

Challenge and Change – International capacity building intervention and Tuvalu NGOs

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Abstract

This research examines changes in relationships between non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the state following international intervention to build the capacity of NGOs in Tuvalu. The study is part of a 10 year longitudinal research project examining perceptions of organisational capacity building of NGOs in a small island developing state. This paper describes the structure of the NGO sector in Tuvalu and discusses the influence of international intervention to build the capacity of NGOs. Tuvalu is a small island state with a population of approximately 11,000. A role of the Tuvaluan NGO sector is to mobilize environment and health awareness. This study analyses interviews with NGO workers and Government officials. It suggests that intervention has resulted in changes in Government perception of NGOs leading to Government viewing NGOs as strategic partners following changes in the bases of NGO power. It will also offer initial insights into negative impacts of changes in balance of resource power within NGOs. The findings have implications for resource management and external agency action in a small island context.

(Keywords: power, organisational change, South Pacific)

INTRODUCTION

The development of capacity, or capacity building, within the non-governmental sector is seen by international donor organisations as a key component to ensuring a fully active society through development of the civil society, the public arena between individual and state which promotes societal pluralism and secures individual rights (Davis and McGregor, 2000). Organisations of the civil society exist outside the realm of the state on a free and independent basis (Hadenius and Ugglä, 1996). Groups within civil society include NGOs and range in nature from small local associations to organisations with a national membership and orientation.

NGOs have long been considered to be an important element of the development paradigm. Where states failed, NGOs stepped in and often mushroomed in number (Zaidi, 1999). NGOs have been viewed by official agencies as more efficient and cost-effective service providers than Governments, offering better value for money (Meyer, 1992). Donors have enthusiastically supported the civil society through projects to strengthen NGOs and their relationships with Government. By embracing civil society in this manner, donors give it legitimacy and institutional substance (Howell, 2000).

Capacity building as a strategic technique adopted by donors holds no consensus about exactly what it is and how to conduct it (Low and Davenport, 2002). Morgan (1999) describes capacity building as a risky, murky, messy business with unpredictable and unquantifiable outcomes, uncertain methodologies, contested objectives, unintended consequences and long time lags.

Many definitions exist for capacity building or capacity development. UNDP defines capacity building as ‘the process by which individuals, groups, organizations, institutions and societies increase their abilities to: 1) perform core functions, solve problems, define and

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achieve objectives; and 2) understand and deal with their developmental needs in a broad context and in a sustainable manner' (UNDP, 1997). This definition draws out the approaches of problem solving and objective setting alongside reflective aspects such as understanding of core values. Similarly, Laverne and Saxby (2001) define capacity development as 'a process by which individuals, groups, organisations and societies enhance the abilities to identify and meet development challenges in a sustainable manner'. He recognises that the development of capacity is something that is done internally, for which outside partners may provide resource and facilitate but cannot deliver the outcome. James (2001, p3) defines capacity building as a 'conscious intervention to improve an organisation's effectiveness and sustainability in relation to its mission and context'. This definition highlights capacity building as an explicit intervention. James goes on to discuss levels at which capacity building may take place through from the individual level, organisational level, inter-organisational level and societal capacity building.

Capacity building as an outcome implies a range of activities such as supporting local NGOs with funding, technical advice and training, alongside establishment of a legal and regulatory framework to enable the development of non-state organisations (Howell, 2000). James (2002) suggests that capacity building in the form of staff training, strategic planning or systems development may appear unthreatening and mechanistic but concludes that this impersonal approach may fail to facilitate human change and therefore fail to build capacity.

The challenge of capacity building or capacity development as it is referred to by the Canadian development agency CIDA, is that unlike tangible development of roads and bridges, the ability to use resources efficiently and effectively, in a relevant and sustainable way, cannot be generated or delivered from the outside. Such capability must be learnt through the experience of doing, and wilfully acquired over time (Laverne and Saxby, 2001). They point to the fact that the intervener cannot build or develop capacities in others but must facilitate resourcefulness in others.

Factors affecting the process of capacity building include geographical context. Makumbe (1998) recognises that the operational context of southern NGOs differs between countries, and therefore place differing constraints on NGO development. For each context and culture, a unique approach to capacity building must be adopted, avoiding lifting blueprints from inappropriate contexts. Unless support in the form of capacity building is given in a considered manner, based on understanding of how people and organisations change within their specific context and culture, such intervention risks being superficial and ineffective (James, 2002).

For capacity building to be effective, it must be informed through an understanding of context and culture; 'the way people feel, behave and change is very strongly influenced by the culture and context within which they live' (James, 2002, p4). Therefore a study of the response to capacity building intervention in a small island developing state will offer insights and inform further practices in similar settings. The development of capacity reflects core capacities which include the promotion of values, including distribution of power in society (Laverne and Saxby, 2001). Previous studies of capacity building of NGOs highlighted the impact of power between organisations, as well as within organisation, which in turn influences the outcomes of the capacity building programme (James, 2002). James quotes Morgan (1996, p15), 'capacity building is not power neutral. Where capacities are built there are both winners and losers. Capacity building cannot be disconnected from issues of power, competition for resources or control over them'. Whilst power dynamics in relation to capacity building has been considered within the context of donor-NGO relationships (James, 2001), this paper will consider the effects of capacity building on the power dynamics between Government, an umbrella NGO organisation and individual NGOs. This study will therefore contribute to an understanding of the impact of international intervention on the

bases of power and the resulting impact on relationships by addressing the following research questions: does international intervention affect the inter-organisational bases of power; what observable changes in power have taken place?

This paper applies a conceptual framework from organisational theory in order to interpret changes in power. The study is based in Tuvalu, South Pacific; a small isolated community where effects of intervention are expected to be readily apparent. This is believed to be the first study of NGOs within Tuvalu. The small island setting offers parallels for other NGO sectors in isolated and small scale organisational settings.

The paper will start by outlining international intervention activities and the NGO sector. It will then describe the approach adopted for the study and finally analyse perceptions of Government and NGOs following three years of intervention.

INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTION AND THE NGO SECTOR IN TUVALU

The Tuvaluan Context

Tuvalu is a low lying island state of 9 atolls with approximately 11,000 mainly Polynesian inhabitants in the central South Pacific Ocean. It is classed as Least Developed Country and a Small Island Developing State. Tuvalu gained independence from colonial rule relatively late in 1978. It remains a member of the Commonwealth with a parliamentary democracy and joined the United Nations in 2000. Its main sources of foreign exchange are remittances from seafarers working on foreign cargo ships, the sale of fishing licences to foreign vessels and sale of postage stamps. Further income is generated by the sale of the .tv internet designation and interest from the Tuvalu Trust Fund. Much of the population remain as a subsistence economy relying on coconut, taro and fish. The majority of wage paying jobs are Government related posts. As with many other small island developing states, Tuvalu is highly dependent on food imports and threatened by the effects of climate change.

Tuvalu's social structure is based on the family and its island community, with strong involvement from the Church. It is this structure set in a culture based on reciprocal sharing and strong relationships that provides social security. These traditional values are challenged in a time when new organisations overlap the old (Government of Tuvalu, 2001). As a result of social structures poverty is not apparent within Tuvalu. As a nation its vulnerability lies in the forces of nature, a fragile economy dependent on market fluctuations in the price of limited exports, isolation from the rest of the world, a lack of skills and an underdeveloped civil society. Limited opportunities to develop sustainable livelihoods exist as a result of limited natural resources and its isolated location. This is particularly the case for those living on outer islands. Poverty in Tuvalu is consequently defined by lack of opportunity (UNDP, 1999).

International Intervention

As growth of Southern Asian NGOs was enabled initially by northern NGOs and latterly by multilateral agencies in the 1980's (Smiley and Hailey, 2002), so the capacity development of the NGO sector in Tuvalu is now facilitated by assistance from a northern NGO and the European Union (EU). Intervention in capacity building of NGOs began in 2000 when the British organisation, VSO, funded a volunteer adviser to review opportunities to develop the NGO sector. This enabled a review of NGO capacity and assisted NGOs to identify areas requiring development.

Out of this review flowed a proposal for a capacity building project developed in conjunction with VSO, funded by the EU. The project 'Pacific Skills Link' is a NGO capacity building project with the goal of alleviating poverty and improving the livelihoods of disadvantaged communities in Kiribati, Tuvalu & Vanuatu through strengthening the capacity of NGOs and civil society. The project is managed by VSO and co-financed by the European

Union, with a total project budget of Euro 2.5 million, of which approximately Euro 450,000 is allocated for capacity building in Tuvalu. The Tuvalu Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (TANGO), an umbrella body for NGOs, is responsible for delivery of the project in Tuvalu. The project started in February 2002 and is due to complete in February 2006. The approaches used to develop the capacity of NGOs include; provision of overseas development workers, formal workshops and one-to-one training, a small grant facility administered regionally, inter country staff exchanges, IT service provision through umbrella bodies and legal advice for constitutions.

In Tuvalu, the development of the intervention project originated from discussions with local NGO workers to identify their visions and assistance required to develop capacity to achieve these visions. This user approach to project development resulted in the following areas being identified for expected results:

- Managerial and organisational capacity, and internal governance of NGOs enhanced, leading to more efficient, effectively run and financially sustainable NGOs.
- NGOs better meeting the needs of their beneficiaries through the implementation of participatory approaches.
- Improved relationship between NGOs and Government in the three participating countries.
- NGOs developing links and sharing good practice with other Pacific organisations.
- Umbrella organisations strengthened and able to provide a better service to the NGO communities.

NGO capacity building intervention in Tuvalu is timely, as Levergne and Saxby (2001) note capacity development at an organisational level is of little value if there are impediments to performance such as lack of resources. Under the 9th European Development Fund, non-state actors (including NGOs) in Tuvalu have access to 10% of the funding received from the EU-ACP Partnership Agreement, thereby allowing opportunity for NGOs to put skills developed into practice through project development and implementation. Tuvalu has allotted to allocate the EU-ACP funding to the social development sector, namely education, environment and water, with the geographic focus being outer islands. On behalf of the non-state actors, TANGO has responsibility for running, coordinating, reporting and monitoring activities under the EDF programme and as such has a strong interest in ensuring that NGOs capacities are developed to access funds and implement projects effectively.

The intervention has contributed to the increased ability of NGOs to access resources, through enabling NGOs to develop skills of project proposal writing and provision of a channel to access funds with TANGO operating as a broker.

The NGO sector in Tuvalu

Legislation recognising NGOs does not yet exist in Tuvalu (Duckworth and Saitala, 2004) and consequently NGOs are classified through membership of the Tuvalu Association of NGOs (TANGO) which broadly reflects groups from the civil society. Membership criteria for TANGO are; 1) a written letter of application, 2) a written constitution, 3) a membership of 20 people or more and 4) membership aged 18 and over. Membership of TANGO is in line with many major development agencies such as the World Bank and the Department for International Development, whose definitions of civil society refer to organisations such as service delivery NGOs, education groups, business associations, churches, trade unions and advocacy groups (Howell, 2000).

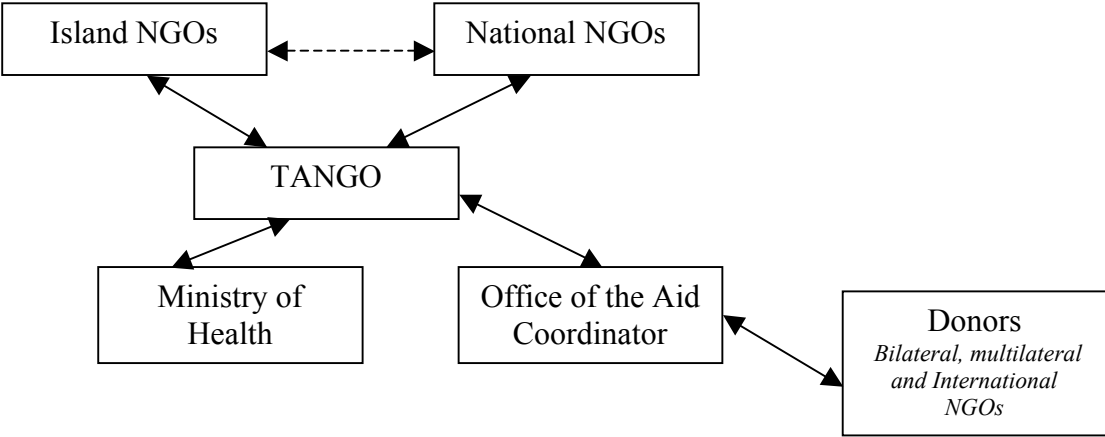
Twenty one member NGOs were registered with TANGO in 2000, including churches, labour unions, playgroups as well as organisations such as Tuvalu Family Planning Association and the Tuvalu Red Cross. In addition there were an estimated 10-15 grassroots organisations (GRO) on the outer islands (pers.com.). All NGOs state their aim as assisting the people of Tuvalu, through physical, economic or spiritual means (Tappin, 2000).

The profile of NGOs in 2000 was as follows: of the 21 TANGO members, five were religious or faith based; six were youth organisations (of which three were subsidiaries of faith based organisations and one, the National Youth Council acts as an umbrella body for youth groups from different island); three were women’s organisations (of which one was a subsidiary of a faith based organisation and one acts as an umbrella body for women’s groups from the different islands); three organisations were focussed on livelihoods and employment; two were health and emergency focussed; one was concerned with provision of early years education; and one focussed on promotion of sport. The Church of Tuvalu (Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu) was a key section of the NGO sector, five of the NGOs with membership of TANGO were EKT based, thereby bringing the number of NGOs with a religious link to nine of the 21 organisations. The membership of TANGO clearly reflects the civil society both in service provision, through NGOs such as the Pre-schools Association and Tuvalu Family Health Association, and a more political role, in the case of the Tuvalu Overseas Seamen’s Union and the Tuvalu National Youth Council, which presents the opportunity to hold the Government accountable for its policies and actions in relation to their membership. In 2000, only one out of 21 member organisations were outer island based, although many national members had island based branches.

By the end of 2003, following three years of intervention, membership of TANGO had increased to 34. The membership increase of 13 comprised of outer island groups (hereafter referred to as ‘island’ groups) and one national environmental NGO. Increase in TANGO membership reflects the increase in information regarding donor assistance and opportunity of assistance to access donor funding through TANGO. This is in line with other parts of the world where growth in NGO sectors is linked to the availability of official funding (Edwards and Hulme, 1996). The Ministry of Health holds responsibility for overseeing NGO activity.

The activities of Tuvalu NGOs are varied, from sexual health education and micro-credit schemes to provision of water collection facilities and gardening projects. In line with many NGOs around the world Tuvalu NGOs are ‘back-filling’ Government activities (Smillie and Hailey, 2002).

Fig. 1 NGO, state and donor relationships within Tuvalu



In 2000, NGOs held limited power in relation to resources due to lack of skills to access funds externally. Domestic resource mobilisation, such as forms of self-generated income, community contributions, contributions from national Government are limited within Tuvalu. Five national NGOs receive a grant of Aus\$10,000 from the Government dependent on Government assessment of NGO performance. The remainder are limited to funds from membership which provide insufficient funding to run organisations effectively. As a result funds received from overseas donors are relied on to enable delivery of activities and programmes and the employment of staff. Applications to overseas donors are channelled through Government via the Office of the Aid Coordinator, part of the Ministry of Finance.

Tuvalu Association of Non-Governmental Organisations

TANGO was formed with 7 NGO members in 1986 with the aim of assisting NGOs in accessing information and attracting resources into the country (TANGO, 2001). A constitution for TANGO was developed in 1987 but was not reviewed until 2001. Until 1998 TANGO operated largely on a voluntary basis receiving sporadic financial assistance from the Commonwealth Foundation, the Pacific Concerns Resources Centre, New Zealand ODA, AusAid, Australian Foundation for Pacific Islands and the Government of Tuvalu. This funding was largely for disaster preparedness, gardening projects and sexual health training.

The appointment of a new coordinator for TANGO in 1998 heralded a change for the organisation. Prior to this, TANGO's outputs were limited and focused on delivery of issue-based activities rather than its intended purpose of assisting other NGOs to deliver projects. In year 2000, TANGO developed its first strategic plan 'Our Way Forward', which covered the period to 2004. For the first time since the organisations inception, this document reviewed the purpose of the organisation through a consultation workshop with its members and representatives of the Government. The document identified six key goals including the primary goal of strengthening the capacity of NGOs in Tuvalu to initiate and manage action for sustainable human development. The second goal considered increasing human capacity through improving the capacity of NGO/CBO leaders and workers to effectively carry out their roles and responsibilities. Other goals focussed on enhancing relationships between NGOs, Government and donors, improving TANGO administration and accountability and improving information provision and communication.

Since 2000, TANGO has focussed much of its work on assisting NGOs in the development of project proposals. In this area it has been very successful. In 2000 no project portfolio existed, by mid 2001 it held a portfolio of 21 project proposals developed by member NGOs, of which 10% were developed by outer island NGOs, with the remaining 90% developed by national NGOs based on the capital island. By the end of 2003 the portfolio had increased to 58 project proposals of which 60% came from outer island NGOs (unpublished, 2003).

THE STUDY DESIGN

The development of capacity of individuals and organisations takes time and produces often intangible results (Lavergne and Saxby, 2001). As such there is need for long term approach to the study of any intervention which aims to build such capacity in the context of sustainable development. It is for this reason that a long term study is essential to assess the impact of intervention on the individuals, organisations, institutions and beneficiaries; in effect the stakeholders in such intervention. This study therefore forms part of a longitudinal research project into the progress of Tuvaluan NGOs over a 10 year period from 2000-2010. The study aims to offer insights into intangible impacts of intervention programmes in small island developing states.

Data has been gathered in 2000 and 2003 and will be gathered in 2006 and 2010. Primary data was gathered through semi-structured interviews and supplemented by a review of available documents. Interviews were guided discussions lead by the interviewer (McNeill, 1990). The interviewer allowed deviations from the structure of the interview so that the interviewee could pursue interesting and potentially fruitful lines of investigation, thereby empowering interviewees to speak with their own voices. Mischler (1986) suggests that this empowerment can be associated with a propensity for interviewees to offer a narrative account. There are advantages to using both oral (informal) and written (formal) sources; it reveals inconsistencies or omissions from account (Sayer, 1992) and it offers differing perspectives on the same phenomenon. For example, the formal gives information on structures, results, responsibilities and procedures whilst the informal provides the personal experience of these results and constraints (Sinclair, 1995).

A baseline study took place in 2000 and gathered data through semi-structured interviews with 21 NGO representatives and 4 Government officials. In an attempt to identify the level of capacity within organisations studied, questioning focussed around areas that are identified by Kaplan (1999) as key to an organisation being capacitated. These attributes gave rise to areas of questioning including: the organisation's view of the world; the organisational attitude which includes confidence to act and belief that the organisation can have an impact; the organisation vision, strategy and sense of purpose; organisational structures and procedures to support the vision and strategy; relevant skills, abilities and competencies; and sufficient and appropriate material resources.

During a three-week visit in December 2003, 7 NGO representatives, 6 Government officials and one EU representative offered their opinions of progress to date and the impact of international intervention in follow-up interviews. Interviews varied in length, but extended up to 2 hours. In the case of the interviews in 2000, interviews were recorded in note form with key points documented word for word. During the 2003 interviews, recordings were made in order that the transcripts could be analysed at a later stage. In both 2000 and 2003, documents were reviewed for information on the organisational features and characteristics of NGOs, the range of activities undertaken by NGOs, the issues and constraints facing NGOs, inter-organisational relationships and the organisational strengthening needs of these NGOs. The 2003 review made use of increased document availability as a result of the Pacific Skills Link project progress reports which were made available to the researcher.

Analysis

During analysis, certain 'narrative segments' (Reissmann, 1993, p58) in the transcripts were highlighted as they expressed aspects identified as prior theoretical interest. The data was then analysed by theme, illuminating issues such as NGOs as consumers of funding, issues of capacity to undertake needs analysis by island NGOs, human resource issues for NGOs in small island setting, issues presented by cultural attitudes to work and the changes in Government/NGO relationships in light of intervention. It is this latter theme that this paper will primarily focus upon. The remaining issues are too substantial to tackle in the current forum and will be considered in following papers.

In order to analyse the changes in relationships and the balance of power, the paper will utilise French and Raven's (1959) 'framework of power'. This enables the user to consider the nature of power that exists and through analysis of interviews will assess the bases of power in the organisational field.

Power is defined by Dahl (1957) 'as a relationship between social actors in which one social actor A can get another social actor B to do something that it, B, would otherwise not have done'. French and Raven (1958) suggested that there were five sources of power available to individuals to influence the relationship described by Dahl. It is through

deploying power that individuals can intervene in change processes to guide organisations along desired paths (Fincham and Rhodes, 2003).

French and Raven suggested that the five bases of power are reward, coercive, referent, legitimate and expert. Reward power revolves around a power-wielder who has control over valued material resources and thereby reward with these resources. Resources may be financial but may also take other forms such as assistance with projects and tasks, cooperation in terms of speed of response to requests, the sharing of knowledge and information opportunities to link with others and personal support. Coercive power, the reverse of reward power, is the ability to punish (Buchanana and Huczynski, 2000) through withholding rewards. Coercion results from an individual complying unwillingly with the wishes of another.

Referent power refers to an individuals personal qualities and the ability to influence others actions through their personal qualities. This is not linked to the position of an individual within an organisation or situation. Legitimate power is also referred to as position power, it relates to authority. It relies on the belief of others that the person in the position is deserving of being followed and accepts being a follower. Legitimate power is generated by nature of a position or status. Expert power relates to relevant experience or expertise, often acquired skills.

It is considered that expert power and resource power are likely to be those of most importance within the current change situation within Tuvalu as a direct result of the intervention, which brings in expertise, training and funding. Whilst the direct transfer of this framework to organisations has not been observed in previous writings, it was considered a useful approach through which to analyse interviews.

STUDY FINDINGS

Resource power – a driver for strategic partnership?

International intervention has resulted in a direct increase in the resources flowing to the NGO sector, both through funding TANGO to undertake capacity building activities and increasing the capacity of NGOs to access further funds. Increasingly NGO activities in Tuvalu are supporting the activity of Government. Smillie and Hailey (2002) assert the importance of NGOs in supporting Government activities; this is reiterated by Government officials.

I think Government recognises that itself, Government, cannot provide for services, basic essential services that any nation would need and therefore it recognises the potential role that NGOs and the private sector could play. (Senior Government Official, Finance)

One of the justifications we had for NGO support was that we see them as a partner in reaching our targets. (Government Official, Health)

Greater recognition by Government represents a significant change in the eyes of NGOs, who indicated frustration with past Government relationships. Improvements in these relationships were welcomed by the NGOs.

It's really hard. Looking back it's really something that I don't want to see again you know, like when you work with a brick door you know to hammer, hammer, hammer. (Director, Health NGO)

Since the last year they [Government] definitely now recognise the assistance and significance that TANGO has been, especially in the projects that we have proposed

and have been implementing at the same time. That's when they start to recognise we are in fact doing something different. (Officer, TANGO)

In the past the Government has viewed NGOs fairly sadly, just because of past experience of NGOs and corruption and mis-management, just a general lack of productivity coming out of not all NGOs but some. You know its something that's had its ups and downs over time. (EU Representative)

The past lack of accountability appears in line with general lack of accountability in NGOs both in the north and south. Edwards and Hulme (2002) were unable to find evidence that contemporary accountability of NGOs was satisfactory. The impact of this poor accountability has a significant impact on the Tuvalu NGO sector resulting in a lack of confidence by donors and therefore past reluctance to funds projects. Attempts by organisations such as TANGO to improve accountability both internally and through other NGOs has been viewed positively by donors as evidenced by increased funds being made available to NGOs. The opportunity this presents has generated Government attention, they are keen to ensure that the problems of the past do not reoccur and prevent future funding flows through NGOs. However, insufficient NGO legislation leaves Government lacking legal power to ensure accountability.

Avina (1993) distinguishes between short-term functional accountability (accounting for resources, resource use and immediate impacts) and strategic accountability (accounting for the impacts that an NGO's action can have on the actions of other organisations and the wider environment). Functional accountability presented problems for NGOs through poor financial accountability and lack of self-reliance. Whilst acknowledging NGO progress in this area, Government officials indicated requirement for greater self-management within NGOs and intention to intervene should NGOs not achieve effective management.

We want them to feel responsible as well, to be responsible for whatever they do. So that's why funds are given to them, otherwise if they cannot manage the funds then it comes back to the Ministry and the Ministry does it for them. (Senior Government Official, Health)

In the past there was a problem with finance, I think the systems were not right then. I think now we have better system for them to manage the funds [but] our auditor can only sort it out when we need them to be done. (Senior Government Official, Cabinet)

...[I] sense that there's still some doubts from senior officials in Government, especially on how to manage the funds that is allocated to the community or the NGO projects. I think that is the main concern of Government that those funds are not misused or mismanaged because that will surely affect the others that are proposing to be donors. (Officer, TANGO)

Use of legitimate power by Government may be considered as a means to control, viewed negatively due Government involvement slowing down the funding processes.

The Government is now more ...aware of the funding and the ministry of finance itself you know is trying to, how can I say it, poke their nose in and have control of the funding. Successful ones [projects] are the ones that go straight to the NGO...Those that go though Government there are a lot of hold ups and even for us in Health. (Government Official, Health)

The Tuvalu Social Development Policy 2001 document briefly indicates the role that NGOs should play in the country's development given Government's limited resources. The capacity of NGOs to financially support the work of the state and the recognition of the importance of this by senior Government officials demonstrates shifts in power in relation to resources. No reference was made to the potential of NGOs to be more resource efficient in their delivery of services as highlighted in other studies (Edwards and Fowler, 2002) but interviewees highlighted the potential value of NGOs to access resources additional to those of Government.

I have spoken to a few people high up in Government and they are very impressed...with the money that is flowing in by NGOs. (Government Official, Health)

I think Government recognises that NGOs can freely access resources...that NGOs can access a lot more resources than they currently are getting and through those resources really assist Government in alleviating some of the burden that Government is currently shouldering. (Senior Government Official, Finance)

Whilst Government officials acknowledge the importance of NGOs to delivering targets, this role for NGOs and a strategy to achieve it is not documented officially. Equally Government has not formalised routes by which NGOs can be a full participant to the development processes through consultation.

[there is] no where a document that analyses NGOs and their contribution to the country's development. (Senior Government Official, Finance)

There isn't sufficient mechanism in place to allow that sort of consultation process to take place in Government in order for NGOs participation in decision making processes...We really engaged the NGOs in that process sort of ad hoc systems at the moment, there is no formal sort of mechanism. (Senior Gov Official, Finance)

This lack of direction as to how NGOs should be consulted presents limitations for NGOs, but equally NGOs lack a model for engagement with Government. Duckworth and Saitala (2004) found a lack of systematic and close collaboration in planning, programming and implementation both on the part of Government and NGOs, indicating that NGOs and Government officials do not adequately understand each other's priorities, leading to duplication and inefficient use of resources.

The findings suggest that whilst Government recognises the opportunity that NGOs present to achieve their strategic goals through delivery of work otherwise not achievable by Government, there are obstacles preventing this strategic partnership operating to its full potential.

Expertise – grassroots but not planning

An objective of intervention was the development of skills and expertise within NGOs. Intervention resulted in the employment of up to three overseas development workers at any one time, with the associated development of local staff and training for NGOs through workshops and one-to-one assistance.

Government officials recognised expert power through the potential for NGOs to work more closely with communities and have greater recognition at a grassroots level. The ability to work closely with communities without barriers that might exist with Government appears to be valued by Government, through recognising their own weaknesses in this area.

That's one of the strengths that people want to work with the NGOs because [of] what they will achieve, that will improve their life at a grassroots, which at Government is quite difficult to see. (Senior Government Official, Health)

How close NGOs are to the grassroots and the people who are in need of assistance and help, I think that is noted by Government. NGOs ...get on well with the people at the grassroots, they can organise feedback or consultations or views of people at the grassroots level and that is also a positive aspect of NGOs. (Senior Government Official, Finance)

Whilst NGOs are perceived to have the capacity to communicate at a grassroots level, lack of skills to analyse needs and plan were widely recognised by both Government and NGOs alike. It was considered that the lack of expert power in relation to planning is a hindrance to the development of NGOs. Poor identification of needs is a problem particularly in relation to island NGOs, whilst national and island NGOs do not advocate the need for change to Government.

The problem with the outer islands is not because of TANGO, but it's the whole system that we are having now and like for islands there's no really analysing of the situation on the islands and in that way the people don't have a collective [view] like 'this is what we want'...But it is very difficult for them to think that way because they are implementers only. Most of them are not planners so it is quite difficult for them. (Government Official, Social Affairs)

They are not seeing all the other problems that people face in the community, they are not in the identifying mode. They are still confined to build up their steps and they are not at the stage where they can sit confidentially in their office and say 'this is a problem, this should not be happening, we should contact the ministry of finance or agriculture. They should not dump things that are a hazard to the community'. They are not at that stage yet. (Government Official, Health)

This may be attributed to either a lack of skills or concerns about the impact of speaking out against Government, who control the route through which funding is channelled to NGOs, a form of coercive power, found to be a cause for USA NGOs avoiding speaking out loudly against Government (Smith, 1990).

'Magic Man' – the negative impact of resource and expert power?

Resource dependence of NGOs confers power to the provider of those resources; this is especially the case where NGOs have a limited resource base (James, 2002). Whilst this is usually considered an issue in relation to northern NGOs, it appears within Tuvalu that the changing nature of TANGO's power affects perception of the umbrella organisations by island NGOs. Whilst resource power enables TANGO to engage with NGOs in a productive manner encouraging development of project proposals, concerns about the use of this power were raised. This misconception of TANGO provides an important power base, creating the image of the 'magic man'.

I think this PSL project has really changed over TANGO.it also leaves a great impact on the people, they just think of TANGO. We had a workshop, these are the leaders of all the islands, the Falekaupule, they are chiefs. You know what they said

when I came into room for the workshop, they said here comes the magic man. The man who brought us here. (Board Member, TANGO)

...looking from the community [perspective]... it looks like TANGO have the money to give them, like they sort of say ... we have to get the money from TANGO, but as far as I know TANGO is not a donor, TANGO is there to advise, but because they are going sort of broad and this is what they look from outside, they look into TANGO like it's a donor. I think this is a problem because the people they start to see that it's a donor now in the country. (Director, Health NGO)

They see TANGO as a dollar agency [laughter]...giving us some funds for their projects you know. I mean we widely become interested in TANGO because they think can secure the funds for their projects. (NGO, Religious)

Money appears to be a strong driver in Tuvalu, clouding the assessment of needs by communities, leading to projects being developed to fulfil wants and not needs. This again appears to relate to a lack of skills in needs analysis.

...the people identify their needs that is dollar, I mean they need to write as many projects [but should] first of all come up with what the special needs are...There is a way that not just by helping them write a project they really going to analyse what the project for, and whether there are other means of satisfying their need instead of getting a donor supply them with that. (Board Member, TANGO)

Like they just want that money to come to them but then in the end that's not exactly what they want, there are more important things that they could have. (Senior Government Official, Health)

As a NGO umbrella body TANGO set its objectives as strengthening the capacity of NGOs and their workers and enhancing relationships with NGO, Government and donors. During the international intervention, TANGO has developed expert power both in developing projects and implementation. This increased skill base presents itself as a double edge sword as donor confidence leads to opportunities deliver issue-based activities such as pre-schools and food safety training.

Whilst Government representatives did not raise any concerns, issues relating to strategic accountability (Avina, 1993) were raised by one NGO interviewee, suggesting that TANGO was undertaking a role that is aside from its stated mission. This may well be as a result of the extent to which it has now developed expert power resulting in TANGO receiving the status of the 'favoured child' of official donors (Edwards and Hulme, 2002). The delivery of issue-based projects by TANGO may lead to issues in relationships with member NGOs. Members perceive this as taking project delivery from their own organisations.

...like to me they are beyond what they should do, as I see to me looking into the TANGO office has to deal with upgrading or teaching or supporting organisations, but now they broaden out to go and teach all these, like nutrition and also on pre-schools...I think it might cause conflict yes, because of doing this. Like if they continue on doing running workshops on pre-schools, running workshops on nutrition, running workshops on other health issues eh, it will cause a lot of conflict you know amongst the organisations. But to me I rather like TANGO to sit there on this high

level and looking at the situation what area they could offer to upgrade this organisation, but not to go into and implement all this. (Director, Health NGO)

Expert power in the case of TANGO should be self-defeating if it continues to strive for its vision and mission. Achievement of its goals, capacitating NGOs and NGO leaders to initiate action for sustainable human development, should lead TANGO to reduce the need for its current role.

The power of personality

Edwards and Hulme (2002) point to limited evidence that NGOs are managing to engage in formal political processes, but highlight a few case studies of NGOs ability to engage in 'micro-policy reform'. In line with this, there was no evidence that Tuvalu NGOs are actively engaging in political processes, however referent power appears to have enabled TANGO to achieve representation for NGOs at the Development Coordinating Committee (DCC), the body responsible for reviewing development projects before presentation to Parliament. This enables civil society to be represented at policy decision making level and achieving greater legitimate power for TANGO.

...that link [to Government] has been really strengthened and they [TANGO] aspire into going into the policy level component, so that's quite an achievement. Like they actually negotiated with Government to get their people in place at the DCC. (Government Official, Social Affairs)

In small environments such as Tuvalu, the power of personality appears likely to play a significant role in relationships. Interviewees perceived that personalities, or referent power, plays a key role in the development of NGOs both in terms of encouraging NGOs and overcoming political obstacles. TANGO leadership has demonstrated power to encourage NGOs to achieve delivery of project proposals despite the weaknesses within its member NGOs.

I think there are those instances...where certain individual NGOs have, primarily through external funding, have gotten a lot stronger and because of the personalities involved in those NGOs some institutional momentum that's been created. It's allowed them to play a more active role in their area. (EU Advisor)

I think their weakness is that they [NGOs] give up very quickly...They give up easily and if they don't achieve what they want then they sort of just back off, but with TANGO in place I think there's bright light at the end of the tunnel for more of these NGOs. Like its there to make them work harder and strive harder to get there, to get what they want. (Senior Government Official, Health)

...my fear [is] that it looks like we [are] asking the outside world to help, money comes and then halfway they stop but to themselves to stand up to work its very hard unless some maybe a good somebody with a strong background you know in managing things to come to try to persuade or make people to come and motivate them to see this project is useful for us you know. (Director, Health NGO)

The importance of referent power is equally demonstrated at a political level, suggesting that where relationships between politicians and NGO leaders are not strong, the impact on the

NGOs prevents them from achieving their potential. This clearly underlines the importance of referent power in the development of NGOs in Tuvalu.

...it's a lot improved now but I think it depends very much on the political leaders because its only personal differences that causing all this otherwise we could have moved this way in the beginning Senior Government Official, Health

I think the Government is aware of the needs of the NGOs, but I think this relationship depends very much on the personality you know, of who is at TANGO and who is at Government, its at the personal level eh. So if the Government has a good relationship with whoever is at TANGO office then Government can offer some very good assistance to the alliances, but if the Government is not in good relationship with the leadership at TANGO it effects also the Governments assistance you know. (NGO, Religious)

Sustainability challenges for NGOs in Tuvalu – culture or confidence?

Sustainability, namely the ability to maintain services in the long run without significant external support (Klinmahorm and Ireland, 1992) was raised by both NGO and Government staff. The two key areas highlighted related to human resources, both in terms of staff and the impact of culture on approaches to work.

James (2002) highlights the need for a passion for change throughout organisations in order to deliver lasting change. In Tuvalu the issue of high staff turnover within organisations presents real challenges for change that is sustainable. This is exacerbated when capacity development programmes can be viewed as 'a hoop to jump through' in order to access donor funds, resulting in capacity building being merely cosmetic (James, 2002). Concerns were expressed by both NGOs and Government officials regarding both lack of passion within NGOs and that funding is the driver for capacity building rather than the passion for change.

Its just the mentality of Tuvaluans that once they don't get what they want that they just forget it [laughter], 'its just wasting our time'. (Director, Health NGO)

...money comes in to run the project and then...the money [is] finished and the projects is half way to finished and so the problem what I see now the people only goes there because there's some money to pay them to do their job. (Director, Health NGO)

...NGOs here are like slugs they do things, like you do it once, its not continuity, I mean they just do it for someone [from overseas who] comes in, everybody's happy and they do it once and then that's it, there's no continuity in the work. (Government Official, Health)

James (1998) suggests that one of the issues in capacity building interventions is the potential for dependency to be created, with the local NGO handing over difficult activities and decisions to overseas staff. In line with James (1998) and Low and Davenport (2002), concern is expressed by NGO and Government representatives alike, about sustainability of international workers within local organisations.

I think the only thing now is for TANGO to be at the local level to be managed by the local people, now they rely very much on overseas personnel...it's a very challenging...to have people who are local to take over the overseas personnel that TANGOs having now. I think because of that support that's why TANGO is really in

good position to help this development. I think that some assistance at this point of time is very needed, but I think for sustainability they need, TANGO needs to have some local people to take over and that is very challenging because people only go for NGOs if they have some security there because now Government is the major employer. (Government Official, Social Affairs)

To maintain these systems the need of VSO skills is still heavily needed at TANGO to sustain the ability to assist, to move forward with their mission. I think it is totally significant. If the VSO disappeared say this year I think it will be totally fair for me to say that I have doubts. But then again if surely we can get locals who have the same experience that these VSO have then, have then it will be a different story. (Project Officer, TANGO)

The concerns expressed are in line with Edwards and Hulme (1992) who discuss issues of employing overseas staff as presenting sustainability issues, particularly problems at the handover stage and the requirement for this to be thought through in advance.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This paper has attempted to offer insights into changes in bases of power within the organisational field in a small island setting following three years of international intervention. Increases in resource and expert power resulted in recognition by Government that NGOs might valuably play a role in the strategic development of the country and hence recognition of the need for provision of greater opportunities consultation. However an imbalance in resource and expert power within the NGO sector can be seen to distort NGO relationships with those organisations securing more resources achieving greater power base.

Referent power is seen to be of great importance within Tuvalu, perhaps unsurprising in a society based largely on sharing and strong relationships. It appears that recent shifts in resource, expert and personal power have enabled NGOs to develop and progress to a point where they are achieving greater legitimisation by Government.

Lack of experience of operating at a higher level presents vulnerability when NGOs are dealing with Government. Proposals to legislate for NGOs and reestablishment of TANGO as a quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisation funded by Government (Duckworth and Saitala, 2004), alongside NGO attempts to influence public policy, may result in the development of bonds that may influence levels of autonomy within the NGO sector. Retaining autonomy from Government in such a small society remains a challenge for Tuvalu NGOs.

Whilst NGOs in Tuvalu have clearly demonstrated their ability to respond to funding opportunities presented by donors through the production of project proposals, it yet remains to be seen if these NGOs are sufficiently capacitated to ensure delivery of projects, with the associated complexities of project reporting, evaluation and accounting. Given the significant challenges presented by functional accountability, the embedded aspects of culture and the withdrawal of capacity building support in 2006, many challenges remain for the NGOs of Tuvalu.

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