

A Pacific View : What Role Distance Education?

Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop

This paper presents a picture of educational needs and ways South Pacific countries are addressing these needs. It proposes that the two major educational issues facing Pacific nations as they address the task of human resource development are those relating to equity of access to quality education and training, and the appropriateness of curricula. It draws attention to the fact that the educational needs of Pacific Island states are not being and cannot be met through formal schooling systems only. Instead, Pacific communities rely heavily on 'non-formal' programmes provided by a large range of non-government organisations (NGOs) and 'informal' learning exchanges also. The challenge today is how the new and exciting developments in distance and open education can be adapted and utilised within the Pacific context.

The Pacific Region

Accounts of the Pacific region usually begin by highlighting that the region is one of enormous linguistic, cultural and geographical diversity, ranging from large resource-rich countries such as Papua New Guinea, which has over 700 languages, through to small resource-poor atoll countries, such as Kiribati, consisting of a group of islands scattered over huge expanses of open ocean (see Table 1). The fragile nature of our resource bases is a second point of note, a fact which makes Pacific countries extremely vulnerable to the elements: cyclones, temperature changes, and sea rises. The third point is that Pacific countries have experienced a 'late', and 'short' colonial period, and a relatively recent independence (Western Samoa was the first country to gain self-government in 1962). Many have maintained close relationships with former colonial administrations in the independence era, a fact which is reflected in favourable aid and migration policies. Integration into global networks through patterns of trade,

TABLE 1
South Pacific Countries - principal physical and economic features

Country/Pays	Land area (sq.km) Surface émergée (km ²)	Sea area ('000 sq. km) Surface maritime (en milliers de km ²)	1990 Mid-year Population Estimates Estimation du nombre d'habitants à la fin du 1er semestre de 1990			Gross Domestic Product (SA'000) Produit intérieur brut (en milliers de dollars australiens)		
			Total	Density (persons/sq.km) Densité (habitants/km ²)	Annual Growth Rate (%): 1973-90 Croissance annuelle (%)	Total (A\$'000)	Per Capita Per habitant (A\$)	Year Année
American Samoa	200	390	46 800	234	3.63	260 417	6 663	1985
Cook Islands	237	1 830	16 900	71	-0.16	65 053	3 943	1987
Federated States of Micronesia	701	2 987	101 200	144	4.02	117 044	1 372	1983
Fiji	18 272	1 290	725 000	40	1.91	1 580 870	2 181	1990
Guam	541	218	133 400	247	2.24	1 513 369	12 334	1986
Îles Wallis et Futuna	255	300	13 700	54	1.29	..	..	..
Kiribati	690	3 550	71 800	104	2.26	44 930	654	1988
Marshall Islands	181	2 131	46 200	255	4.21	52 682	1 514	1984
Nauru	21	320	9 300	443	2.28	..	..	..
Niue	259	390	2 500	10	-5.27	4347	1 553	1984
Northern Mariana Islands	471	777	44 200	94	8.88	355 972	11 558	1985
Nouvelle-Calédonie	19 103	1 740	167 600	9	2.00	2 641 153	16 354	1988
Palau	488	629	15 200	31	2.29	..	..	..
Papua New Guinea	462 243	3 120	3 528 500	8	1.61	4 853 623	1 376	1990
Pitcairn	5	800	100	20	0.00	..	..	..
Pitcairn	3 521	5 030	196 300	56	2.48	3 875 976	19 745	1990
Polynésie française	27 556	1 340	324 000	12	3.67	222 153	725	1988
Solomon Islands	10	290	1 800	180	1.45	..	..	..
Tokelau	747	700	96 300	129	0.49	119 800	1 256	1988
Tonga	26	900	10 200	392	4.05	7 595	767	1989
Tuvalu	12 190	680	146 400	12	2.41	183 899	1 283	1989
Vanuatu	2 935	120	157 700	54	0.10	147 767	939	1987
Western Samoa	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
South Pacific Region Région du Pacifique Sud	550 652	29 523	5 855 100	11	2.08	..	..	..
South Pacific Region less PNG Région du Pacifique Sud moins PNG	88 409	26 403	2 326 600	26	2.11	..	..	..

Source: Countries' statistical reports and responses to SPSSS questionnaires

migration and remittances and aid, has rendered the South Pacific island states and territories extremely vulnerable to restructuring measures in other nations.

We must ask, what are the implications of this cultural diversity, isolation and physical vulnerability for government administration generally, but in particular for the provision of services such as health and education? Furthermore, what are the influences of the patterns of education set up in the colonial periods, and the expectations and attitudes regarding education generated in these periods also? Are the schools elitist institutions with academic curriculum 'educating', as is so often said 'our people away from the land, away from sweated labour?' What are the attitudes to gender issues in education and, are there any rural/urban disparities in the provision of places?

The unique feature of the South Pacific region, often referred to as the internal dynamic, is that the customary social, economic and political institutions are still strongly observed in most Pacific nations today: the customary ways are the prime motivators determining access to resources and status options, determining what is produced, who produces this, and how goods are used. The customary ways are embedded in extensive family networks, which are in turn tied to land and sea resources. The majority of land is held in customary tenure; for example, up to 97% of PNG land is held in customary tenure, and locals are reportedly 'still trying to get the other 3% back'.

At the same time as the customary ways are vigorously defended, we Pacific Islanders also want modern goods and services: money is needed for church offerings and school fees, for goods that cannot be produced by subsistence means (for example kerosene, nails, needles, seeds and tools, cloth, pencils and paper); goods which make life easier (rice, which is easily stored and tinned fish which requires no cooking) and luxury goods such as soap, toothpaste and sugar. We have been called subsistence affluent societies, wanting the goods that we cannot provide for ourselves using our own resources, wanting, may I add, the goods which we have been taught to expect. And so Pacific nations observe a dual system of production and use, trying to incorporate traditional values into a

development goal, trying to balance the old and the new value systems side by side with an alacrity which continues to challenge, undermine and boggle the minds of many Pacific leaders and development planners alike.

Not only are Pacific nations 'semi-subsistent' economically, but a similar conflict exists in many domains of activity - for example, between legal and traditional forms of justice; democratic and chiefly forms of government; ideas of 'human' or 'individual' rights and kinship or lineage rights; and government powers and rights versus local community rights.

Why the customary ways endure will not be discussed in this paper, except to say that these are integral to personal and community identity, and furthermore, that in the absence of nation-wide provision of government services, (such as health, education and law and order) the network of behaviours which come under the rubric of 'customary ways' effectively ensure family, community and national security. These family support systems have been particularly crucial in helping families survive the effects of restructuring measures being introduced in Pacific states in the past few years.

The maintenance of customary ways in their present forms may not be feasible or realistic in today's rapidly changing social and economic conditions. We are part of a global community with all the advantages and disadvantages this brings. Highly sophisticated media and communication technology are rocketing our semi-subsistence villages straight into the high tech age. For example, today, the atrocities of Bosnia, of voting day in South Africa, along with the progress of the Manu Samoa in the Super Ten series, are beamed live into the smallest *fale* on the most isolated tip of Savaii island. What is more, we watch everything. Not only that, we are extremely susceptible to the changing rationale of aid programmes. The dialogue of aid projects is confusing and very often contradictory, and many times the implications of projects are not fully understood or predictable. For example, debates about sustainable development/population/human resource development/poverty alleviation and national food security programmes give the impression that a holistic view of agriculture (food security, essential household goods and medicines, value added goods and income-generation potential) has replaced the conventional

cash-oriented focus in development programmes. But this is not so. And somewhat paradoxically, these people-centred ideas of 'development with a human face' are being promoted at the same time as the restructuring measures being introduced place great strains on family resources. Pacific communities are extremely vulnerable today as markets for traditional agricultural products fall, aid moneys decline and migration restrictions result in huge drops in the remittances families have come to rely on. In this situation the pursuit of all cash earning options becomes crucial.

A fact which many of our countries are reluctant to recognise is that the customary ways are themselves changing, as very clearly evidenced in the way the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' in our communities is widening at an alarming rate. The growing disparities are seen in the unequal spread of material goods (cars, European houses, for example), the waiting-lists for International schools for those who can pay, (in PNG, Fiji, and now in Western Samoa); and in the flight to New Zealand schools which accompanied the 'South Pacificisation' of the school curriculum, and School Certificate. The power source of the new elites is their ability to plug into the wider economy, their access to established networks, as well as their ability to regulate others' access to the same resources. Hau'ofa (1986) proposes that the underprivileged are poor because of their inability to tap the regional resources. They are therefore left to make the best out of what is available in their immediate physical surroundings.

It is very clear that Pacific communities are facing the dilemma of redefining roles in the light of present day realities. It becomes vital that communities carefully examine the prevailing customary ways and how these impact on education, health, employment, women and families, for example. Communities should identify those ways which are essential to national feelings of identity and so must be upheld, and those which are not so important. As stated, many of the traditional ways have already been modified considerably in the post-contact period, which raises questions as to why these practices are upheld. Be that as it may, a consideration for the customary ways must be integral to the planning of any interventionist strategy.

The Needs

Issues of economic security, health and education are briefly discussed and attention is drawn to some of the educational and training implications associated with these issues.

The interconnected nature of these problems is a key factor in the discussion: for example, high fertility rates are associated with economic, social and health issues and hold consequences for natural resources and the environment as well. These also relate to unemployment, present a strain on education systems and at the same time increase the separation of a strata of elites who can pay for private schooling. While education and training are essential to the addressing of every issue, it is very clear that a change of emphasis from the prevailing provisions is essential.

1 Economic Development

Agriculture

Agriculture and the sea are 'the backbone of our economies' with the exception of mineral-rich countries such as PNG and Vanuatu. The French territories, Guam, Fiji and Papua New Guinea already display the industrial and commercial sectors of modern cities. Hence these countries have a range of employment opportunities not available in the smaller states. Commercial centres and factory zones are beginning to emerge in other countries of the region, as I will describe, supplementing predominantly government-dominated wage sectors.

As stated, the majority of our countries are semi-subsistence economies. Up to 80% of the Pacific populations rely on agriculture for food security, cash needs¹, and a significant proportion of agricultural goods and services are used in cultural and community maintenance functions, which is also a 'use' which does not appear in national accounts².

¹ For example, agriculture, forestry and fisheries provide around 50% of Western Samoa's GDP, 50% of the work force and up to 80% of export earnings (World Bank, 1991:213).

(The community category has importance in Pacific countries not only because these acts reinforce feelings of identity, but because many communities have responsibility for providing their own health, education and law and order services, as these may not be adequately provided by centralised government agencies). Families are the major producers, practising mixed cropping on typically small, scattered parcels of customary land.

Despite the avowed importance of agriculture, production continues to decline throughout the region. Decreases in exports, as well as the neglect and degeneration of the traditional subsistence sector has been noted, as has the alarming increase in food imports. This situation has implications for national food security, and has been linked to the serious increase in the incidence of malnutrition and nutrition-related diseases throughout the region. Nor is this an urban phenomenon, as proposed in the past: malnutrition amongst children is also becoming a rural problem. The question of poor nutrition has been treated as an educational rather than a production issue, but if people are selling the foods they should have eaten, and eating cheaper substitutes, then it is obvious that poverty is becoming a problem.

One factor related to the decline in agricultural production is that it has never featured highly in educational planning either through formal school systems, or in agriculture department budgets. For example, Agriculture Extension is the low-status job, under-funded, and under-staffed; agriculture is the last scholarship taken; while 'returning to the land' is the option for those who fail at school. Another factor is that there are fewer people available to do agricultural work today. The family labour force has been severely depleted by factors such as longer school attendance by children and the out-migration of males. At the same time, there is a widespread disillusionment with the economic returns from agriculture. Farming is an expensive and a risky business, and natural disasters such as cyclones and pest invasions can cause instant havoc to crops which families have

² A recent Western Samoa study showed 23% of goods were used in exchanges which did not involve the exchange of money (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1991). The amount, type and direction of this use of goods warrants further examination.

worked on for years. The drop in world prices for customary staple goods has led to a search for niche markets and specialist enterprises, such as ginger, passion fruit, vanilla and cocoa in recent years. These 'new' enterprises demand different skills and labour inputs compared to those used in growing staple goods. The rising incidence of part-time farmers noted in the Pacific, as well as the increase in women doing agricultural work has implications for education and training systems.

The decreases in agricultural production are in direct contrast to the Pacific belief that 'we have nothing to worry about' with regard to food security. This situation is forcing us to look again at our agricultural policies. The emphasis of these has always been on cash cropping, because of the assumption that everyone 'knows' how to grow food crops. Small in-depth intra-household studies are necessary to identify who is doing the agricultural work today, in particular women's and children's contribution to the smallholder units, and what support services these producers need.

Alternative income-generating activities

The rural-urban drift in search of cash earning alternatives, which is taking place, is straining health, education and other services as well as presenting law and order problems. Sub-standard urban centres are emerging in all Pacific nations.

Some cash earning alternatives being explored include the following:

- 1 Increase in informal sector activity.

Case: Informal sector activities, Solomon Islands

More than two thirds of a sample (random selection, size 323) were self-employed. 75% said that they spend sixteen hours or more during the week on their income-generating venture. The types of activities the women were engaged in were: farm gardening (38%), food catering (21%), crafts (15%) and textiles (11%). These women sold directly to consumers at the markets (40%) from home (34%) or from shops (16%). More than 75% of

the sample were married, (average five children) and 25% lived in households with more than seven persons. More than a third of the self-employed women were sole income providers. More than 75% had not received any assistance either from relatives, banks or other sources to run their enterprises. More than half had received 'a few' years of primary school education; almost one fifth had not had any formal education; one quarter was not able to write in any language and almost one third not able to do any calculations. (WDD, Ministry of Health and Medical services (MHMS) and ILO 1993)

Custom goods that 'would never have been sold in the past' are also being sold through informal networks. For example, a small number of fine mats began to appear on the Samoan markets in the early 1980s, a response to the urban demand of tourists and 'women who don't have the time to make mats'. A common sight at the Apia Market today is the quality array of mats ranging from between \$200 and \$700 per mat. Sellers state that they sell up to 7-10 on a good day but sometimes can go for weeks without making a single sale, so that in desperation, they have sold some mats for as low as \$5 or \$6 per mat. Reasons given for selling the fine mats included the need for money for school fees and household needs because no family members were working, and the families were without supplementary income since their taro plantations had been destroyed by the leaf blight. The women said they spent all day selling at the market, then went home to weave at night, and 'When I think of all the work involved in preparing the materials before the weaving and then to see your work sold at giveaway prices because your loved ones' education is at stake and because your family has to survive ... it breaks my heart.'

Research is needed to identify the nature and extent of the informal sector activities in our countries, and the appropriate educational and other support services which must be provided.

2 Environmental exploitation/and degradation

Logging and other such income-earning ventures must be noted, as well as problems associated with the development of the tourism

industry.

3 Job Creation Measures

The introduction of Free Trade Zones and joint venture policies have brought the establishment of factories such as the garment factories in Fiji, the fish canning operations in Solomon Islands and the Yazaki factories in Samoa. These factory jobs are perceived to offer 'easier' and 'cleaner' ways of making money, as well as to be more regular sources of income than agriculture. While attention has been drawn to the exploitation of workers (of women in particular) associated with these measures, the social problems resulting from concentrating large groups of single women, or men, in one place, are just being realised.

4 Migration, Remittances and Aid

Although migration has become 'a way of life' in all Pacific countries, this is particularly so in Tonga and Western Samoa. The economic consequences of migration are seen in the high levels of migrant remittances, which it has been proposed can figure at least three times as large as total export earnings, making labour the most important export in these islands. In 1989 for example, remittances into Western Samoa by official channels only were almost US\$40 million. The effect on the family and national labour force and family relations brought about by this exodus of the most skilled and the young has not been well documented.

All of our countries have come to depend heavily on aid. Amounts of aid have reduced considerably in recent years, and furthermore, aid patterns have changed as new attention is turning to the European sector.

2 Health

Standards of government health and welfare services vary between countries and within countries. For example, the French territories have an extensive health and social welfare scheme, whereas the provision of adequate health services in other Pacific countries is often problematical due to the scattered and rural concentration of populations. There may be no roads into isolated areas and few boats to outer islands, for example. In most countries, government health services have utilised localised women's committees for the provision of essential health services. Generally speaking, the Polynesian Pacific and French territories display higher quality of life indices in health and education than the Melanesian and Micronesian countries. In brief:

- 1 The region is marked by very rapid population growth (see Table 2), high fertility patterns with short birth intervals, and teenage fertility becoming a cause for concern in some areas. In most countries, between 40 and 50% of the population is under 15. Because of out-migration, population pressure has not been such a problem in Polynesian countries such as Western Samoa and Tonga. Such a population structure has obvious implications for service provision.

The larger less developed Melanesian malarious countries of the western Pacific and the less developed dispersed atoll nations of the central and northern Pacific, manifest higher mortality and higher proportional mortality from infectious disease compared with other regional states, while high infant mortality rates and high maternal mortality rates prevail in some Micronesian and Melanesian sectors. As reported, urban PNG women have a 1 in 26 chance of dying from pregnancy, which rises to 1 in 15 for women who live in rural areas without access to health services. Inadequate access to health care as well as poor nutrition, anaemia, heavy physical work burdens, frequent pregnancies and locally endemic diseases such as malaria, are prime factors to be addressed.

TABLE 2
Population age distribution, sex and dependency ratios

Country	Census Year	Total	Population in age group (%)			Sex Ratio		Dependency Rate
			0 - 14	15 - 64	65	Total	15 - 64	
American Samoa	1990	46 638	40,9	56,2	2,9	103	99	77,9
Cook Islands	1986	17 614	36,9	58,4	4,7	109	110	71,2
Federated States of Micronesia	1988	101 155	(a)46,4	50,1	3,5	105	101	99,7
Fiji	1986	715 375	38,4	58,7	2,9	103	116	81,6
Guam	1990	132 726	(a)34,9	62,3	2,8	109	113	61,0
Wallis & Futuna	1990	13 705	(b)45,8	50,1	4,1	102	102	99,6
Kiribati	1990	72 298	40,3	56,2	3,4	98	95	77,8
Marshall Islands	1988	43 380	51,0	46,1	2,9	105	105	117,1
Nauru	1983	8 042	46,5	52,2	1,2	116	99	91,4
Niue	1989	2 267	36,6	55,7	7,7	105	112	79,5
Northern Mariana Islands	1990	43 555	(a)40,6	56,5	2,9	111	119	67,8
New Caledonia	1989	164 173	32,6	62,9	4,5	104	106	59,0
Palau	1986	13 873	34,8	59,7	5,4	106	119	67,8
Papua New Guinea	1990	3 529 538	(a)43,0	55,5	1,6	(d)108	110	80,2
Pitcairn								
French Polynesia	1990	52	(c)21,6	55,4	23,0	124	120	80,4
Solomon Islands	1988	188 814	35,3	61,5	3,2	109	112	62,5
Tokelau	1986	285 126	47,3	49,4	3,3	106	105	102,4
Tonga	1986	1 690	41,1	51,7	7,3	97	87	93,6
Tuvalu	1986	94 649	41,0	55,0	4,0	101	97	45,0
Vanuatu	1979	7 349	31,8	63,1	5,1	88	79	58,5
Western Samoa	1989	142 944	44,0	52,0	4,0	106	104	
	1986	157 158	41,1	55,5	3,4	113	110	80,3

Sources: Census reports for the indicated years

(1) M. I. Bakker

Notes:

(a) Refers to the 1980 census year

(b) Refers to the 1983 census year

(c) Refers to the 1976 census year

(d) Total sex ratio refers to the 1990 census year

Life expectancy

More serious attention is being given to the incorporation of population issues within national sustainable development policies.

- 2 The rising incidence of diseases of 'affluence' in Pacific island populations is linked to dietary change. Many factors are involved, such as urbanisation, food aid, changing food preferences, economic modernisation and the convenience of processed foods and the high prices of traditional staples, problems of national food distribution and marketing, urban poverty and changes in farming systems and land use. Some Pacific countries, notably the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of the Marshall Islands, have become dependent on imported foods.

New data documenting high incidences of mental illness, alcoholism, drug abuse, violence, and suicide completes quite a depressing picture of the health status of Pacific communities today.

3 Education

The major educational issue in Pacific nations today is to provide an appropriate basic education for rapidly growing populations, and training for those adults who have never had an opportunity for schooling, as will be discussed. Adult education should be an essential part of education planning and ways government agencies can work together with NGOs in providing this need careful examination. The need for quality teacher and community educator training is central to this task, as is the provision of appropriate and adequate support systems for these educators, both in terms of material resources, as well as personal support. The identification and utilisation of appropriate distance and open learning strategies in addressing this mammoth task is a matter of urgency.

Pacific nations must decide where they should concentrate their educational efforts. For example, it is widely argued that governments would get 'better' educational and financial 'returns' today by focusing on the expansion of adult education throughout the region for many years. At the same time, ideas concerning educational investment tend to become clouded

by nationalistic concerns, as seen in the emergence of national universities, polytechnics and institutes of higher learning throughout the region. Promoted under the banner of 'equity', in that these are providing tertiary study for more people, these institutions effectively reduce the amount and quality of resources available for primary education.

Formal schooling

National education systems are typically pyramidal in shape with restricted entry into higher levels. Formal schooling is neither universally available nor compulsory in many Pacific countries. Governments do not have sufficient funds to provide schooling for rapidly growing school-age populations, but depend on the assistance of religious and donor agencies in this regard. As a result, there are large variations in the availability of school places and participation in the region (see Table 3). For example, fewer than half the citizens of PNG have had any formal education, only 24% of the 5-11 aged population and 37% of the 12-16 year olds are at school, whereas in some Polynesian countries education has been universal for some years.

The pattern of participation for women is similar to that of women in developed nations; fewer women compared with males enter the schooling system and the attrition rate for women is higher than that for males. Also, there is a concentration of women in the social sciences as opposed to male predominance in the basic sciences. While this pattern of participation is partly due to financial constraints, social and cultural beliefs concerning women's roles inevitably influence educational provisions at all levels.

Illiteracy rates indicate wide regional variations, with rates in Melanesia and parts of Micronesia being markedly higher than those for the Polynesian sector. While the differences between male/female literacy rates are not marked, female figures in all countries are higher than males, except in Western Samoa. The PNG illiteracy rates for women underline that males have received favoured treatment in the allocation of school places for some years. These data reinforce the crucial need for adult learning programmes.

TABLE 3

Population of school age children: school attendance as a percentage
of their gender age group

	Age	Males	Females	M:F(%)
Papua New Guinea (1990)	5-9	284000	246000	15 14
	10-14	237000	197000	52 50
	15-19	213000	184000	26 19
French Polynesia (1988)	6-12	15000	14000	98 99
	13-16	8000	8000	74 80
	17-19	6000	6000	30 38
Solomon Islands (1986)	6-12	32000	29000	41 37
	13-16	14000	13000	56 43
	17-19	9000	9000	18 8
Tokelau (1991)	5-14	216	200	100 100
Tonga (1986)	6-12	9000	8000	98 98
	13-16	5000	5000	84 85
	17-19	4000	3000	38 35
Tuvalu (1991)	5-9	9700	600	64 65
	10-14	400	400	97 95
	15-19	300	300	38 35
Vanuatu (1989)	6-9	9000	8000	72 71
	10-14	9000	8000	74 69
	15-19	7000	7000	26 18
Western Samoa (1986)	5-9	11000	10000	88 89
	10-14	11000	10000	97 99
	15-19	11000	9000	66 75

Source: South Pacific Population Bulletin, No 42 (1994)

The issue of quality of schooling will not be discussed. It is, however, noted that there is a dire shortage of basic resource materials in many Pacific schools. The issues of teachers' qualifications and appropriateness of curricula have been well documented and are currently being addressed in various regional projects.

Non-formal

The record of NGOs as major providers of adult education in Pacific nations is impressive. While in the earlier days NGO programmes may have been more welfare and health oriented, more recently these have focused on income generation activities, as well as literacy and awareness raising programmes. For example, the Huli Women in Literacy programme (1980-1985) was conducted by three PNG mission agencies (The United Church, Evangelical Church of Papua and the Christian Brethren Church). Of note is that 70% of the estimated 1736 literate adults who completed the programme during these years were women.

The noted Pacific preference for group activities is one reason for the success of NGO efforts, but more particularly, NGO programmes have generally arisen out of and responded to local needs and have been presented at the time and place of need. Furthermore, NGO networks have the added advantage of instant outreach into rural areas. Government health and agriculture extension activities have also utilised local NGOs, such as the village women's committees and youth groups.

NGOs need substantial institutional strengthening. In the interests of sustainability and the multiplier effect, (and given the urgency of making up for the backlog caused by years of educational neglect), NGO programmes are beginning to incorporate a training of trainers' component. More careful attention is also being paid to the provision of support services after an initial NGO training period. Networking can play a vital role in this regard. The example of the University of the South Pacific's radio networking systems already in operation (as for example the FISHNET (Fishing information), AIN (Agricultural Information Network), FLYNET (Fruit Fly programmes) and AIDS and nutrition networks shows how this can be achieved.

The role of distance education in the Pacific

Distance education already plays an important role in the Pacific, as will be seen. The more pressing question today is how the technology and programmes of the Distance Education model can be adapted and extended to cater for a wider audience of 'need' as has been identified.

During the 1950s New Zealand provided radio broadcasts to Pacific schools and backed these up with supplementary materials, including Teachers' Monthly Guides. While this service raised much contention as to appropriateness of curriculum and how the broadcasts might be misused by 'lazy' teachers, the importance of these broadcasts has, I believe, been under-rated. These were an invaluable learning resource for teachers in areas where resources were, and continue to be, few. Also, the outreach of these programmes into isolated rural areas was instantaneous. What is more, the sessions were a 'training' time for teachers, as well as students, reinforcing how to plan and present lessons. Today, in Western Samoa at least, a small group of vastly under-resourced local staff provide these radio services, but cannot meet the need for supplementary materials.

Tertiary distance education has been provided for over a decade by the Universities of Papua New Guinea and the South Pacific (USP). The USP Extension headquarters located at the Laucala Campus in Suva serves a network of well-equipped and staffed Extension Centres in each of the twelve countries served by the region. The USP programme includes Extension Studies for credit, and Continuing Education and Community Outreach programmes. Preliminary (equivalent to sixth form) and Foundation (seventh form) courses are offered in countries which do not have facilities or personnel to teach these levels, while other students take vocational and academic subjects as part of certificate, diploma and degree courses.

USP Extension enrolments in 1992 were 5662, with 4310 students involved in Continuing Education Courses. These figures, when contrasted with the 2406 on-campus students of the University in that year, show very clearly the importance of distance learning in the region. In addition to this, the Institutes of the University also run in-country training programmes.

Table 4 shows the increase in total enrolments in extension study at the USP in the 1987 to 1990 period. Also shown is Polynesian women's higher participation in extension study, compared with that of women from the Melanesian and Micronesian countries.

TABLE 4

Enrolments at USP centres, by year and gender

	1987 male	female	1990 male	female
Cook Islands	233	273	334	455
Fiji	2454	1318	4436	2856
Kiribati	354	258	516	426
Nauru	157	214	76	158
Solomon Islands	569	79	630	134
Tonga	565	435	562	363
Vanuatu	359	140	534	181
Western Samoa	252	261	272	274

Source: USP University Extension 1993.

The question of who studies by extension is related to finance and questions of equity once more. For example, when the Western Samoan Government stopped refunding the fees of civil servants who passed the extension courses in the mid 1980's, there was an immediate reduction in enrolments.

I draw attention to three ways in which the USP is addressing the issue of outreach and accessibility of its distance education programmes. The first relates to entry. Whereas strict regulations mark entry into USP credit courses, entry into continuing education courses is open. For a number of years now, the university has offered a Certificate in Pre-School Education through the Continuing Education section of Extension, and a certificated programme for nutrition educators will be offered within the next two years. As a result of these moves, students who do not meet the university entry requirements have been able to gain a recognised qualification. A second measure relates to rural access to distance education. In response to local demand, the USP has established a Vanuatu sub-centre on Santo Island. This sub-centre is fully staffed and resourced, with library and other facilities, and is providing an excellent community resource for Santo residents, while at the same time complementing the work of the Vila Centre. The Western Samoa Centre (based in Apia) is currently exploring whether to establish a second centre on Savaii Island. Thirdly, agriculture is being offered by extension mode for the first time this year by the university. This move has required extensive negotiations with local school and extension staff regarding practical work and assessment of this. This step marks an important new direction in extension courses.

Conclusion

Distance study caters well for those who can afford the fees, who have the time to study, and who have the skills needed to follow an individualised learning programme, whether this be through print or other media. As outlined, the wider need in the Pacific at the moment is for increased access to functional literacy and numeracy programmes, by a group who may not be able to pay fees, who may have time constraints, or who may need and prefer a face to face group learning experience. The challenge in

the Pacific is to find the right 'mix' between formal, non-formal and informal learning modes and to utilise the new technologies being developed in distance education to serve these needs.

I conclude with some comments by Dukes (1985) which sum up challenges facing Pacific nations today. Dukes proposes that whereas in developed nations the impetus for adult education comes from two major directions - the liberal and individualist position 'that education is an end in itself' (self development, leisure and richer personal living) and from the utilitarian viewpoint (that the rate of change in modern society has been so rapid that people must be educated in order to cope with these), in developing nations, adult education is perceived to be a means of reducing poverty, confronting nations' inequity and contributing to social change. Dukes lists three programme priorities for developing nations today:

Literacy, usually of a functional kind for development...Practical skills and knowledge for production, whether in a cash economy or for self-reliance of local communities... To these two may be added various forms of post-literacy and basic (school equivalency) education through to vocationally-oriented training at different levels to meet economic development needs... The third major category comprises adult education for active (and maybe equal, or maybe responsible) participation in society.

He adds that this does not mean that individual motivation and learning are not important, but that in developing nations the purposes of education are collective, for the development of the group or district, nation or society, through enhanced knowledge and skills, and changed attitudes of its members (Dukes 1985:4).

References

- Dukes, C. (ed). (1985). *Combating poverty through adult education: National development strategies*. London: Croom Helm.
- Fairbairn-Dunlop, P. (1991). Strengthening NGO structures - Western Samoa. In McCall, G. (ed.) *Sydney Talk*. Centre for Pacific Studies, University of New South Wales.
- Fairbairn-Dunlop P. (1994). *The status of South Pacific women*. Noumea: South Pacific Commission.
- Hau'ofa E. (1987). The new South Pacific society: Integration and independence. In Hooper A. et al (eds). *Class and culture in the South Pacific*. Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Auckland and IPS, the University of the South Pacific.
- Schoeffel P. (1992). Food, health and development in the Pacific Islands: Policy implications for Micronesia. *A Journal of Micronesian Studies* (1)2: 223-59.
- South Pacific Commission (1976-93). Statistical Summaries.
- Taylor R., N.D. Lewis and S. Levy. (1989). Societies in transition: Mortality patterns in Pacific Island populations. *International Journal of Epidemiology* (18)3.
- The University of the South Pacific. (1994). *Extension Handbook*. The University of the South Pacific.