caribbean Island Countries: A Comparative Study* (Brisbane: Foundation for Development Cooperation, 1996), 77. Fairbairn and Worrell cited the case of Samoa

for the majority of people in industrialized countries is inconceivable without supermarkets and department stores—in fact, inconceivable without the mechanisms, assumptions and achievements of the global neoliberal economy—so life and wellbeing for the majority of people in the Pacific is difficult to imagine apart from their close interconnectedness to the land, sea and sky. However, despite its being the mainstay of life and wellbeing in the countries of the Pacific, “the real role of the subsistence sectors tends to be significantly undervalued.”<sup>72</sup> This has led the ecumenical leadership in the region to make the call that the traditional sector “needs to be re-valued and supported because it ensures self-sufficiency, sustainability, food security, and livelihoods for a large percentage of Pacific Islanders.”<sup>73</sup>

### Communal Identities and Environments

Cultural rituals and spiritualities bind people to one another and to their immediate surroundings. It is peoples and communities that belong to the land, not the other way round.<sup>74</sup> In Pacific cultures and spiritualities, a person’s identity is formed not in isolation from community but in association with and participation in it, as well as in interacting with one’s surroundings. A community’s identity and formation are, in a significant way, the outcome of its living in and interacting with its environment (hence *tangata whenua* for indigenous New Zealanders, *tangata fenua* for Ma’ohi Nui, and people of the *vanua* for the *iTaukei* in Fiji.) As such, the identity of a human community is connected within itself and interconnected with its land-sea-sky web of life.

Communal rituals and celebrations through feasting, dancing, singing, chanting, and even mourning are an integral part of reaffirming communal identity and relationality. In many traditional island cultures, celebrations such as weddings are made to coincide with major harvest times on the land and fish spawning times in the sea. Sharing, reciprocity, barter and exchange are hallmarks of communal relationality which are interconnected with the environment.<sup>75</sup> In the Fijian context, sharing and collective community efforts are reflected in

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as an example from the late 1980s. The case of the Solomon Islands during the period of ethnic tension, 2000–2003, is a recent example that showed the resilience of the subsistence economy in supporting the livelihood and welfare of people when the cash economy contracted.

72 Ibid., 77.

73 WCC, *Island of Hope*, 134–135. This is a direct criticism of and counter-position to forces of global neoliberal economics which are, in de Gruchy’s words, “... sucking up the resources of the earth, cutting down trees, polluting water, pumping industrial waste into the atmosphere, ploughing up wetlands, and mining in ecologically sensitive spaces.” Steve de Gruchy, “Oikos, God and the Olive Agenda: Theological Reflections on Economics and Environment,” <http://www.sacc.org.za/news07/oikos.html>.

74 See Tuwera, *Vanua: Towards a Fijian Theology of Place*.

75 Jovili Meo, “Gems of the Pacific: Sharing and Service,” *Pacific Journal of Theology* II, no. 16 (1996): 84–101.

the traditional economies of *solesolevaki*, or collective community effort, which is manifested in the communal nature of Fijian society, where everyone is related and all are obliged to work together.<sup>76</sup> *Solesolevaki*, reciprocity and communalism feature prominently in social relations and are considered culturally as a primary source of wealth.<sup>77</sup>

### **Knowledge, Wisdom and their Transmission**

Embedded in the land-sea-sky web of life are traditional-cultural knowledge and wisdom. Mountains, valleys, caves, forest trees, plants and bush areas, sacred spots, rivers, reefs, estuaries, seas, oceans, islets and islands, and so on-these are not just empty spaces but are places in which stories are embedded. These are not vacuums to be filled with some matter or foreign value but are indigenous storied repositories. An integral part of Pacific cultures and spiritualities is the ability to discern and “read,” listen to and hear these embedded non-textual stories and narratives. This enables us to use traditional knowledge and skills to recognize the signs in nature of imminent and increasing natural disasters.

**“Just as life and wellbeing for the majority of people in industrialized countries is inconceivable without the mechanisms, assumptions and achievements of the global neoliberal economy, so life and wellbeing for the majority of people in the Pacific is difficult to imagine apart from their close interconnectedness to the land, sea and sky.”**

Such knowledge has been maintained through indigenous traditional and customary knowledge systems of Pacific peoples and expressed through voyaging tales, genealogies, song and dance, and through resource use and exchange. These knowledge systems have sustained community life and cultural practices across generations and vast distances. The contemporary and critical importance of such knowledge is pointed out by Konai Helu-Thaman: “Times have changed; where once indigenous knowledge was labelled as primitive, pre-logical and inferior, it is now considered by scientists and researchers as superior and important in resolving global environmental problems. We need to reweave a new mat, where learning of indigenous knowledge is made vital.”<sup>78</sup>

76 Asesela D. Ravuvu, *The Fijian Ethos* (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1987). There are concepts and practices that are very similar to *solesolevaki* in other cultures of the Pacific.

77 Apisalome Movono, “Fijian Culture and the Environment: A Focus on the Ecological and Social Interconnectedness of Tourism Development,” *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 26, no.3 (2018): 451–469.

78 Konai Helu-Thaman, “Culture, Teaching and Learning in Oceania,” in *Educational Ideas from Oceania: Selected*

Sustainability of such knowledge systems is integral to Pacific cultures and spiritualities, and therefore guardians and transmitters of traditional knowledge and wisdom play a crucial role in our collective life.<sup>79</sup> Traditional leaders, adults, elders, parents, artisans, artists, craftspeople, heritage practitioners, healers/shamans and storytellers all have their place in guarding and transmitting such knowledge and wisdom. It is crucial in bringing about a good life or wellbeing, both in the present and the future.<sup>80</sup> Upolu Va'ai and Unaisi Nabobo-Baba affirm this when they point out "... the need to examine indigenous epistemologies, ontologies and cosmological ideas and philosophies so that global conversations include local and indigenous understandings of such terms that govern the way Pacific Islanders live their lives and make decisions regarding knowledge, lands, seas and peoples."<sup>81</sup>

### **The Sense of Sacred and Taboo**

Finally, as stressed throughout this section, spiritual grounding is of fundamental importance to Pacific wellbeing, and this is not reflected in global capitalist systems. It has been relegated to lower level knowledge in modern and foreign development narratives. Throughout the Pacific, the land-sea-sky is filled with symbolism of the divine realm. It was believed that gods and spirits filled and permeated these domains and were experienced as part and parcel of the environment. In some contexts, these beings were described as 'immanent spirits,' and they presided over different aspects and activities in life-gardening, fishing, hunting, canoe and other craft making, homemaking, warfare, and so on.<sup>82</sup> Many of these activities involved religious rituals. For example, religious rituals were always associated with clearing virgin land for food gardens, ensuring the best maintenance of such gardens, and harvesting. Human wellbeing transcended the tangible and was connected with the spirit realm. Cresantia Frances Koya-Vaka'uta points out that, in this way, wellbeing was closely attached to the concepts of *tabu* (taboo) and *mana*.<sup>83</sup>

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*Readings*, ed. Konai Helu-Thaman, 3–12 (Suva: IOE, USP/UNESCO, 2003).

79 A good example of guardianship and transmission of traditional knowledge and wisdom is the cultural renaissance in the skills of constructing traditional ocean-going vessels and the needed traditional navigating skills. These have helped to re-establish traditional voyaging pathways and cultural connections between communities separated by national borders.

80 See Unaisi W. Nabobo-Baba, *Knowing and Learning: An Indigenous Fijian Approach* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 2006). She highlights that good life/wellbeing in traditional Fijian is *sautu*.

81 *Ibid.*, 7.

82 See Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology*. See also Darrell Whiteman, "Melanesian Religion: An Overview," in *An Introduction to Melanesian Religions*, ed. Ennio Mantovani (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute, 1984), 107.

83 Frances Cresantia Koya-Vaka'uta highlighted the significance of *tabu* for the wellbeing and livelihood of Pacific peoples in a public address, "Indigenous Knowledge and Ecology," University of the South Pacific, 4 March, 2019.

The concept of *tabu* has been explained and interpreted in various ways, and one in particular is quite relevant for this discussion. This is the idea of prohibition or restriction attached to the environment, or aspects of it. A *tabu* could be attached to a subject (person, plant, fruit tree, bird, fish, reptile, etc.) and must be respected. Disobedience or disrespect for such a *tabu* was not tolerated, and could result in some misfortune. A *tabu* could also be attached to an entire land area, or to an entire sea or reef area for a certain time period. Within that time period, no one was allowed to harvest whatever was in the *tabu* area. It was made “sacred” (or *tabu*) and given time for regeneration of the land, sea or reef. The practice of *tabu* ensured that the wellbeing of people was closely connected to the wellbeing of the environment-land-sea-sky.

The concept of *mana* has also been much discussed. Noting the dynamic debate around the concept—whether *mana* is used as a noun or stative verb<sup>84</sup> and whether this debate itself reflects a Western approach<sup>85</sup>—*mana* in traditional Pacific cultures is not an either/or but a both/and concept. As Esau Tuza points out, “*mana* is both an ideal (mainly related to the spirits and ancestors) and an activity (as it affects man [sic]).”<sup>86</sup> Darrell Whiteman has taken the latter position and connects *mana* with salvation: “To make a crude paraphrase, we can say that ‘without *mana* there is no salvation;’ salvation, of course, being an abundance and success in all the possibilities of human life. The Hebrew concept of Shalom—physical and spiritual wellbeing, reconciliation, justice—comes close to capturing the essence of salvation, the essence of *mana*.”<sup>87</sup> Such an understanding of salvation in the Pacific is upheld by theologians across the region.<sup>88</sup>

In Pacific cultures and spirituality, the sense of the sacred-*tabu* and *mana*—is closely interconnected with human wellbeing. *Tabu* as ritual-ecological observances and respect for restrictions and prohibitions, and *mana* as both blessing from a divine other and an outflowing of intrinsic goodness or positive outcome from someone, some act, or some (natural) process,

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84 The agricultural practice of “fallowing” was commonly practiced in traditional subsistence farming methods. Similarly, the marine conservation method of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) could perhaps be described as a modern-day offshoot and science-based development of the traditional practice of instituting *tabu*.

85 Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology*, 169, points out that the problem with Western researchers is that they try to find a “European verbal equivalent” for *mana*—a kind of a “perfect fit” replete with certain cultural and ideological baggage and preconceptions.

86 Esau Tuza, “The Solomon Islands Response to the Gospel,” paper presented, South Pacific Regional Conference of the World Methodist Historical Society, Wesley College, Paerata, Auckland, New Zealand, 18–23 May, 1987, 115.

87 Whiteman, “Melanesian Religion,” 101.

88 See Tuwere, *Vanua: Towards a Fijian Theology of Place*; Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology*; Bird, “Re-conceptualising Salvation.”

are seen as integral to the wellbeing of people, their relationships with each other, and their relationships with their environments.

***“Spiritual grounding is of fundamental importance to Pacific wellbeing, and this is not reflected in global capitalist systems. It has been relegated to lower level knowledge in modern and foreign development narratives.”***

## **PART 4: A REM METHODOLOGY TOWARD AN ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPMENT (EFD)**

A REM methodology which emerges from this analysis feeds into an Ecological Framework for Development (EFD). This methodology helps in outlining such a framework. It is also an educational tool to assist in empowering communities to recognize and affirm their roles as custodians of the environments (the land-sea-sky web) of which they are a part. A REM methodology integrates the following key dynamic movements, which also aims to Change the Story of Development:

**First Movement:** A “now” starting point ... This first movement capitalizes on what is quite a normal activity that people do nearly every day: they talk about what is happening all around them! On one level this involves frank and honest narrating and hearing stories of people’s and communities’ views, eye- and ear-witness accounts and experiences in the present time, in terms of economic development activities and what they see as the multifaceted impacts of such developments-on people and their relationships to each other and to their surroundings, on economic and financial differences between players and spectators, and especially on the environment. On another level, this involves and calls for deeper conversation, engagement and analysis.

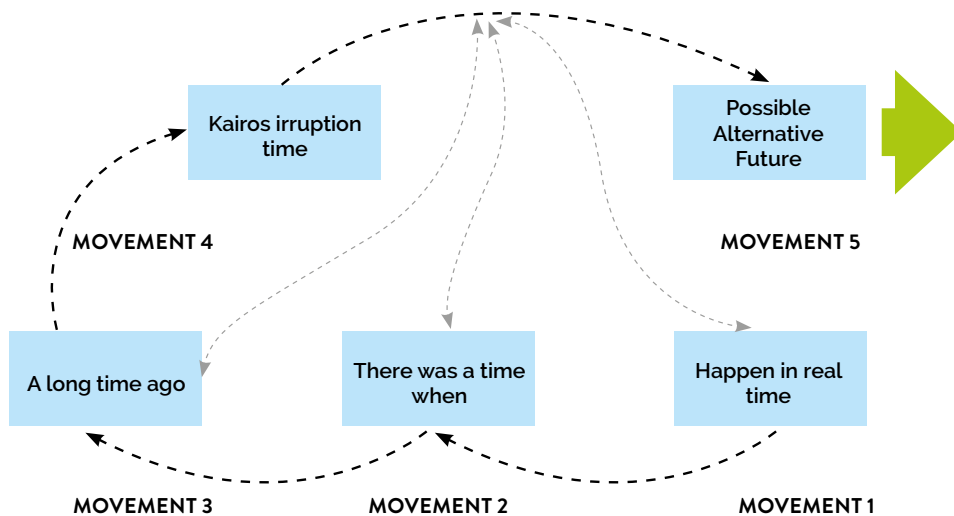
**Second Movement:** A historical reference point ... “There was a time when ...” This second movement capitalizes on traditions of storytelling, especially of establishing a reference point in the relatively recent historical past. This *there was a time when* is a demarcating point of reference, when a negative twist changed the plot of the story from good to not good. In the “Economic Framing” section of this paper, and especially in the Ecological Accounting paper proper, it is pointed out that there is a need to establish this *there was a time when* demarcating point of reference. For REM this point of reference is set at 1987, for two reasons: Firstly, in achieving goals such as carbon offsets, back-casting the data to 1987 will establish a baseline for meeting the 350ppm goal, the internationally agreed upon marker for safe sustainable CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere; and secondly, the year 1987 was also when the Brundtland Commission called for action on climate change. On one level, this is a qualitative narrative and storytelling of *there was a time when* with regards to the environment, especially the perceived and experiential impacts of climate change. On another level, it is also an enumerative and quantitative-analytical storytelling. On both levels, this

second movement seeks to set the critical historical reference point from which ecological baseline data is determined. This is necessary for an accounting of the ecological data between then and now-what has been lost or destroyed-and what could be done to offset these losses in order to move toward environmental regeneration and thereby raise the equity of our region.

**Third Movement:** A pre-historical originating point ... “From time immemorial or a long time ago ...” This third movement capitalizes on traditions of storytelling about the pre-historical (mythic) past, or the originating point in time. It narrates tales of origins of creation, the involvement of gods and spirits, and the place of humans. It narrates tales of the land, sea and sky and human interaction within this web of life. It narrates the dynamic and near-harmonious interaction people and human communities once had with their environments. This third movement brings back to life and into contemporary consciousness, through storytelling, the cultures and spiritualities outlined in the “Cultural-Spirituality Framing” of this paper. It reweaves storied layers and threads, and opens up the repositories of indigenous knowledge and wisdom. As Tarcisius Kabutaulaka points out, “this is not about looking backwards. Rather, it is about creatively using our people’s experiences and values to build a better future.”

**Fourth Movement:** A Kairos irruption time ... “From a time of novel Gospel ...” This fourth movement capitalizes on the traditions of storytelling focused on God and God’s relationality with the whole of creation, and on the good news

**Figure 1: A “Reweaving the Ecological Mat (REM)” Methodology**



of God's reign declared and demonstrated through Jesus of Nazareth. It provides the space for theological and biblical reflections on people's narratives and life experiences. This revisiting and rethinking appropriate biblical narratives, exploring creation theologies, eco-theologies and theologies of development forms an integral part of this fourth movement. All of this is for the dual purpose of, first, grounding the storytelling in the previous movements, especially in the Fourth Movement, and, second, critiquing the kinds of development activities that currently take place (as outlined in the First Movement).

***Fifth Movement:*** A history of possible alternative futures ... "From this point in time onward ..." This fifth and final movement capitalizes on storytelling as dreaming, even visioning, possible alternative futures that emerge from all the storytelling in the previous four Movements. This Movement is described as a "history of possible alternative futures" because, as this paper consistently asserts, and as the Ecological Accounting paper in particular highlights, the Pacific Islands are strategically placed to lead in the change that we need and want to see. As Pacific Islanders, we have a tremendous potential for leading in terms of how we account for our ecological assets. And as Kabutaulaka stresses, "we must ... rethink and reset our development agendas, values, goals, processes and trajectory. We must find our own development paths ..." By mapping out and forging possible alternative futures, we are in fact writing the preferred history of our futures.

### **Measures of Wellbeing:** Starting Point for Ecological Framework for Development

As pointed out above, whatever is measured shapes what people collectively strive to pursue. Starting with outlining and defining what it is that we want to measure should influence the model of development that we will deliver. From the preceding discussions, the following measures of wellbeing are discerned:

- \* availability of healthy, generative and supportive state of the land-sea-sky web of life (integrity of ecology);
- \* access to areas for subsistence and livelihood-farming, fishing, collecting, crafting, etc.;
- \* sufficient healthy/whole food, clean water, livable shelter, decent clothing and other basic human needs;
- \* availability of and access to cultural-traditional-communal life and livelihood support structures, systems, processes and networks;

- \* safety and security of persons and significant others;
- \* protection and freedom from violence and abuse;
- \* health and wholeness instead of sickness and ill health;
- \* respect instead of disrespect;
- \* honour instead of dishonour;
- \* dignity instead of indignity;
- \* peaceful relations and good neighborliness instead of enmity and community-social discord;
- \* fertility and fecundity instead of infertility and infecundity;
- \* success (in terms of work, responsibilities, ventures and undertakings) instead of failure;
- \* access to opportunities to work and learn, and to grow into maturity and productivity.

These measures of wellbeing are rooted in cultures and spiritualities that affirm the values of the deep relationality and interconnectedness of life-values which have no real place in the neoliberal market model of development that exalts and worships economic growth and promotes individualism, consumerism and a superficial and commoditized sense of community that is built around products and brand names.

# CONCLUSION AND MOVING FORWARD

## Time for Reckoning: Toward a Pacific Definition and Experience of Wellbeing

Reweaving the Ecological Mat is critically concerned with the pervasiveness of a model of development-the neoliberal market model-that has outlived its time, if indeed there was ever a time for which it was purposed for the welfare and common good of the world's peoples and ecological systems. Multiple and increasing critiques of the paradigm have exposed its serious defects and failings, both as a development model and as a measure of wellbeing and common good for the vast majority of the world's people and ecosystems.

Just the title of an article by George Monbiot, for instance - "Neoliberalism: The Ideology at the Root of all our Problems"<sup>89</sup> - is a very strong statement against the prevailing model. The article is a concise critique of the model that "sees [market] competition as the defining characteristic of human relations. It redefines citizens as consumers, whose democratic choices are best exercised by buying and selling," and makes the point that "... neoliberalism is the God that failed. But the zombie doctrine staggers on."<sup>90</sup> His own judgment is clear and unequivocal: "What the history of both Keynesianism and neoliberalism shows is that it is not enough to oppose a broken system. A coherent alternative has to be proposed."<sup>91</sup>

There is no better time to rethink the prevailing development model than the present. The COVID-19 global pandemic has forced the world to come to a point of near standstill. Countries that wield economic-political-military power are left incapable of successfully dealing with the pandemic. In the midst of the human pain, suffering and deaths caused by the pandemic, many around the world see the silver linings. As the pandemic spreads across the globe, there have been and are increasing calls not to return to what was considered 'normal' prior to COVID19<sup>92</sup> and, instead, to work toward creating and establishing a 'New Normal.'

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89 George Monbiot, "Neoliberalism: The Ideology at the Root of all our Problems," *The Guardian*, 15 April, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/15/neoliberalism-ideology-problem-george-monbiot?CMP>. Monbiot is a British writer and environmental-political activist who has authored several books, including *Out of the Wreckage: A New Politics in the Age of Crisis* (London: Verso, 2017).

90 Monbiot, "Neoliberalism."

91 Ibid.

92 One of the many examples is the article by Peter C. Baker, "We Can't Go Back to Normal: How Will Coronavirus Change the World?," *The Guardian*, 4 April, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/31/how-will-the->

An example from the Pacific is a recent article by the renowned Solomon Islands academic Tarcisius Kabutaulaka. Regarding the prevailing dominant development model, Kabutaulaka says:

There is nothing normal about ... the fact that most of our people are marginalized by an economic system built on corporate greed, rather than people-based investments. What we had prior to COVID-19 was not normal ... in the post-COVID-19 era, we must build a ‘new normal.’ In order to create this ‘new normal,’ there is a need for deeper conversations and reflections, especially about ‘development,’ that pervasive yet ambiguous concept that has dominated public discourses ... Yet we rarely stop to think about its genealogies, assumptions, values and impacts ... We have long been encouraged, and in some cases coerced, to follow a dominant neoliberal economic development model that focuses on economic growth built on unlimited consumption of finite natural resources. This poses an existential threat to our communities, islands, country and planet ... This economic development model is relatively new, born in particular parts of the world and projected globally through imperial expansion. It is a hugely destructive set of ideas because its logic is one of wholesale transformation (rather than adaptation or incorporation) of institutions, practices, values and lifestyles. It asks individuals and societies to stop being what they are and have been and become something completely different ... We must use this opportunity to rethink and reset our development agendas, values, goals, processes and trajectory. We must find our own development paths. ... In carving a new development path, we can draw from and be informed by values and practices that have enabled our people to live in these islands for thousands of years. This is not about looking backwards. Rather, it is about creatively using our people’s experiences and values to build a better future. Let us learn from COVID-19 and build a ‘new normal’ - a new development path.<sup>93</sup>

Reweaving the Ecological Mat is a project that predates COVID-19 and is already a vision to rethink this prevailing and dominant economic development model, and especially how it measures wellbeing and progress. If anything, COVID-19 makes it quite plain that this vision and direction is highly mandatory if a ‘New Normal’ is going to emerge and take the place of the neoliberal development model. As highlighted in the “Economic Framing” section, an

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world-emerge-from-the-coronavirus-crisis?CMP.

93 Karcisius Kabutaulaka, “Creating a New Normal After COVID-19,” April 2020, [https://he-il.facebook.com/Sundayisles/photos/a.725125640899367/2891415767603666/?type=3&eid=ARB7JO0PFMEuw7qR6aF4hUmAqp7C\\_T\\_F7GNHQdlZhMbzYn82CHucGPh-Q5i8NywLhymbfBfzjt1vQjg](https://he-il.facebook.com/Sundayisles/photos/a.725125640899367/2891415767603666/?type=3&eid=ARB7JO0PFMEuw7qR6aF4hUmAqp7C_T_F7GNHQdlZhMbzYn82CHucGPh-Q5i8NywLhymbfBfzjt1vQjg).

alternative system is greatly needed.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, as argued in the “Theological Framing” and “Cultural and Spirituality Framing” sections, this alternative must, as a matter of urgency and necessity, take seriously the theological and cultural-spirituality moorings, contexts, experiences and hopes of the peoples of the Pacific.

From the foregoing discussions, the following key and interconnected insights are discerned:

- ***Indigenous knowledge is in fact a knowledge configuration:*** Religious knowledge (or spirituality), ecological knowledge (a.k.a. indigenous ecological knowledge, IEK), economic knowledge, societal and communal knowledge, and cultural knowledge highlight the core areas of this configuration. This is the knowledge configuration that sustained and moved the peoples of the Pacific forward over many generations, well before the intrusion and impacts of the neoliberal development paradigm. This knowledge configuration is therefore vital for mapping and fleshing out the development direction we desire moving forward. Neoliberal economics (with its assumptions, values and goals) is compartmentalized and self-interested knowledge. It creates knowledge and spreads it through dominant schools of thought in universities and institutions of higher learning. It manufactures desires and sells these using what Joerg Rieger calls the high priests of capitalism, who are the market model advertising gurus<sup>95</sup> and the massive infrastructure that supports them!
- ***Existence was and is viewed and experienced as one whole life.*** Human life and livelihood are part and parcel of the web and confluence of life, neither above nor outside of it. Holistic life and existence are nurtured within the interconnectedness of the land, sea and sky-the household or *Oikos* of life-and founded on and propelled by indigenous knowledge. Human wellbeing is very much linked with and dependent upon the wellbeing of the land-sea-sky web and confluence of life. This experience of life requires, in fact demands, a shift of perspective and practice, from one that is strictly economical in narrow neoliberal exclusivist terms toward the *Oikonomical* in holistic and inclusive terms. In the household of life, economics, ecology and ecumene all belong together. Neoliberal economics advances an understanding and experience

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94 The proposal to work toward an alternative model of development that is rooted in and takes seriously Pacific contexts and the traditional-cultural-theological moorings goes back about two decades. The *Island of Hope* global ecumenical conference, which was held in 2000 and became a WCC publication in 2001, set the foundation. Ten years later, in 2010, the Pacific Conference of Churches developed a concept document on “Re-thinking the Household of God.” Five key issues were outlined in the document: (i) governance and leadership; (ii) development in Oceania; (iii) peace and security; (iv) climate change and resettlement; and (v) cultural and social cohesion.

95 Joerg Rieger, *No Rising Tide: Theology, Economics, and the Future* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010).

of life that revolves around and is built upon the market and its forces of supply and demand, production and consumption, which creates and feeds a consumerist worldview.

- ***Defining and measuring value is, and indeed must be, contextually based and determined.*** Indigenous worldviews affirm value as belonging within or intrinsic to the land-sea-sky web of life. At the same time, the concept of value and defining or determining what is considered valuable is tied to people's cultures and beliefs, environments or surroundings, relationships, and the interconnectedness between all of these. A contextual-based view and practice of value recognizes and affirms that it is both a qualitative and quantitative concept, and it is necessary that this understanding is sustained in any development framework. Again, indigenous knowledge is key in the process of defining and measuring value. Value as defined and measured by the neoliberal economic model is foreign to these understandings and experiences of Pacific peoples. For example, qualitative aspects of value—such as familial and communal relationships, virtues such as love, compassion, sharing and reciprocity, and the aesthetic and spiritual elements of land-sea-sky web of life—are not part of its valuation principles and processes.
- ***Human wellbeing and flourishing are integrally interconnected with, derive from, and sustained through the wellbeing and flourishing of the land-sea-sky web of life—***hence the necessity for humanity to live in harmony with and respect for this web of life. (In truth, the wellbeing and flourishing of the latter does not depend on the former.) Similar to value, human wellbeing is both a qualitative and quantitative concept. The measure for human wellbeing within religio-cultural understandings is about a “good life.” This is important to state clearly, because whatever is measured shapes what people collectively strive to pursue as “good life.”
- ***Quality of life is and should be a natural outflow from living oikonomically.*** *Oikonomical* living requires that human beings live within nature's own limits and intrinsic governing laws, respect nature's own ways of regulating all its constituents as the way these were and are meant to relate and integrate, and acknowledge the co-creatureliness and co-relationality of the human species within the land-sea-sky web and confluence of life. Quality of life is also both a qualitative and quantitative category. Defining and measuring quality of life in this way differs quite significantly from the neoliberal development paradigm perspectives.

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