

Economic Development Survey 2030

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Comments

- **Overall the report is very positive** and that is good as it gives faith to the Cook Islands people. However maybe it is too optimistic. Should we believe that Covid-19 is going to end soon and work towards that or should we perhaps work towards a worst case scenario?
- **Too many economists writing reports.** Although I accept this is an economic strategy I wonder who is the target audience when it is written by economists? Gini co-efficient? Can the language be in lay man terms? The NSDP has the same problem. Although the Vision and Values tend to be qualitative the monitoring of progress is quantitative – using the Gini co-efficient. I sent comments on this being confusing in terms of qualitative been assessed by a quantitative tool.
- **NSDP and the EDS** - I attended the NSDP consultations and I did comment on the “feel good” vision and the values and how I hoped they would be reached before 100yrs. My point was that the NSDP and the EDS need to be linked to prevent duplication. I believe both NSDP and EDS have a role to play. I actually find that the EDS lacks the “soul” that NSDP has – a feeling that the report was written by people that have experienced the ups and downs (*the realities*) of growing up in the Cook Islands.
- At the moment it seems that the **EDS is “moving into the area of NSDP”**. Since the EDS conference in 2019 there are changes to the Key Objectives of the EDS – we now have the additions of
 - Developing our people and culture, and
 - Greening our economy
 but this isn’t discussed in the current report. Why the inclusion?
- **Consider merging the NSDP and the EDS** to prevent duplication. Why are the 2 documents separate?

Who pays for implementing the Strategy?

- **How are all the objectives going to be financed?** We really cannot afford to keep taking out ADB loans and as we are, I worry that we will revert back to 1996 when were at the mercy of ADB and had to cut 50% of the public service at the instruction of ADB.

Monitoring and Evaluation of the Strategy

- **Moving from quantity to quality growth** – this seems to be a 360 degree turn. Can’t you have both quantitative and qualitative growth or does it have to be one or the other?
- **Measuring progress** – Gini coefficient again but I don’t know what this means. Although quality is in the objective the measurement uses an economic tool.

Instead of a Gini coefficient economic monitoring tool why not **use a Happiness Index** tool like the one used in Brunei. How happy are the Cook Islands people?

The Land

- **We know the importance of our land** –it ties us together from generation to generation. Land is more than an economic resource. I worry when I read that Government will increase access to land to ensure economic growth. To me that means Government will use its power to take away land from landowners. ICI is already working in this area through legislation.
- **Sustainable development** is based on people living *in harmony* with their environment. It means we look at alternatives rather than choose the obvious course of action. If cables need to be put down, find another route. If people are crashing into trees, educate the people, don't kill the trees.
- **What price progress?** Cutting down trees in Matavera to widen the roads in the name of progress. When all the trees have been cut down how can we sit at Climate Change conferences and honestly say that we are doing our best to mitigate the effects of climate change. Trees offset negative effects of climate change by providing Oxygen; they provide shelter, shade, beautiful scenery, are historical landmarks, and protect against erosion. Yet ICI continues to push for cutting trees and NES stands by and doesn't say a word –very troubling.
- **Move to the Pa Enua due to over development** – with the development changes occurring on Rarotonga people may prefer to move to the Pa Enua in future to live a tranquil lifestyle where flora and fauna are protected and the environment of today is much like the environment of yesterday.

The People

- **Use resident experts** - There are **experts within the Cook Islands** who are not utilized and this is an ongoing issue. The movement of talented public servants out of the public service occurs as their expertise is not acknowledged or used. Jobs that they are the best candidate for are given to others. I can speak from personal experience about this as I was unable to secure government jobs so worked for NZHC, UNDP, and ADB where employment is based on merit.
- **Population** – where are we and where are we going? The Cook Islands UN Population forecast – My husband Andreas Demmke is a qualified Population Specialist who has lived on Rarotonga for almost a decade but his skills have not been tapped. Andreas Demmke has a Masters in Demography, has worked at UNFPA, SPC, and in the Cook Islands. He has experience in population estimates, projections, census work and has written on the elderly. His presentations on census data for all islands within the Cooks have been presented to NZHC and Internal Affairs. He has also done comparisons between the Cook Islands and French Polynesia regarding population.
- The **Population study and National Population Strategy** are areas that Andreas can provide assistance on.

- *Before growing our population or using overseas assistance we need to **look at trying to keep people in the Cook Islands**. One way is to acknowledge and use the expertise of residents.*
- **The cost of expatriate experts** - Aside from higher salaries, relocation fees, and package benefits, expatriates take away work from local available experts. We have engineers, lawyers, environmental scientists, strategic planners, economists, population experts on island. Yes we need to bring in health specialists and we have managed to bring in Cook Islands Drs but what they are offered is less than they receive overseas. MoH continues to advertise for health professionals. Attractive remuneration packages required.
- **Do expatriates teach local counterparts?** When their contracts are over and they leave the Cook Islands, are their counterparts able to carry on the work – write reports, implement projects, monitor and evaluate etc.? Is there any relationship or follow up post departure?
- **Increasing our skills base.** As a graduate of the University of the South Pacific I would push for more scholarships to that institution. The curriculum is on living in the Pacific Region and striving to deal with the challenges we face. Friendships forged there carry on into the work place and it is not uncommon to be at regional or international meetings with former USP classmates. *Unity in Diversity* is a bond that recognizes that USP graduates are from different countries but we are united in our similar cultural values, our geographic smallness, isolation, vulnerability and shared challenges of climate change, Covid 19, trade issues, competing for markets and so forth.

Government

Objective 1: Key focus areas

- Improving welfare suggests more payouts or increases in payouts. Is this sustainable? Shouldn't we encourage self-reliance? The *OIDGF Outer Islands Development Grant Fund* was successful in providing seed money to Pa Enea business and community groups. Maybe look at reestablishing this and add Rarotonga to the grant (*Former Manager of OIDGF*).
- **Objective 3: Developing our people and culture**

The how part is missing here. How will you increase the population? How will you increase labour?

When government moved to make 60year workers redundant in the public service it caused more problems than solutions. The initiative was to enable the young people to replace the elderly by moving into their high level positions of management. The result however was that youth needed mentors but the mentors had been put out to pasture so the young people ended up resigning (see Internal Affairs

- *With a decreasing labour force, 60+ who have the proven practical expertise should be encouraged to stay in the work force.*

- *In addition where views of Youth are sought so should the views of the elderly as they contribute their knowledge and experience. This includes having both Youth and Elderly reps on relevant Committees.*

Private Sector

- **Trade** – how can the Cook Islands diversify its economy so that it moves away from a heavy reliance on tourism? In the past there have been many trials with agriculture (*market competitions, problems with securing steady suppliers, high cost of freight*), fisheries (*grounds not as rich as northern Pacific, fishing licences are cheap, no cannery for processing, no air freight facilities*), pearls (*glut on the market at one point, loss of farms during Cyclone Martin, competition with Tahiti, Fiji, and other countries*), Offshore banking.
- Has the government thought of selling our IT domain name? Tuvalu was successful in selling TV – their domain name.

BTIB

- **BTIB** is undergoing a review at the moment. **Go Local** is a success of the agency. Has BTIB worked much with the Chamber of Commerce? Would it be feasible to combine the two agencies? Or consider moving BTIB to the MFAI as part of the Trade Division.

Non-Government Organizations

- **Where are the Non-Government Organizations in this report?** NGOs are active in providing social services such as PTI (*domestic violence*), Creative Centre and Te Kainga (*mental health*), CIFWA (*child and family welfare*) and NGOs have to fundraise to do their work.

The Development Approach

- **Determinants of quality growth:** who is the target audience for this list on p21? What do you mean by “inclusiveness” with regard to equity and access? This seems to assume that we start from the same place of equality but we don’t. We are different – some of us are Cook Islanders born here while others are not, some speak Maori and some speak other languages, some are from families of political or economic prominence, others are not, some have physical and mental disabilities and others do not, some belong to the rainbow family of LGBTQ and others do not.
- **Strategy Approach: building quality growth** – I’m surprised by the move to quality growth as economic dialogue 101 tends to be on quantitative growth and concrete results and outputs. Not too sure about this move. The challenges of labour, sharing economic benefits, solid waste and sanitation have been with us for a long time. In terms of labour the Employment Relations Act 2012 needs to be revised if workers are going to be brought in to fill labour gaps. In addition, support systems including free mediation and legal services are needed (*Former Labour and Employment Relations Director, INTAFF 2013-2015*)

- **Development priorities** – big infrastructure projects for 15,000 people living on fragile islands doesn't make sense. Is the goal "*build and they will come*" – build large projects, widen roads, put in RE on all islands, and so forth in the hope that they will attract tourists? Tourists are trying to get away from their countries in search of the quiet island style holiday. Do we build to attract Cook Islanders and others to live in the Cook Islands? This immigration requires support services (health, education, youth activities, free employment mediation/legal services, access to employment benefits like maternity, paternity, pensions for all).
- **Tourism** – sustainable development is key. Supporting local businesses – host homes, family meal experiences, letting tourists enjoy local eco tours, introducing the unique Cook Islands life style, Kia Orana values, selling Go Local products and services and so forth. What sets us apart is our people and our way of life. With Covid 19 we have time to think about the Cook Islands that we want to market to visitors. When the borders open, do we push for quick big money making ventures? *In the Maldives – the Pa Enua there are pristine and reserved for top dollar paying tourists while most locals are crammed into overcrowded tenements on the capital island of Male. In the airport you won't find any souvenirs or postcards of Male.*
- *Should we look at the Caribbean to learn from their tourism ventures there – what works and what doesn't work?* (1990 Tuara – Masters in Environment Studies thesis - Towards Sustainable Tourism Development for the Cook Islands – Lessons in experience from Barbados).
- **Telecommunications - Manatua Cable** – are the costs of IT communications lower? We seem to be having more internet problems.

In the beginning CIIC was the key agency for the Manatua Cable but after the cable was laid the Ministry of Transport (MoT) got burdened with carrying out community consultations when it had no input into the pre cable work. MMR and NES did not want to pay for the safety signs and MoT got the extra bill although it has a budget of less than \$2million a year.

MoT is a regulator of land, sea, and air modes of transport (motor vehicles, ships, and planes) not undersea cables.

The safety signs should have been discussed as a condition for CIIC or Avaroa Cable or others before the cable went live. Now MoT has to try and find \$ during Covid 19 when donors are focusing on funding medical aid.

Lesson – read the small print. Don't pass the buck to other agencies who were not involved from the start.

Consultations

- **Public Consultations** – are these just a tick the box exercise where government knows the outcome it wants? People may be allowed to sit at the table and talk but that doesn't mean they will be heard and their views put into place. What follow up occurs after consultations? A report? Facebook posts? Is feedback accessible to all?
- As Director of Labour & Employment Relations I was Chair/Secretariat for the Minimum Wage Committee. The team was comprised on myself and reps from MFEM, CIWA, Chamber of Commerce and the Community. We met and put forward our interest groups thoughts on what the Minimum Wage should be. We contacted our stakeholders on Raro and the Pa Enuua but at the end of all our deliberations the MFEM rep made the MW decision because he was able to say that government could only afford \$5/hour.

Consultations can be as diverse as you like with representatives of all interest groups but who makes the final decision when it comes to money being spent?

Finances

- **Donor relations** – with Covid 19 giving us time to reflect we can look at developing stronger relations with our donors. NZHC has been in the Cook Islands for years, UNDP was based in

*The Cook Islands government provided unsatisfactory support to the UN Coordination Office 2016/2017. The MOA stipulated that UNDP would provide salary and basic office equipment, and the Government would provide an office, communications and electricity. As the local UN Coordination Officer I shared an office with local ADB officers in DCD, MFEM. In 2017 both UNDP and ADB were kicked out of DCD for reasons of **national sovereignty** and **security**. Relocation was paid for by UNDP and I moved to an old container in China Town. CIIC was contacted for assistance and visited to view the leaking roof and broken window louvres but no action was taken. With the help of my 86yr old father and my niece we fixed the leaking roof, the broken louvres, and painted the inside of the UN office.*

It was no surprise to me when the UN office was closed by UNDP in 2017 despite assistance despite assistance provided by UNCO to over 36 UN Missions who were invited to provide technical assistance in health, education, disaster management, climate change, environment, social welfare and human rights.

The reason provided by UNDP was that we had become a developed country but I wonder if poor support from Government helped in their decision to close.

the Cook Islands for a short time but left, and now ADB is here. We can look at relations based on knowing what we want, what is being offered, and working together in a partnership of mutual respect to ensure the assistance we receive is appropriate.

- **Acknowledging local staff and consultants of NZHC, UNDP, and ADB staff.** From my own experience I saw that government did not see me as an employee of the donor agencies I worked for which resulted in overseas visitors being treated with mana and not me.
- **Use former NZHC, UNDP, and ADB staff as a resource** to educate government on donor policies and practices.
- **Tax data** – this is difficult to read given that tax data is not available. For about a year I have been chasing after IRD for my tax return to find out whether I need to pay or receive a return. As a former employee of ADB and UNDP I have been contacting IRD about my tax free status under donor agreements that were signed by the donor and government. Other local ADB staff have managed to obtain tax free status but I am still waiting. Why is there a hold up given that I have submitted the signed Agreements and other documents requested by IRD?

The Environmental costs of Development

- **Climate Change:** From 1991-1992 I had the privilege of being the sole Cook Islands rep to the UN climate change talks that led to the 1992 signing of the UN Climate Change Convention by the Cook Islands.
- This was some time ago but the issues of climate change are still here with us. We are getting more \$ and technical support from the UN agencies but this tends to focus on adapting – or ***accepting climate change***. What should be happening is that the large Carbon polluters need to make cuts in their emissions. What is stopping progress and what can the Cook Islands do to move forward? (*review what needs to be done, have negotiations training, join the UN, move out of AOSIS and join other lobby groups, be selective about meetings attended,*).

Above are my comments on the EDS with examples from my experience in the Cook Islands.

KIA MANUIA
