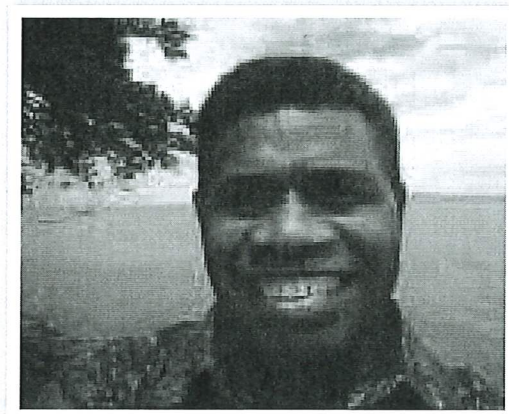


# Inspiring ‘Our Islands of Communities’

*Gordon Leua Nanau*



The coronavirus pandemic, better known as COVID-19, which started in Wuhan, China in December 2019, has brought the world to a standstill in a span of several months. The fast-moving lifestyle, profit-driven economies and global integration promoted by rich and powerful nations has proven inept in the face of this unseen enemy. This crisis has demonstrated that humanity can survive without many of the niceties and luxuries of our contemporary global order. In Solomon Islands and other countries, citizens retreated to their local communities, mostly in remote and maritime locales but also in urban formal and informal settlements (*vanua/komu/vera*), as a spontaneous response to the impending global threat. Pacific communities include some of the most isolated, neglected and peripheral thresholds of the capitalist world. In this instance, Pacific island countries (PICs) shut their borders.

The COVID-19 pandemic taught us a big lesson in terms of how vulnerable we are to crises such as pandemics and climate change. Despite genuine intentions, international organisations were unable to guarantee people’s safety. Regional organisations became feeble, with minimal action. The machinery of modern nation-states relied on people’s goodwill, submission, respect for authority and humility in the fight against COVID-19. Economic wealth and development activities became secondary considerations.

Governments pulled the brake on the fast lifestyle, while many were forced to go on extended leave or became unemployed. The common advice from state institutions and employers was ‘work from home’ or ‘work online.’ The travel

were proven to be more important than monetary profit. This crisis prompts an important question: *What can Pacific islanders do to face the future? What could be a credible Pacific vision?* Certain realities have hit home:

- First, legitimate, participatory and collaborative leadership founded on a culture of respect, translucency and peaceful coexistence must be rejuvenated.
- Second, we must strive to empower and connect local communities and villages, including schools, clinics and hospitals, with environmentally friendly technologies. Advancements must not be at the expense of close-knit social relationships and the natural environment.
- Third, cleanliness and clean-living habits must be encouraged and facilitated. Local communities must be empowered with proper water supply and sanitation systems to encourage better hygiene.
- Finally, we must realise and appreciate the fact that local villages and communities remain Pacific peoples' refuge during times of strife and destitution. Safety, livelihoods, education and processes of human development must be rooted in local communities and ways of knowing. Local communities and what they offer must now be our focus as we face the future.

The Pacific cannot be described in any other way than as an 'Ocean connecting all our islands of communities.' This is the Pacific Manifesto! This should be our vision for the future of Oceania – reinvigorating our islands of communities.

***“We are a region glued together by respect, sincerity and appreciation of diversity. We must support a region comprised of distinct villages, languages, ethnic groups, religious beliefs, islands, provinces, states, nations, confederacies and sub-regions into a strong common ecosystem called Oceania. ”***

We are a region glued together by respect, sincerity and appreciation of diversity. We must support a region comprised of distinct villages, languages, ethnic groups, religious beliefs, islands, provinces, states, nations, confederacies and sub-regions into a strong common ecosystem called Oceania. We must respect and defend the rights of distinct communities across the Pacific and allow each of them the right to develop and enjoy the proceeds of their labour. This diversity must be rooted in local livelihood approaches and ways

of doing things, fertilised and supported by modern ideas, clean technology, determined leadership and positive habits, with humanity and relationships at the core.

Our relationships with each other in our respective communities, and our guaranteed livelihoods bestowed by our customary land and marine tenures, must be upheld with dignity and respect and protected for our children's children. As part of our vision for Oceania, we must strive to keep the environment clean through eco-friendly models of development and forms of communication. We must put communities first as the core building block of daily human interactions and livelihoods. We must get village community services right so that they genuinely provide safe sanctuaries in future global pandemics and other calamities.

The Bible states that 'the stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone.' Our village communities have long been neglected and ignored by states across the region. Village communities have proven resilient in the face of COVID-19 and other human-made and natural disasters in the past. We must get our village communities right by empowering them with appropriate livelihood facilities and services, giving them opportunities to generate income and assisting them to access services provided by other entities, including state, sub-regional and regional organisations. We must ensure that communities and families are robust, safe, self-sufficient, vibrant and well connected. If we continue to ignore communities, *wantok* groups and what they represent, the whole Pacific region will lose its particular identity and diversity.

***“We must assent to a shared vision of Oceania where communities are inspired, ecosystem services upheld, and individuals and their families exhilarated as we journey into the future.”***

#### ***About the Author***

Dr. Gordon Leua Nanau is from the Tathimboko region of Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands. He has a strong interest in leadership issues in Pacific island countries and is a keen observer of the impacts of globalisation on local Pacific communities. His other research interests include constitutional reforms, elections and democracy, rural livelihoods and Pacific epistemologies. He is currently a senior lecturer in the School of Government, Development and International Affairs (SGDIA) at the University of the South Pacific, Laucala campus, in Fiji.