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Impediments to village progress and development at Choiseul, Solomon Islands

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Abstract

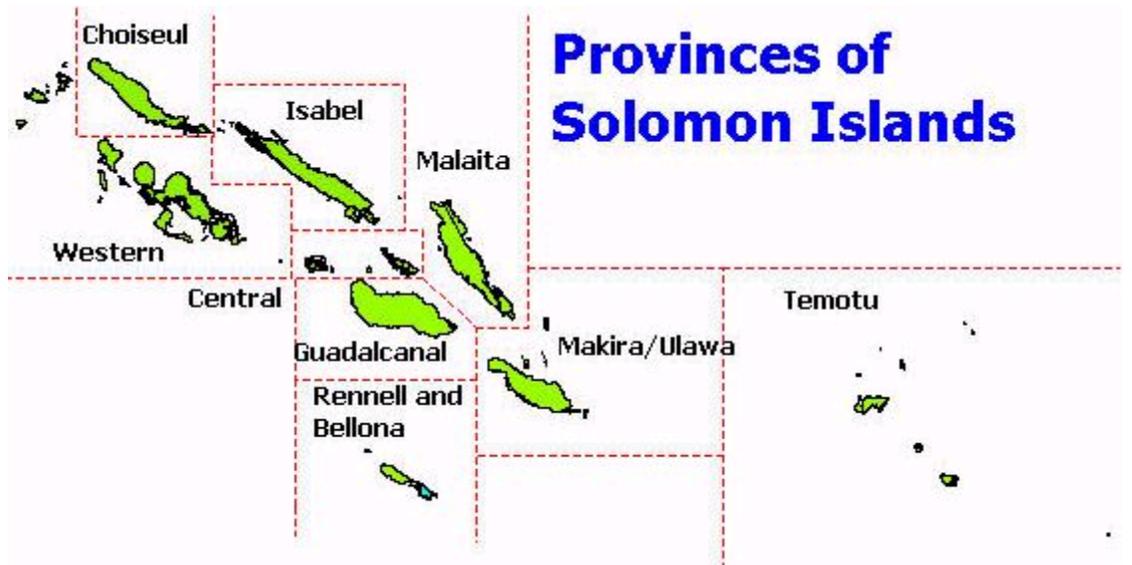
Based on the interview of six members of a village in Northwest Choiseul, Choiseul Province, Solomon Islands, this paper aimed to discover factors that they perceive to act as impediments to the development of their village. Evans' (2002) method of analyzing qualitative data was utilized and Kantz's (2001) types of livelihood resources of natural, economic, human and social capital were used to organize data. Among the findings were that in terms of natural capital, land disputes are a major obstacle to development, curtailing land access, which are linked to other livelihood disadvantages in the village. It is only when land and people are at peace can development occur. Concerning economic capital, there is recognition to diversify the village's income base and to be also cognizant of the dangers relating to rapid shifts from traditional food to imported foodstuff. With regards to human capital, there is concern for eroding traditional skills and realizing the need to also locate the village in the current environment. Village leadership and the poor governance of the village were cited as the most pressing social capital issue. An over-controlling chief accompanied by a lack of vision, planning and group consensus on matters relating to village progress, do not provide a positive milieu.

Background

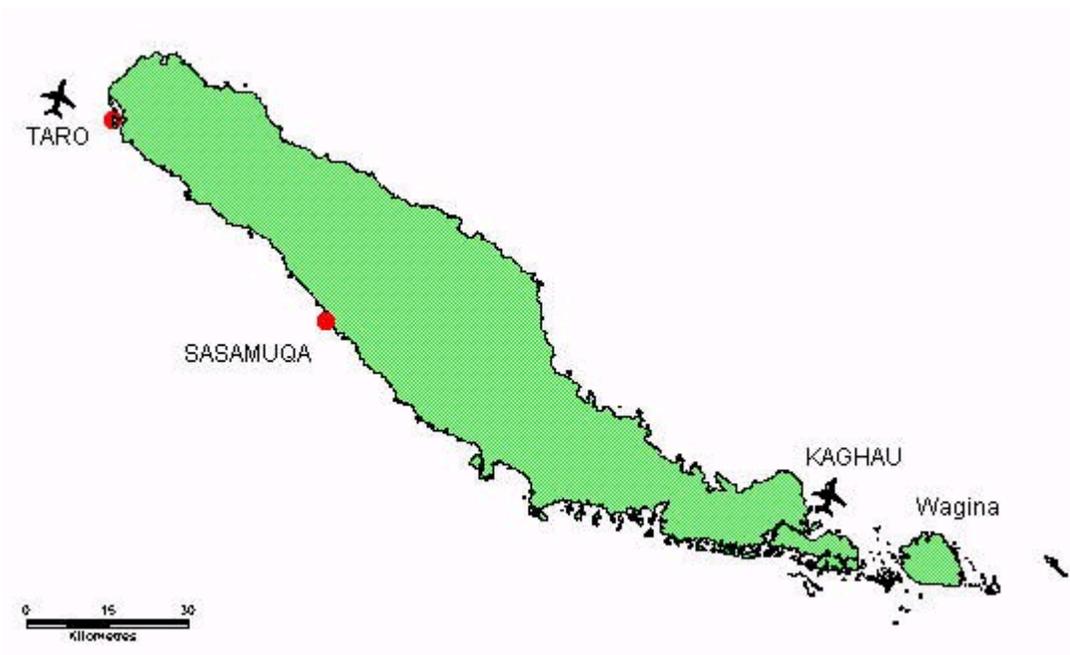
There seem to be a hive of issues, ideas and happenings that occur at villages in Choiseul Province, the Solomon Islands, that it is not clear whether these are contributing to the progress and development of the community or not. While there are a plethora of activities in Choiseul that contribute to growth and development, there may also be ones that impede it. Dhesi (2000) posed a very simple definition of development which means social, economic, technical and institutional change. Community development then according to Doe and Khan (2004, p. 363) is

a “process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with its active participation” It advocates a bottom-up approach to development where the community members have a say in their own development. The theory behind community management is to empower and equip communities to control their own development. Adequate community management is important to community development and the sustainability of communities. Community management is the vehicle through which collective action is exercised for the common good. In other words, community development is operationalized through community management. Cox and Hendrickson (2003), in their work with village health workers in Papua New Guinea, concluded that for any projects to be successful, the community needs to be involved from the beginning. Cox and Hendrickson also emphasized the training approach at the village should not be the usually patronizing implementation from the ‘educated’ to the ‘uneducated’ but instead must also value what people know and bring to the task.

Horowitz (2002), in their study of a New Caledonian village, commented that small rural groups are not static, homogenous units that are being destroyed by modernity. Rather, they are communities that comprise individuals that are constantly adapting to new circumstances, new possibilities and new desires. At this village, the land is their source of identity and dignity and that they have a spiritual relationship to the landscape. Therefore, when there is large scale development such as mining is planned for their land, there is concern that punishment may be delivered by their ancestors for disturbing their resting place. In the case where large scale activities would be allowed, a ceremony is performed to apologize to their ancestors for the disturbance. Furthermore, in New Caledonia, conflicts that centre around social status and land rights have been occurring since the pre-colonial times. Besides these, much of the unique knowledge Kanaks have, had been lost through colonization and missionary activities, and through increasing Western influence on the young people (Horowitz, 2002). Thus, Lindegger and Oliver (2003) emphasized that Western influence is inevitable and there need to be flexibility and be willingness to learn new skills in rural settings. This could entail starting a small business or using information technology to communicate with the world. Many rural businesses contribute to the economy and their sustainability requires good planning.



Choiseul is in the far west



Map of Choiseul Province

Map source: People First Network

Villages in Choiseul also have a myriad of factors affecting them. Choiseul, also known as Lauru, is one of nine provinces of the Solomon Islands. It has a population of more than 20,000 people and account for approximately 7.5 per cent of the country's population (Dorovolomo, 2008). Most of the coastal area is converted into coconut plantations. It is also in coastal areas that most people live. Very few people live inlands. Villagers are involved in a mixed economy by gardening, fishing and hunting for family consumption, as well as producing copra and fishing for sale. Lauru's system of inheritance is patrilineal which means one gains tribal affiliation through their father. Issues of inheritance and rights to land are matters of high debates in Lauru. These disputes are plentiful in Choiseul and further triggered by loggers and logging rights and agreements (Solow, 1992). Almost all land at Choiseul is under traditional ownership or customary tenure at about 95.5 per cent. Its sea and reef have the highest coral and fish diversity than other provinces. Moreover, Choiseul's forest has the greatest biodiversity than other provinces. Choiseul is also the location of the remaining lowland forests in the Pacific (Menazza & Balasinorwala, 2011). At Choiseul Province, there are more than 300 tribal groups (Boseto, 1994), who own areas of the customary land. Boseto stresses the importance of the people as the main resource for the survival and security of life at village-based communities. He further emphasized that tribal leaders are vital in ensuring that politicians and national officials listen to grassroots people's voices. National leaders, on the other hand, need to be increasingly accountable to people in villages, as rural communities make up most of Solomon Islands' population. This study seeks to investigate impediments to development at a village near Taro, the capital of Choiseul Province, Solomon Islands. Thus, the questions asked are: what impediments hold the development of the village? What prevents the village from achieving higher in development?

Conceptual framework

Krantz's (2001) four types of livelihood resources of natural, economic, human and social capital are utilized to provide the conceptual framework of the study. Natural capital entails the natural resource stock such as water and soil. The economic capital constitutes the capital base such as cash, savings, and various assets that would contribute to pursuing a livelihood. The human capital refers to the skills, knowledge and capability to labour and also includes good health to be able to effectively secure an acceptable livelihood. Social capital, as a type of livelihood resource, encompasses the social resources such as networks, social relations and affiliations that can facilitate coordinated actions. Dhesi (2000) also explains that social capital can include shared knowledge, values, norms, traits, social support and networks. It is the accumulation of social, psychological, and cultural assets that influence combined and cooperative action.

Data Analysis

The study incorporates Evans' (2002) method of analyzing qualitative data. Such process involves coding and categorization. Coding is sorting data with commonalities to categories. Categories are conceptual aspects of theories. Evans also states that guidelines used to construct categories are that the categories should a) reflect research purpose, b) be exhaustive, c) originate from a single classification principle and, d) be mutually exclusive. Exclusive means that a particular data or statement clearly belongs to a category and would not fit into the other categories at all. As suggested by Evans (2002) the interviews were analyzed utilizing the following steps:

(i) The first-level of coding involved compilation of lists from the raw data. It is a simple, straightforward and superficial initial analysis. For example, a list of important materials extracted from the interviews totaling about 113 was constructed. The list is without any particular order, it is a simple and straightforward initial listing. Included in this long list, for instance, are 'No freedom to work land', 'Land dispute a chronic issue', 'Generating funds for village projects a challenge' or 'Tobacco a rot to families'.

(ii) Next, this large list is further refined and reduced by sorting them into categories. These categories were facilitated by Krantz's (2001) conceptual framework for the types of livelihood resources which consists of natural, economic, human and social capital. Items were then put into these categories and further sorted into sub-categories, as can be seen in Figure 1.

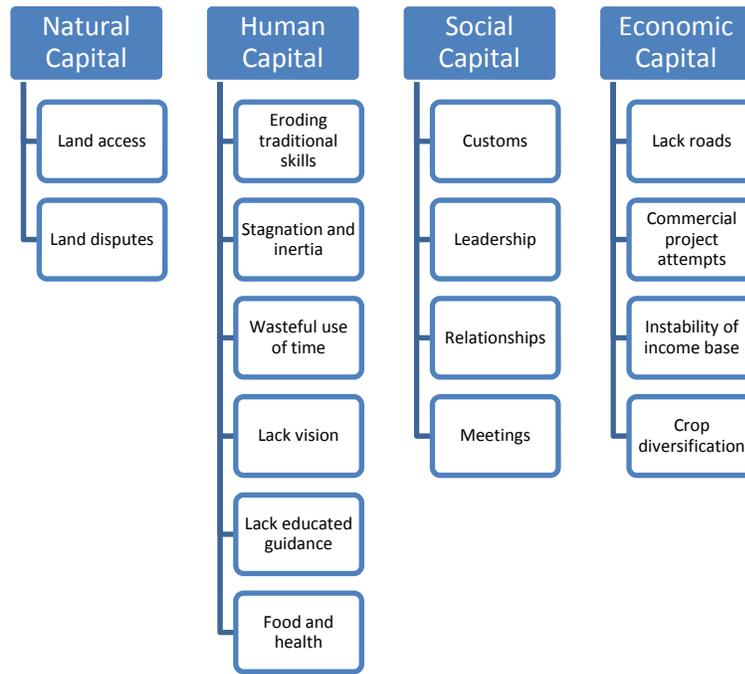


Figure 1: Types of livelihood resources - Categories and sub-categories.

The four skills that were used to establish these categories were:

1. Recognition and elimination of overlap.

Overlap is avoided by reducing the long list of coded items. In addition, what (Evans, 2003) calls *systematic comparative pairing*, was conducted to ensure elimination of overlaps. This is implemented by comparing each category to each other. For example, if six categories were generated, A, B, C, D, E, and F, compare A with B, C, D, E, F. Category B is compared to C, D, E, and F, while C with D, E, F, and so forth. In this study, there are four categories thus the contents of A (Natural capital), is compared with B (Economic capital), C (Human capital) and D (Social capital). Category B is compared to C and D and so forth. This is also repeated for the sub-categories in order that materials within categories and sub-categories do not overlap.

2. Recognition and incorporation of outlier and atypical cases.

Outlier cases are those that do not conform to any of the patterns identified. In this study, however, no outlier was generated. Coded items were shifted from category to category and sub-category to sub-category, but a list of outlier was not necessary, as items generally fit into one.

3. Application of appropriate levels of the basis of categorization.

There may be multiple levels of categorization with a kind of hierarchy of categories, sub-categories, sub-sub-categories and so on. This study went down only two levels of categorization, that is, categories and sub-categories, as can be seen from figure 1.

4. Presentation of categories.

An aspect of presenting categories is labeling. The labeling of the initial four categories of this study was provided by Krantz' (2001) conceptual framework for the types of livelihood resources. However, the sub-categories needed to be labeled. It was ensured that these sub-categories accurately reflect the category's nature and constitution. Repeating the exercise at 1 above is useful in finding a sub-category that is sufficiently all-encompassing of its own.

Credibility, which is generating confidence in the truth of the findings, was ensured through member checks (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002), in which two of the interviewees were given the completed paper to read and make comments on the accuracy of the analysis and findings. Interviewees who checked the paper mostly agreed on the findings. However, changes were made where they felt does not really reflect their opinions or a particular information is incorrect.

Discussions

Natural Capital

The study investigated impediments to development and livelihoods of people at a village in Choiseul Province, Solomon Islands. This village will be referred to as *Komala* hereafter, not its real name. In terms of natural capital, it was found that the most prevalent obstacle to development and making livelihood advancements at *Komala* village is land disputes. It was claimed that land disputes are chronic issues not only at *Komala* village, but also throughout the province. Participants purported that time and resources are often wasted on quarrels over land and tribal leadership rather than on plans and projects that would benefit the village. One of the participants explained that unless land and people are at peace, there will never be development and improvement of villagers' livelihoods. As a consequence of the prevalence of land disputes, there are restrictions to land access and utilization, which impede the livelihood of families. Foremost is access to gardening space, the linchpin to villagers' livelihood, as they are mostly subsistence farmers. These subsistence gardens are grown enough for the family and excesses can often be sold at Taro, the provincial capital. There is an assortment of crops grown in these subsistence gardens, similar to what Wagner (2007) noted about crop gardens at a Papua New Guinea village, which usually include a variety of potatoes, cooking bananas, cassava, yams, taro, sugar cane, beans, tomatoes, cucumbers, eggplant, corn and pumpkins. In any case, produces are primarily for the family's subsistence. Restrictions to land access stifle the access to subsistence farming spaces as well as economic and commercial enterprises that will be argued later.

In a longitudinal analysis of the changes at a Tibetan village, Goldstein, Childs, and Wangdui (2008) noted that there are two most important factors that determine household poverty. The first is low agricultural output as a result of small field or fields that are not fertile. The second factor relates to not having access to non-farm income usually because there is no one to send for it or the one sent misuses the money and brings back almost nothing. Concerning non-farm income, the Tibetan villager views this essential for improving their standard of living. They realize that they live in a complex and difficult economy in which agriculture alone will not be sufficient to achieve the standard of living they aspire. Consequently, villagers send unprecedented numbers of family members to earn income. The latter reason does not really apply to *Komala* village, as avenues of non-farm employment are not available. However, the issue of getting access to a limited field to till, as a factor that determines household poverty, is of relevance to *Komala* village. The limited access to land for subsistence gardening is affecting the livelihood of families. Undoubtedly, this will impinge on issues pertaining to household poverty and hardship. This does not mean that there is not enough land at Choiseul Province, as it is one of the most sparsely populated provinces of the Solomon Islands (Dorovolomo, 2008).

Rather, tribal leadership over land is traced through the patrilineal inheritance system at the Choiseul Province which makes access to land, in many instances, restrictive if you are born from a female family line within *Komala* village.

One of the participants, nevertheless, emphasized that being the tribal chief does not mean that you own the land, but responsible for the tribe, whether their lineage is from the male or female sides of the tribe, so that the people better access and utilize the land. Currently, participants expressed that there is lack of freedom in the use of land as well as what you own, which in turn holds progress. As has been argued earlier, Campenhout (2008) also reiterates the relationship between land acreage held by the family as being positively related to wealth at the village. In addition, crowded use of available land allows minimal fallow time, which affects soil quality and outputs. In depth investigation into the poverty and hardship level within *Komala* village was not among the scopes of this study, but the implied message is that there are levels of notable hardships at the village. One of the strengths of such community, however, is that people tend to share produces among each other. The recipient will reciprocate in the future, not necessarily with the same gift, but with what they may have in surplus. This helps to buffer the hardships that villagers may have. McDowell (1997) calls this the ‘gift economy’ which involves the traditional interchange of material goods among people, referring to his study in the Papua New Guinea context. In such society, including *Komala* village, moral correctness is often judged against materials shared from person to person and not by the materialistic orientation to success in the world. Reciprocity is the basis of social relationships among the people, thus, it is confronted by forces of capitalism and a market-driven economic relationships.

Economic Capital

The study found that there had been failed attempts at commercial projects at *Komala* village. In the 1970s, there were plans for a cattle project and considerable ground works were made and the village chief ordered that the project be aborted. The chief also terminated a cocoa project that was suggested in the 1980s. Clearly, the village leadership is an impediment to collaborative economic plans. It was emphasized that too many infrastructural and economic development at the village do not materialize due to uncooperative leadership. A participant commented that the village cannot develop unless they develop themselves. The people can develop themselves only if the village leadership provides the climate for it to occur. In other words, villagers must not wait for others to develop and improve their own livelihoods. Dong (2000) supports the idea of village-sponsored infrastructural investment and social services in Chinese villages as they contributed positively to growth in household outputs. Dong states that such investment leads to an upsurge in agricultural productivity and helps alleviate poverty. Ultimately, it is hoped that village-initiated projects would then have tangible benefits to villagers’ standard of living and help alleviate poverty and hardship.

Income at *Komala* village primarily comes from producing copra and selling surplus garden crops at the provincial capital. Due to lack of roads, the coconut plantations are nearest to the coast. Crop gardens begin where coconut plantations end. Copra and garden crop surpluses are transported via powered-boat or paddled canoes to a copra buyer and the provincial capital market. However, the study found that there is instability in the income base of the village. It was noted that only a few of the villagers concentrate on a particular income source, such as running a trade store, bakery or fuel depot. The rest of them often chase after what brings higher returns, which is influenced by the world market rather than the villagers. For instance, if the price of copra is high almost all villagers will be producing it and would abort its production when the price is not worth the physical labor involved. The activities for income generation may then shift to harvesting and selling trochus shells or bechdemers. Nevertheless, the Solomon Islands Prime Minister, Gordon Lilo, has put a ban on the sale and export of bechdemers and warns that illegal traders will be brought to justice (Marau, 2012). The initial ban was in 2004 as a result of overharvesting. The ban was lifted in 2007 to enable victims of the tsunami disaster to earn a living and later banned again in 2009. Despite the ban, there are still illegal traders operating, evidenced by a raid on an Asian businessman's property, where almost SBD\$1 million worth of bechdemers were confiscated (Makaa, 2011). Rural and coastal communities engage with traders in order to earn an income for their families, often not realizing or ignoring the environmental implications. Marau (2011) reported on rural and remote communities such as the Duff Islands and Ontong Java, who petitioned that the government lifts the bechdemer ban, as it is a means by which they can pay their school children's fees and other belongings. In terms of *Komala* village, participants suggested that instead of going after what is fashionable and eventually fades away, villagers need to establish a legal, viable and steady income base for their families.

Having said that, participants emphasized that there is a need to diversify the crops that are planted. Villagers are already doing it by the nature of the subsistence gardening system being used, which has an assortment of agricultural crops. However, villagers face difficulties and food shortages when there are lengthy periods of rain or dry weather. Other times, shortages of food from the garden are as a result of neglect and the overuse of plots of land. Neglecting traditional practices that enabled food security over generations in traditional *Lauru*, the local name for Choiseul Province, is a much more serious reason that can be accorded to issues of food insecurity. Many villages at Choiseul Province are disregarding the importance of the *quana* (Jansen & Sirikolo, 2010). Separate from the crop garden, a *quana* "is the traditional food forest where most of the important forest food trees – known as *vugata*, are traditionally planted" (Jansen & Sirikolo, 2010, p. 15). Jansen and Sirikolo found that the *quana* is declining as food trees that were planted by elders are old and very few people are replanting them. These *quanas* are cultivated forests of nut and fruit trees that are planted, replanted and maintained over generations. Commonly found in ridges, these nut and fruit trees include *bario*, *boboe*, *kaku*, *karukarunu*, *kasu*, *kimaku*, *natu*, *nive*, *pavoma*, *qiqiti*, *saqa*, *talike* and *vele*. Two of the most important nuts are the *kaku* and *saqa*, however, the traditional pruning of these trees are

declining. Traditionally, someone who has a well stocked *quana* is seen as a rich person. It depicts richness because the neglect of the *quana* will also mean the neglect of the food security, diversity and wealth it has provided the people of Choiseul over generations (Jansen & Sirikolo, 2010).

Social Capital

It was voiced by participants that an over-controlling chief does not provide an environment for development. Chiefs impede development and opportunities for collaborative tribal action when they make decisions and implement activities on their own. An example provided was that in traditional and significant occasions such as the *Naki*, all related clans should be consulted to contribute to the event. On the contrary, the chief opted to organize the *Naki* on his own, which is also against tribal customs. A *Naki* is a large feast which carries various functions including enabling rights to land and resources (Solow, 1992). The chief can gain respect and support if he is seen to be playing his roles properly. Moreover, there can be a climate of cooperation and mutual interdependence to make progress at the village if the chief and leaders portray such traits in their actions. Participants recognized that village leaders need to trust each other, not to be envious of the other, be closely knit, and be people-focused. In the absence of these, participants expanded that it leads to a lack of vision and a positive future outlook, which in turn, instills ignorance among people, diminishes a wish for something better, creates a lack of focus, and eventually impedes village development. Galvan (2007) observed that village leadership is vital in articulating a vision of collaboration and cooperation in order to pave way to reorganize work, farming, raising livestock, and financial cooperation that would break old habits and provide a path to a better future. Village leaders must be able to motivate and inspire fellow community members to see a new vision of how to organize economic and social life in the community. Most of the technical expertise may not be possibly drawn from the village, which requires leaders to also marshal outside technical assistance to help soldier development enterprises of the community (Galvan, 2007). Conspicuously, villages must be led, governed, reorganized and envisioned using newer paradigms, not business as usual anymore.

Galvan's (2007) notion of networking with outside technical experts to provide input into community development enterprises was also echoed by participants. Participants expressed that in the modern era, the ability to tap into developmental aid and utilize outside expertise are important to *Komala* village's development but this is largely unexplored. In addition, participants admitted that the village obviously lacks a lot of expertise which requires external connectivity. Wagner (2007) purports that social relations is now not defined by intra-community relations but inevitably outside the village through expanding and diversifying networks of social and economic relations. Furthermore, Wagner (2007, p. 37) stated that "these networks link individuals and groups within local communities to outside interests of various kinds and at various scales. The membership of these many networks crosscuts that of existing

social groups and alters the social position and motivations of all members of the community”. It is almost inevitable that villages should diversify their external links for their social and economic advancement. Favorable intra-community and inter-community social relations are crucial to the village’s development. Furthermore, an issue that participants identified that weakens the intra-community relations is the non-observance of various village customs. For example, there is a decline in *padapada*, which is respect for others at all levels of the village. There needs to be respect among siblings, cousins, parents and children, elders and the chiefly family. A very strong custom at *Komala* village and generally at Choiseul Province is for a brother to *padapadani* his sisters and cousin sisters, vice versa. However, it was reported that there are increasing incidences of cousins making each other pregnant. In the opinion of the author, impregnating your cousin, which is a very serious offence in *Komala* and Choiseul custom, is a breach of the custom in its worst form. Such incidences are blatant manifestation of the deterioration of traditional customs and evidence of poor social capital and cohesion at the village.

Crucial to building social capital, participants elaborated that the relationships within the village need to be conducive to growth and development at the village. Participants commented that when there is lack of cooperation and togetherness, then it is so difficult to develop anything viable at the community. In instances, there is group focus, but often there are disobedience and hesitance from sections of the community in implementing plans. On the other hand, when someone attempts to start a business enterprise or commercial undertaking, there are forces that often attempt to put a halt on it. An attitude that suppresses the progress of other fellow villagers does nothing to provide incentive and encourage innovation at the community. Lev-Wiesel (2003) indicates that it is imperative for rural communities to develop strong solidarity, rootedness and intimate ties among members of the community. Lev-Wiesel stresses that if such cohesion is absent it will affect the level of communality and commitment to community goals and shared values. Social cohesion, according to Berger-Schmitt (2002, p. 405), is “the connections and relations between societal units such as individuals, groups, associations as well as territorial units”. Berger-Schmitt provides two dimensions to social cohesion. The first is the social capital dimension which embraces the notion of bolstering social relations, interactions and ties. The other relates to the inequality dimension which promotes equal opportunities and the reduction of disparities within the community and society. Overtly, social cohesion has a significant influence on the social capital of the community, which can in turn, impact on the quality of life of the village and society. On a wider scenario than *Komala* village, the lack of social cohesion and not investing enough into building strong social capital in the Solomon Islands may have caused conflicts and the poor economic performances that follow and thus affecting the quality of life. It is important that the Solomon Islands invest on its social capital, the platform from which stability can be gained in order to pursue higher socio-economic wealth. Duhaime, Searles, Usher, Myers, and Frechette (2004) reinforced that a high stock of social capital can translate into a socially cohesive society and enable sustained economic growth and human development. When society does not work against each other and relative stability is maintained, it can help the community endure stress and strain caused by economic downturns, social deviance, and disasters.

Participants also raised the issue of educated people that are leaving the village further weakened its capability to help connect to the outside world. For example, participants explained that the village's capability to write a competitive proposal for provincial or donor assistance towards community livelihood projects is lacking. Dhesi (2000), in a study of a village in India, also noted the erosion of social capital as many villagers moved overseas or to cities. However, Dhesi advises that these people can be utilized to send in funds and expertise for projects. Additionally, Dhesi advocates the training and engagement of youths in the village to strengthen the village's social capital. Often underused, youths can assume the role of agents of change at the village. This should not only involve providing sporting facilities and organizing camps, but also making sure that youths are involved in the village council. Participants also recognized the salience of regular village meetings and councils, but that which Dhesi (2000) suggests should include the active involvement of young people. Participants voiced the need for regular venues for decision making at the village as being vital to getting people together to plan projects, discuss ways to improve standards of living, promote church activities, and identify gaps. Campenhout (2007) agrees on an analysis of the village in order to identify gaps. Campenhout argues that such baseline situation analysis can identify appropriate poverty indicators and profiles, from which relevant development interventions can be designed. Campenhout (2007) specifically requests that in the process of formulating village profiles and baseline information, the activities and the beneficial effects women have on the well-being of the household needs to also be captured.

Participants warned that making decisions and formulating plans are vital, but there should also be vigorous implementation of these ambitions. Unless there is collaborative, focused, active and energetic execution of plans, village situations will obtain little progress or remain the same. In order to rally collective energy, it is vital that rural village communities have 'core activists' (Juska, Poviliunas, & Pozzuto, 2005) to be 'key agents of mobilization' (Galvan, 2007) in dealing with social, cultural, political and economic problems. This comprises recruitment and deploying volunteer participation in activities impacting on the quality of life in villages, whether it be in the beautification of surroundings, leisure and recreation, economic pursuits, cultural or educational enhancement. Generating necessary and successful mobilization requires leaders and individuals who possess the skills in communicating a mission and inspire followers. A 'top-to-bottom' approach to soliciting grassroots participation has severe limitations. Rather, an approach that assures meaningful participation, shares decision making and responsibilities, have a chance of gaining viability among ordinary villagers (Juska et al., 2005). *Komala* village needs 'core activists' who are given the mandate to be drivers of community projects and activities, which should not necessarily be the chief. It is problematic when the chief and elders want to implement things by themselves, often with little results, and empower individuals within the tribe who can inspire followers to achieve shared goals.

Human Capital

Participants felt that wasteful use of time and unproductive habits impede the capability of the village labor to reach optimal productivity. It is advised that villagers prioritize and use their time well. Three habits are viewed to hold back a lot of human potential at *Komala* village. These are tobacco use, alcohol intake, and gambling. There was a comment that development will not happen, when people spend time gambling or use time and limited resources just to acquire tobacco. It was emphasized that tobacco use and alcohol abuse is a rot to the family, wastes money and causes health problems. In the study of 11 rural villages in Tamil Nadu, India, Kaur, Rao, Radhakrishnan, Ramachandran, and Venkachalam (2011) observed a high prevalence of tobacco and alcohol use. They called for health promotion campaigns and creating enabling environments that would curb the growing burden of rural tobacco and alcohol abuse. In rural Taiwan, Kow-Tong, Chien-Jen, Fagot-Campagna, and Narayan (2001) found that there is significant use of tobacco, alcohol and betel quid chewing in rural Taiwan and that the male gender is a strong predictor to the abuse of these. In a rural community in Nigeria, Brisibe and Ordinioha (2011) noted that alcohol is widely used but most do not necessarily abuse it, due to cultural restrictions. These examples indicate that involvement in addictive habits such as alcohol and tobacco use and gambling can also be issues in other rural parts of the world. Males are often the main users and measures that discourage involvement such as cultural restrictions and health promotion campaigns can be implemented.

In order to break inertia and stagnation, it was explained that villagers need to possess the urge to do something better so that the livelihoods of children can also be better. A participant commented that village development starts with the development of the individual. The responsibility and drive should begin from the individual armored with the will to develop the family, village and the tribe. There was emphasis on the continuous and early education of children before they arrive at young adulthood, on traditional customs, roles of girls and boys, the importance of owning a garden and home, respect for others in the village, and working together. It was also advised that adults also need to be organized and marshal particularly the skills and strengths of women in development. Bhuiyan, Faraiza, and McAllister (2005) agree that development in rural villages begins with educating people into specific norms that are considered important to development. This process starts with change that should occur in the intellectual climate of clan leaders and their recipients. This can be possible, according to Bhuiyan, Faraizi, and McAllister (2005, p. 350):

“through increasing their capacity to reconsider the foundations of knowledge – for both clan members and their recipients – which will in turn enable them to appreciate where they stand in contemporary humanity. This would empower them with a new insight to dismantle the existing control mechanisms of dependency and constructed notions of development”.

Villagers need to be empowered with education about what they need and where they currently stand, in order to free themselves from development-dependent subjects to development-free

people. The progress and skilling of youths and adults are vital and can be organized for the betterment of the village, but can only be nurtured within the ‘intellectual climate of clan leaders’, who are more than often obstacles to development. Goldstein et al. (2008) also emphasized the need to bolster the skill levels of villagers in various relevant areas and to develop social mechanisms to effectively organize the family in a changing world. Since the globe is changing rapidly, villages too need to make informed judgment on where they locate themselves in today’s shifting world.

While villagers need to obtain relevant skills for the modern economy, since *Komala* village still largely depends on a subsistence economy, traditional skills and practices are important. There are concerns regarding eroding traditional skills. Choiseul has its own traditional *kuza*, which is a custom string bag for carrying produces. Many young people today do not know how to make the *kuza*. The *kuza* is woven from the *sako*, a special tree bark. The act of *kukuboto*, putting together strings from the *sako*, is fast fading away. Many now use string from rice bags, ropes that land ashore found on the beach, or string bought from shops rather than the *sako*. Another traditional skill that many people from Choiseul do not know how to make today is the *ziku*. The *ziku* is a traditionally woven rope to carry firewood in Choiseul. It is a concern that people are using different ropes to carry firewood rather than the *kuza*. One of the most important crops in Choiseul and *Komala* village is the *tika*, or taro or *dalo* in Fiji. The *baroe zekata*, where *tika* is planted, is the most important garden at Choiseul. Each family has to have a *tika* farm, but many do not have one and if they plant *tika* it is usually combined with sweet potatoes. A *baroe zekata* should be separate and properly cared for, which should be an everyday task. When *tika* is harvested, the *zeqe* is used to peel it. A *zeqe* is half of a shell harvested from the reef. However, many villagers today use the knife instead of a *zeqe* to peel *tika*. Eroding traditional knowledge of taking care of the *baroe zekata*, making of the *kuza* and *ziku*, the use of the *zeqe* and issues surrounding harvest, dilutes the retention of vital traditional mastery. Siriphon (2006) emphasizes that indigenous knowledge is necessary for development and modernization. Revitalization of local knowledge married with modern science can be combined strategically and contextually. In other words, local knowledge is neither theoretically nor practically superior or inferior to scientific knowledge. Thus, there should be hybridized local knowledge with new technologies in order to survive in the changing socio-economic environment.

Participants also discussed matters relating to food and health. There is an increasing reliance on rice and imports that also has health repercussions, if traditional food such as *tika* is shunned as unimportant. It was stressed that it is important to promote and eat traditional food than the over-reliance on rice. Consequently, participants noticed that many are unproductive even before they reach fifty years of age. Traditionally, a participant recalled, when a visitor comes at your home the *kūnū* is prepared. A *kūnū* is mashed *tika* with dried nuts of *kaku* and *saqa*. Sadly, when a visitor drops in today the homeowner would instruct the cooking of rice or the boiling of water for a cup of tea. In fact, with the drastic increase in the reliance of rice as the staple food, rice imports in the Solomon Islands reached SBD\$200 million in 2009 (Basi, 2009). When a country relies on foreign countries through imports, for its staple food, it poses serious risks to the food security of its villages, towns, provinces and the nation. According to Puia (2011) the rice

consumption rate in the Solomon Islands is about 100 kilograms per person each year. With a high Solomon Islands population growth rate, the ability to feed an increasing number is imperative and more imports of rice should not be the long term plan. Over-reliance on imports for a crop that is not indigenous and has become a staple food is not healthy for the people and the economy. Jansen and Sirikolo (2010) advocate that at Choiseul, people must be more reliant on their own traditional food that had sustained them for millennium years, as their staple food. They also advised the insertion of traditional knowledge into the formal school curriculum. Schmid, Egeland, Salomeyesudas, Satheesh, and Kuhnlein (2006) also stress that local traditional food can be incorporated as an important feature to nutritional intervention strategies in villages and rural communities. A high reliance on imported food that are high in sugar, fat and salt and moving away from traditional food that are high in fibre, less in sugar and salt, is a challenge. The public often knows what constitutes healthy eating but translating it into positive behavior often lacks. Therefore, there needs to be promotion of locally grown food (Parry, 2010).

Conclusion

With a Human Poverty Index below that of Bangladesh and a very low Human Development Index (Tisdell, 2000), and being labeled as one of the most corrupted nations in the Pacific Islands and possesses an average income that has declined since 1980 (Wate, 2006), the economic and social conditions in the Solomon Islands can be harsh. Underlying drivers that affect the village can be multiple and complex including societal change, conflict within the village, village leadership and governance, issues of access to land and resources, poverty, misplaced priorities and untapped potentials. In order that villagers maximally utilize relevant livelihood pursuits, adequate attention needs to be put into identifying factors that impair them from happening. In doing so, it has to be realized that village livelihoods are also dependent on national and regional socioeconomic conditions and policies, many of which villagers may have no control over. Governments emphasize a bottom-up approach to rural development, but whether it is rhetoric or reality remains to be seen. Such an approach must be reflected in the amount of money spent on rural advancement. Currently, most government funds are spent in Honiara, where less than twenty per cent of the population of the Solomon Islands lives. The majority of Solomon Islanders live in rural villages which makes it absolutely imperative that they are supported, led and governed effectively at the village level. Understanding villages must be a strong and urgent fascination of the government, province and local councils, as outputs of these communities have a lot to do with the development of Solomon Islands and the quality of life of its people. Understanding these villages, it has to be said, should also include in-depth knowledge of the context and culture of the people. Furthermore, the four types of livelihood resources of natural, human, social and economic capital are intricately related. Addressing one livelihood resource and neglecting the others is not holistic in effectively tackling community needs and development. For example, there may be natural capital (land), but if social capital (community networks and strength of supports) and the correct human capital (skills), do not sufficiently exist, developing resources into something that can benefit the village will not occur. The access and effective use of land remains a critical issue. Additionally, in community-based development, effective and educated leadership play central roles. Adequate community

management is essential for effective social action that is instrumental to community development and the sustainability of villages. In the process, marrying local knowledge with modern knowledge has to be almost inevitable as the world rapidly changes. The fact is that the more the community has social, natural, human and economic capital, the more you can get. Conversely, the less you have, the less you will reap. Thus, the quantity and quality of intimate ties among these livelihood resources will inadvertently indicate the strength of the community to alleviate the impediments to development at the village.

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