

Samoa Villages and the MIRAB Model: Four case studies

Tiffany N. Arthur, National University of Samoa

Abstract

In 1965-67 Brian Lockwood documented the socioeconomic circumstances of four Samoan villages (Poutasi, Uafato, Utuali'i and Taga). In this paper I present the results of studies of those four villages in 2018-2019 that show the trajectory of mainly subsistence to mainly commercial agriculture expected by Lockwood and others in the period following Samoa's Independence in 1962 has not occurred, and suggest that the processes of change and the similarities between the case study villages may be explained with reference to the MIRAB model first articulated in 1984 by Bertram and Watters. The MIRAB model of development proposes that, the interacting characteristics of small Pacific Islands of migration (MI), remittances (R), aid (A) and state generated employment (bureaucracies 'B') created a "perfectly sustainable strategy" for most Pacific island countries. My research findings suggest MIRAB model can be applied to an understanding of the trajectory of village development in Samoa since the 1960s. The economies of the four villages studied rely heavily on remittances (R) from their relatives overseas (MI) and the new component of aid (A) in the form of village projects funded directly by donors for development purposes in a particular village in the form of village projects. The village councils, women's committees, or youth groups usually implement these projects. The bureaucracy (B) component of the MIRAB (which in the literature refers to government employment) can also be understood as the provision of services to villages and rural districts by government agencies (B), such as health and educational facilities, police outposts, access roads, water and electricity supply and other infrastructure.

Introduction

In 1965-1967 Brian Lockwood documented the socioeconomic circumstances of four Samoan villages (Poutasi, Uafato, Utuali'i and Taga), aiming to test empirically Fisk's model of transition from subsistence to the production of a market surplus in an economy of 'primitive affluence' (1964). The term 'primitive affluence' refers to the economic practices of agrarian societies like Samoa in the pre-European contact period. Fisk's model saw the production of traditional surplus crops for the market as the first step towards commercial agriculture, driven by new demand for goods and services that required cash to buy them. Lockwood's study confirmed that the first step had been taken in Samoa in the 1960s, with market participation extended beyond food crops to export crops such as coconut, cocoa and bananas. In this paper I present the results of studies of those four villages in 2018-2019 that show the expected trajectory of mainly subsistence to mainly commercial agriculture has not occurred, and suggest that the processes of change and the similarities between the case study villages may be explained with reference to the MIRAB model first articulated in 1984 by Bertram and Watters.

In the 1980s it was assumed that rural development would and should follow the colonial economic model based on export agriculture, as well as the concept of nation-based development. To the contrary, the MIRAB model of development proposes that, the interacting characteristics of small Pacific Islands of migration (MI), remittances (R), aid (A) and state generated employment (bureaucracies 'B') created a sustainable strategy for small Pacific island countries (Stahl and Appleyard 2007; Bertram and Poirine 2007; Bertram 2006; Bertram and Watters 1985). The MIRAB model can be considered as having two distinct components: that of aid and that of migration and remittances. The first component depends on the availability of foreign aid, which, in MIRAB economies, supports government operations in various sectors such as health, education, agriculture, law and justice, and basic services. In the MIRAB economic model, government is the largest employer and public sector wages benefit households and the overall economy (Tisdell 2014:3). The second component of the model is migration and the sending of remittances by emigrants from MIRAB economies to their families. However, the benefit of foreign exchange inflows to the economies of small island states is offset by the high dependence on imported goods made possible by increased spending power in the population (Tisdell 2014:3).

My research findings suggest MIRAB model can be applied to an understanding of the trajectory of village development in Samoa since the 1960s. The economies of the four villages studied rely heavily on remittances (R) from their relatives overseas (MI) and the new component of aid (A) in the form of village projects funded directly by donors for development purposes in a particular village in the form of village projects. The village councils, women’s committees, or youth groups usually implement these projects. The bureaucracy (B) component of the MIRAB (which in the literature refers to government employment) can also be understood as the provision of services to villages and rural districts by government agencies (B), such as health and educational facilities, police outposts, access roads, water and electricity supply and other infrastructure.

Methodology

I locate myself here to explain the context of my learning and research. I am an Afro-Caribbean woman from Guyana and a CARPIMS (Caribbean-Pacific Islands Mobility Scheme) scholarship recipient who arrived in Samoa in February 2017 to undertake study at the National University of Samoa (NUS). I was interested to learn how aid has influenced village development in Samoa, and so I used Brian Lockwood’s four case study villages, described in ‘Samoa Village Economy,’ a book based on his observations over 50 years ago, in the first decade of Samoa’s independence, when migration still had a relatively insignificant impact on village life. These villages were Poutasi, Uafato, Utuali’i and Taga (figure 1). I was unable, due to lack of time and resources to duplicate Lockwood’s detailed study but was able to use his data to compare changes in population and economic practices.

Figure 1: The four case study villages



Source: Centre for Samoan Studies GIS database

My research was funded by the NUS research fund (UREC), and used a mixed-method approach with literature review and field-based data collection using questionnaires and interviews. Samoan research assistants helped me with context and language in each village.

Profile of Samoa

Samoa is a Pacific island nation made up of eight islands but the two bigger islands of Upolu and Savai'i hold over 90 % of the population. Samoa, (formerly called Western Samoa) has a population of approximately 196,440 people (ADB 2017) on a land area of 2,830 sq. km (1,093 sq. miles). The population are mainly indigenous Polynesians. Samoa has the reputation of being one of the most traditional and conservative cultures in Polynesia (Connell 1987).

The country has a nominal GDP of \$844 million. Samoa's GDP is expected to grow by 2.0% in 2019 and 3.0% in 2020 (ADB 2015). Traditionally Samoa's economy has been dependent on fishing and agriculture and, since the 1970s, on development aid from donor countries, bilateral donors and international development organisations and tourism. Agriculture, including fisheries, furnishes 90% of exports such as, fish, coconut oil, nonu products, and taro. The manufacturing sector chiefly processes agricultural products. The manufacturing industry accounts for nearly about 22% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) but employs fewer than 6% of the labour force. The service sector accounts for just about around two thirds of the GDP and employs approximately 50% of the workforce. Tourism was an expanding sector accounting for 25% of GDP in 2019. Samoa shares with its Pacific island neighbours a vulnerability to natural disasters and other economic shocks, as well as challenges of social transformation (USAID 2016). In the latest Human Development Index Samoa is ranked at the low end of 'high human development' with an overall ranking of 111 out of 164 countries (UNDP 2019 (a)).

After Samoa gained independence in 1962, Samoa's constitution formalised three main categories of land. These are customary land, freehold land, and public land. Customary land in Samoa cannot be sold or mortgaged in accordance to article 101 (2) of Samoa's constitution (Schmidt 1994: 172). About 80 % of the total land area of Samoa is under customary tenure, and most village land is under customary tenure.

Samoa has 11 traditional districts (*Itumalo*) which date back at least to the 18th century and longer, according to Samoan traditions. These are now divided into 19 main districts, 89 sub-districts, Villages (*nu'u*) are not just settlements but comprise territories, typically from the interior mountain ridge to the outer reef in the sea. There are 286 villages governed under Samoan customs and traditions by a village council of chiefs (Schoeffel and Taua'a 2019). Society is based on the '*āiga*' which is a large extended family group with a matai (chief) at its head. Villages comprise several families each with their matai who represents them in the *Fono*. The *fono* has judicial and executive authority under the Village *Fono* Act 1990 as long as these do not contravene national laws of the Constitution of Samoa (Meleisea 1987). Each *fono* elects one of its members (*sui o le nu'u*) to liaise between the *fono* and the government. The *fono* has a significant impact on village life, regulating operations, mediating disputes and enforcing resource utilisation.

The traditional Samoan village is made up of two conceptual entities 'the village of men' and the 'village of women.' This division reflects the gender division of labour on which almost all traditional institutions are based. The criteria for membership in village groups are age, marital status, political status and whether one is born in the village or married into it. The system accounts for everyone and imposes a number of different expectations on all members of the village (UNICEF 2006: 9). Other village groups are the Women's Committee, the Untitled Men's Group and Christian Youth Group.

Changes and Continuities since Lockwood's findings in the 1960s

When I commenced this research I expected to find significant changes in the population and economies of the four case study villages as described over 50 years ago. To my surprise, I found little change in many aspects, although there were major increases and improvements in the provision of government services, schools, sealed roads, water supply, electricity and telecommunications. All these have contributed to the well-being of village families but less significantly to the village economies. Lockwood appeared to assume that the direction of economic change would be towards market participation that would extend beyond subsistence farming to export crops such as coconut, cocoa and bananas, in the end, increasing cash income and fostering social and economic development. Therefore villages that were most advantageously located in relation to markets such as Utuali'i would have greater engagement than remote villages such as Uafato. However, he found little evidence to support this assumption. Lockwood concluded his study by saying:

Samoans are generally content with the life they lead. They have little interest in the outside world which intrudes on them in the form of the market sector. They likewise have little evident concern for the future, little interest in productive investment, little willingness to develop.

However, he appears to have contradicted himself when he discussed villagers' responses to opportunities:

... they are willing to take on new cash crop as these become available and to earn money from other sources such as wage employment when opportunities were presented. All *'āiga* had invested labour in establishing sources of cash income in their villages, such as their coconut, cacao and banana small holdings. Some had attempted to increase their cash income further by investing labour and money in such capital items ... for the same reason, most had invested money in their children's schooling, and some also in sending individuals to New Zealand (Lockwood 1971:1897).

In each village surveyed for this research it was evident that families do have concerns for their lives and futures. They depend on multiple livelihood strategies by investing in their children's education, and in some cases operating a small shop or other businesses. Some work overseas to provide for their families, and most manage their plantations and cattle farms, sell agricultural produce, carve and weave mats for sale in the market or have paid work. Lockwood found that education was seen as the way out of village life and to help the family in the village. This is still true. However, the access of these villages to the local market or export markets has little to do with their level of cash income. In the 1960s there was little difference between the crops grown in villages that were produced for subsistence and sale. This finding is still valid: there is very little to distinguish the villages from each other in respect to production for subsistence and sale.

Land

Lockwood found that Poutasi and Taga villages were the best well-endowed with land and in these villages, land is still not yet a limiting factor on village agricultural output. However, Uafato is being pressured to conserve its land as a conservation area, and Utuali'i lost much of its land in the 19th century. Lockwood thought that both subsistence food and cash crops could be expanded or intensified either by clearing forest or by using land already cleared more intensively (Lockwood 1971:188). There was a taro boom in Samoa about 20 years ago, when the number of overseas Samoans and other Pacific Islanders created an export market for taro (O'Meara 1995, Macpherson and Macpherson, 2009). Village families and urban businessmen with matai titles invested in chainsaws to carve out big taro plantations from the forest, but this ended due to taro blight, and although new disease resistant varieties are now planted and exported, the market for the preferred variety was captured by Fiji and did not recover its former strength. In Poutasi and Taga there is a

trend for matai to fence off former plantation land for cattle. Meleisea (personal communication, 7 September 2019) thinks this has more to do with matai claiming sections of customary land as family property than a big increase in cattle farming.

Markets

In 1965 the four villages varied considerably in the strength of linkage with the market sector (Lockwood 1971:201). In the 1960s, Utuali'i village ranked first in access to the market followed by Poutasi, Taga and Uafato respectively. His ranking could still be applied, although in all of the villages, transportation has increased in numbers and types as families have invested in cars, van and utility trucks. Due to the terrain of the Uafato village route, no public buses are available to traverse to and from the village, however Uafato now has a newly built sealed road and the people no longer travel by sea.

In the 1960s Poutasi village had the best retail marketing facilities of the four villages Lockwood studied. In 1953 a Poutasi *taule'ale'a* (untitled man) returned from working in New Zealand and opened a small but well-stocked store and in 1959 a large trade store was built by a Chinese trader, Lee Hang. His store attracted a large share of the copra output of Poutasi and considerable quantities from the neighboring villages by offering a variety of goods for sale at prices similar to those in Apia. In 1964-1965 another *taule'ale'a* and a matai each built a small shop (Lockwood 1971:139). In 2019 these two stores were gone but another locally owned store opened about 18 years ago and is now leased to a Chinese businessman. The store has expanded its range of goods and attracts customers from the whole district of Falealili.

Utuali'i village had the best market access because of the ease and cheapness to travel to Apia. The village is close to the London Missionary Society's headquarters at Malua, and commercial plantations and lay on the only major road in Samoa at that time. That road now connects to the international airport and the inter-island ferry port. Utuali'i village now has the best retail marketing facilities with a branch of one of the major local supermarkets (Frankie supermarket), a total of nine shops and a Vailima beer outlet. Utuali'i also has the cheapest and most convenient access to a market supply of subsistence foods. Taga village has a total of six small shops and Uafato village has the least marketing facilities with only two small shops offering a limited variety of food items.

Production

Lockwood commented that 'to raise the subsistence output levels in all four of the villages it requires not only additional land in production but, also additional labour' (1971:191) which suggests that even in the 1960s there were not enough young men interested in commercial farming. He found that the village access to the market has nothing to do with the level of cash income in the villages. This is still true; the agricultural output levels from these villages remain low. Because agricultural work is tedious and the financial returns are low, the youth from the villages try to escape the hardship of agricultural work and search for jobs that pay wages. Copra was the only cash commodity produced in the villages during the time of Lockwood's study and is no longer economical to produce. Coconuts have declined in importance since 1965 but there is now a rising demand for coconuts in Samoa after many years of decline, due to markets for green drinking nuts and ripe coconuts for manufacturing coconut cream, oil and other products. The government of Samoa is encouraging replanting. Yet so far there have been no significant efforts in the villages to replant their aged coconut palms (Schoeffel & Meleisea-Ainuu, 2016: 15).

Lockwood tried to assess the opportunity cost by recording the labour time-cost of harvesting which varied in the villages. It took 1.9 hours in Poutasi to gather 100 coconuts, 2.3 hours in Utuali'i and 2.3 hours in Taga and Uafato. However, Lockwood did not describe the number of people required to collect 100 coconuts in that time, or the time to carry them to the point of processing or sale. Lockwood's conclusion was that 'there is a decided lack of interest in earning money through village agriculture, and yet there were very few other opportunities' (1971:206), this is still valid. Generally, the villagers found that they could maintain the level of living they wanted with multiple strategies, casual labour, wage employment, some market sales, and growing subsistence staples.

In 1965-1967 Uafato and Taga villages had the same level of subsistence food production with limited substitution in favour of market goods (e.g. rice for taro), and in Poutasi where there was more substitution, subsistence output has declined only slightly. Utuali'i village purchased most of its staple food, and there was minor dependence on subsistence production (Lockwood 1971:193). The finding is still valid with the exception of Poutasi village where there was less substitution of traditional staple food for rice. At the time of my survey that village was facing a particularly steep decline in the production of taro, likely because many young men were working overseas as seasonal workers. Lockwood (1971:189) found that substitution (for example taro for rice) in the villages was directly related to the strength of the linkage to the market sector. Uafato had the weakest linkage to the market and the least substitution. Poutasi had the strongest linkage and the most substitution. Uafato and Taga had the same level of staple food production and rarely consumed flour, rice and bread as substitutes. All four villages approximately conformed to national data on agricultural production which shows significantly increased subsistence production, which is not what Lockwood's modernisation model predicted:

Table 1: National data on agricultural activity in households

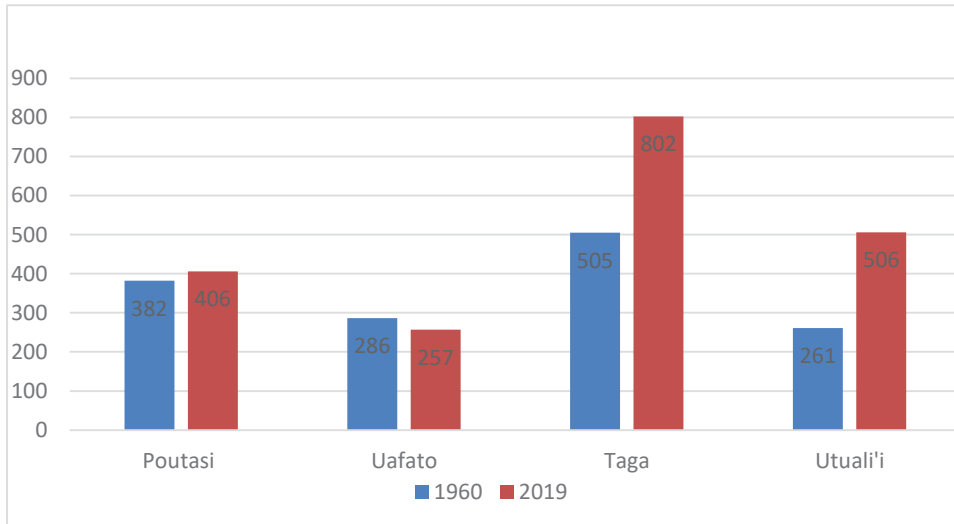
Type of Agriculture	1989 (%)	1999 (%)	2009 (%)	2015 (%)
Subsistence	19.0	30.0	34.0	64%
Mainly for home consumption	49.0	39.0	31.0	32%
Mainly for sale	5.0	5.0	3.0	4%

Samoa Bureau of Statistics, Agriculture Census 2009 & 2015

Population and housing

There was little change in population 1960-2019 (Figure 1) except in Taga village on Savaii, followed by Utuali'i which has increasingly urban characteristics in terms of wage employment. Poutasi has had a slight increase and Uafato a slight decrease. The increased population in Taga may reflect the considerable effort made by government to provide modern services to Savaii, and remove disparity with Upolu. It seems likely that people who remain living in a village may do so partly by preference or by lack of alternatives, but also by obligation to safeguard the assets of the extended family, care for their elders, support their church and keep their relatives overseas connected to their home village.

Figure 2. Population changes in the Poutasi, Uafato, Taga and Utuali'i



The main coastal road, the busiest in Samoa ran through the Utuali'i *malae*. This village was different from Poutasi, Uafato and Taga because of the houses and larger *fales* faced the road from the other side, and there were more non-traditional (*fale palagi*) than traditional dwellings (*fale Samoa*) (Lockwood 1971:157). The difference now is that Utuali'i, Poutasi and Taga village have adopted the same housing patterns, with houses built in rows facing the main road on each side. In Uafato however, the dwellings are found on the right side of the road, almost immediately in front of the sea. Additionally, in all of the case study villages, there has been further substitution of *fale palagi* for *fale Samoa* than during Lockwood's time of study in the 1960s. This clearly shows a trend towards privacy and modernity. Utuali'i villages has more non-traditional houses than the other three case study villages because of the village has long had relatively easier access to supplies of non-traditional building materials than the other villages.

Investment

The minor changes in investment is related to the population sizes of the villages, of which none have increased significantly since the time of Lockwood's study in the 1960s. Lockwood concluded, comparing the four villages he studied, that Poutasi was the best endowed of the four villages in terms of its natural resources, and that 'there was more investment of productive capital ... such as tools and equipment, fishing gear, canoes, fencing and a road into the plantation' (1971:132). He described other investments of labour in fencing and rock walls, access roads and cleared land (1971:135). Also that Poutasi had strong traditional leadership which encouraged the level of subsistence and the market output, as well as investment in the Congregational and Roman Catholic church building and houses for their clergy. This finding is still valid, and the availability of government services in the village has been improved such as the new district hospital, police station, district college, and the district office of the Department of Agriculture. The village is also well known because of the Poutasi Development Trust, a non-government organisation under the leadership of a single chief/businessman of the village, but some of my sources said the village council leadership was weak.

Where investment has been really significant is in the building of houses and churches. In the 1960s migration was just beginning to gain momentum and already people were remitting money home regularly and returning to invest savings in a *'āiga* store, bus or European-style home (Lockwood 1971:209). In the 1960s Uafato and Taga there was only one dwelling built with imported or modern material. The opening of the road in Taga in the 1960s led to the purchasing of building materials, so that saw the building of many homes with purchased materials. In Poutasi the opening of its new road brought the construction of houses with more purchased materials but, this practice was restrained as in the past the *fono* attempted to preserve the traditional housing style by forbidding the construction of *fale palagi*. Two high chief's dwellings, the pastor's house and the school buildings were exempted from this rule. As for Utuali'i village, non-traditional dwellings were more common (Lockwood 1971:186).

Fa'aSamoa

Lockwood concluded that the overriding ambitions of Samoan youth were based on the available models in village life; to enjoy the prestige and status of the elite in Samoan society, to become matai or Pastors. This is still the case, although to be a pastor is more prestigious than to be a matai of any rank. Another major ambition was to move to New Zealand or to be a seasonal worker there.

Economic change has increased *fa'asamoa* practices rather than decreasing them, as implicit in notions of modernisation. According to Meleisea (personal communication, 5 September 2019) the greater access to cash from remittances has increased the expenditure on *fa'alavelave* ceremonies since the 1960s, especially funerals. In the past funerals were held on the day or the day after a person passed away, so the money and gifts needed depended on what could be amassed in a short time. Now, with overseas families, funerals last two weeks or more because there are funeral parlours to hold the deceased person until the overseas family comes to Samoa. In the intervals, money can be amassed from many sources. Funerals often cost between SAT\$ 50,000 to 100,000 or more in the case of pastors and high chiefs.

The churches

Lockwood's study found the villages invested a lot in their church buildings, and for the support of their pastors and the national churches, especially Poutasi village, even when they had less access to cash than people have today. The Christian Congregational Church of Samoa (formerly the London Missionary Society) was the biggest church in each village in the 1960s and still is, but since then other denominations have been able to find their way in the villages as well. Then as now the villages provide the pastor and his family with food, money, farming land and services including housing, furniture, other handicrafts and domestic help. In my own observations, Utuali'i had invested more in the church buildings, having just built a new pastor's house, followed by Poutasi village then by Taga and Uafato. Decline in membership of the CCCS since the 1960s occurred in all four villages following national trends, with defections to the Latter Day Saints (Mormon), Assemblies of God, and in one case, to the Seventh Day Adventists. In each village the church is the centre of the community, not only for worship but for meetings, choir practice, fund raising and youth activities. The established churches have been critiqued by those suggesting that the major financial and other material demands of the churches are contributing to poverty in Samoa (Macpherson 2011:137; Maiava 2016; MNRE 2017:11). The general view of most Samoans, however, is that devotion to the church leads to blessings of success and prosperity.

Democracy, culture and Christian values have integrated well in a manner that is acceptable to the local community. Government leaders are often church leaders as well, which therefore reinforces the mutually beneficial relationship. Church buildings and pastor's houses are among the costliest ones in the village communities. Church financial and other material demands on church

members who are already experiencing economic difficulties may explain the reasons for the decline in the membership of mainstream churches. Monetary offerings collected by the biggest denominations range from SAT\$ 5-8 million per annum. These offerings are drawn even from many families who live just above the poverty line.

Remittances

There is evidence that remittances feed back into social and church obligations. Brown and Ahlburg (1999) found that 63 % of Samoan households used remittance income for 'social uses,' with 41 % typically directed to support churches (Ahlburg and Brown 1999:334). Macpherson and Macpherson (2011:307) pointed out that 'cash contributed to churches effectively limits the capacity of individuals, families, and village groups to save or to acquire assets that could be used as collateral for commercial loans to establish and operate commercial ventures.' The social expectation to donate to church can impose a heavy burden on families. Financial contributions are often more than 30% of family income, leaving families with not enough money to pay for basic needs. Failing to contribute can result in public shame and embarrassment. The 2006 UN Development Report (United Nations 2006) noted that households failing to meet material expectations could be punished by village councils in ways that were harsh and financially expensive.

Climate change and natural disasters

Lockwood's study was conducted around the time when Samoa was hit by a major cyclone in 1965. Approximately 70% of Samoa's population and infrastructure are located in low-lying coastal areas. Projected sea level rise could exacerbate coastal erosion, loss of land and property and dislocation of the island inhabitants. Since then tropical cyclones Ofa (1990) and Val (1991) have caused damage to homes and crops with costs estimates of approximately four times the gross domestic product (GDP) of Samoa (UNDP 2019 (b)). The country is not only vulnerable to devastating storms but to other extreme climate events, for example, prolonged drought periods and coral bleaching stimulated by extremely low tides (SPREP 2013: 11). The impacts and devastation caused by the 1990 and 1991 tropical cyclones wiped out the cocoa industry in many communities/villages, with damage to the economy of Samoa at an estimated value of USD35 million (12% of GDP).

On 29 September 2009, a tsunami swept over the nation's southern coastal region of Upolu, killing 143 people, destroying infrastructure and devastating the nation's vital tourism industry. Losses were estimated at US\$106 million, equal to 17% of annual gross domestic product (GDP). It was the worst natural disaster to hit Samoa since Independence (ADB 2011:4).

Another disaster in the early 1990s was the taro blight outbreak, a fungal disease that severely damaged the production of the country's main staple food, also a key export product. While Samoa coped by substituting less vulnerable varieties, resulting production reduced household incomes and failed to achieve the same level of international competitiveness. The taro blight also resulted in a shift to consumption of more imported foodstuffs (primarily to rice as a staple) as it discouraged some farmers from commercial production, making poorer families more susceptible to rapid increases in imported food and fuel prices (Samoa School Fee Relief Scheme Background Analysis 2009:11).

The MIRAB model in village economies

The MIRAB model proposed by Bertram and Watters (1985), with some adaption concerning the role of government and aid, explains the socioeconomics of the four case study villages of this research. These village economies have maintained relative prosperity and improvements in living standards, without significant increases in agricultural productivity. This is because of their dependency on

migration (MI) and remittances (R), direct village level aid to fund projects (A), and bureaucracy (B) (redefined as government services) for their livelihoods.

Migration (MI)

A 50-year pattern of exodus from village to urban or overseas labour markets is demonstrated in each case study village where the population has not grown significantly (Table 1) in relation to their unchanged youthful population structures reflecting overall fertility rates, in the period from the 1960 to 2016. The average value for Samoa during that period was 5.61 births per woman with a minimum of 3.93 births per woman in 2017 and a maximum of 7.65 births per woman in 1960. In the 33 households surveyed in each village, all had close family members living abroad (Poutasi 117, Uafato 117; Taga 134 and Utuali'i 134). In Utuali'i the increase in population can be attributed to the village's proximity to the employment opportunities in the urban and peri-urban areas.

The pattern confirms O'Meara's (1990) conclusion that village-based Samoans find wage labour and other sources of cash income more rewarding than investing their time in commercial smallholder agriculture and that many aspire to migrate to find paid work. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) the Government of Samoa has recognised the reality and opportunity presented by increasingly global markets for labour, and is developing labour migration policies to ensure that labour migration is managed in the best interests of Samoa's people and economy (ILO 2015). After more than a century of Western influence, most Samoans today, whether rural or urban, subsistent or commercial, see their horizons for living as including the wider environments of New Zealand, Australia and the United States. Migration has its roots in Samoans' perception of the good life and is motivated by the desire for money and the potential increase in social status conferred by having money. This is a rational goal when there are other opportunities more rewarding than the uncertainties of village agriculture in Apia and overseas (MNRE 2017:54). 'Given the white-collar orientation of the school system, young people go into subsistence production mostly as a last resort' (Muagututi'a 2006:48).

The situation of the four villages demonstrate the far reaching impacts on Samoa's village economies of outward migration since the late 1960s. Circular short term migration which involves the migration of young single men for work as well as permanent migration when whole families take up residence in a different country have all proven to economically benefit the home country and can continue to do so as long as migrants transmit a sufficiently large flow of remittances. The massive migration of Samoans since the 1970s has been accompanied by a correspondingly large flow of remittances which over the years, has accelerated, making labour the most important export (Ahlburg 1991:2).

These villages illustrate how labour movement from Samoa to advanced economies such as that of New Zealand and Australia has become part of the country's economic norm (Moustafa and Dwyer 2012:161). As I have observed during my time in Samoa, extended family events such as funerals, titles conferring ceremonies and weddings involve not only those living in Samoa, but depend on a Samoan diaspora which exceeds the population of around 200,000 living in Samoa.

The introduction of the seasonal labour scheme in Samoa has created a new avenue for the generation of income in the village communities. In each of the case study village the men of the village have benefitted. Of the four villages, Poutasi village had the largest number (200) of seasonal workers mainly because it is located at the centre of a district recruitment program under the Poutasi Development Trust. In the other villages only a handful of villagers have had the opportunity because there is no recruiter in the village districts. Overall, Samoa is currently ranked second in the region, in terms of overall numbers, after Vanuatu. The total number of Samoans finding seasonal employment

in New Zealand, (mainly agricultural harvesting work) in the fiscal year 2018/ 2019 was 2,473 (NZI 2020).

Remittances (R)

In the four case study villages all of the households received remittances some monthly and others occasionally from abroad. However, the most frequent interval was on a monthly basis. The case studies illustrate how remittances form an important part of village families' incomes and are also an important part of Samoa's GDP (20%) and a vital source of foreign exchange (Choong et.al.2011; Gibson and Mackenzie 2007).

The big question is, what is it that ensures the sustainability of high levels of remittances in Samoa village economies? The MIRAB model lacks a significant cultural explanation of the factors that influence the migration, remittance and the maintenance of social network among Samoans (Niko, 1993:8). In my observation, remittance behaviour in village economies can be understood in relation to the importance Samoan families living abroad attaches to their identity as Samoans. Referred to as *fa'asinomaga* it attaches their identity to place or places, their ancestral villages, and the rights they have there if they were to return, which is maintained and validated by remittances. As a cultural principle Samoans view interpersonal relationships as *o le va fealofa'i* – meaning a communication relation or space between two or more people as a protocol of respect when engaging in a conversation with one another as between parents and children, matai and non-matai, a pastor and his congregation, a brother and a sister, a person and his or her in-laws (Niko 1993:8). Samoan culture values unity and a holistic view of life in terms of service. From birth Samoans are taught that their obligations are to the family, the village and God. Samoans living overseas maintain very strong ties with their families, villages and churches, even among second generation migrants. This strong attachment of overseas Samoans to their extended families and continuing flow of new migrants have ensured the reliable continuity of remittances during past crises.

As the four village case studies illustrate, the sending of remittances is not only through the overt formal money orders, and tele transfers but, also in kind such as the shipment of food, clothing, and home appliances, as well as cash gifts carried by family visiting from overseas, which often go unreported. Remittances are more stable than exports of goods and services. The counter-cyclical nature of remittances was seen vis-a-vis the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) of 2008, and the 2009 Tsunami.

'During the GFC there was a sustained nominal level of remittances – US 135 million and US 132 million in 2008 and 2009 respectively. Furthermore, after the 2009 Tsunami, data suggests a spike in remittance levels both in nominal terms as well as in % of GDP. The counter-cyclicity of remittance flows is particularly helpful to Samoa given its vulnerability to large external shocks (including natural disasters)' (GOS 2016:4).

What the government of Samoa has done to ensure the continuity of remittances is to lessen unemployment in the country by encouraging the seasonal workers schemes to New Zealand and Australia (Connell 2015:122; Moustafa et al, 2012:35 & Gibson et. al. 2011:114-116). The schemes have enabled many low- skilled Samoan workers to earn money overseas and to bring their savings home to their village families. In Poutasi village for example, these savings were usually used for housebuilding, businesses (brickmaking, cattle farm) and other expenses for families. Despite these evident benefits of remittances in the economy, there have been critical comments on the effects of remittances on Samoa's economy. One is that reliance on remittances creates dependence that hinders the expansion of the local economy (Lee, 2009:20). It has also been argued that the labour force at home is reduced both in terms of skilled and unskilled workers and can stand in the way of progress for key sectors such as tourism and agriculture (Moustafa et al, 2012:34-35). In the village economies it has led to a labour shortages for commercial agriculture.

Aid - for village projects

While, as I have noted previously with reference to Bertram and Watters original configuration of the MIRAB model, the 'A' stood for aid given by bilateral and multi-lateral donors to prop up the government as the major employer and service provider. In the village context aid is also valued and hoped for to fund village projects. All the four villages had externally funded projects that were distinct from government services, and included bee-keeping, vegetable production, and environmental conservation activities. Some of them did not appear to be very successful, and some were said to have failed. Although having an aid project in the village is prestigious, the design of these kinds of projects is usually to provide village-wide benefits, and they do not always meet local expectations that a project should provide money directly for village families. Villages retain many of their cooperative characteristics as described by Lockwood and others in the 1960s and 70s, but Schoeffel (personal communication, October 14, 2019) notes that voluntary contributions of time and effort, other than for the churches, are more likely expected to be remunerated nowadays, compared to the village service ethics she observed in the 1970s.

Village projects also tend to reflect the donor priorities of the day rather than desires of villager for cash income. A major focus of aid at present is for climate change resilience. The villages of Poutasi, Uafato, Utuali'i and Taga have all received funds for various environmental goals, because they have all faced damages such as coastal erosion and damage to homes, plantations and to roads, as a result of cyclones which hit Samoa over the years. Given the urgency for adaptation in small island states, there has been an increase in ad-hoc stand-alone environmental projects. The South Pacific Environment Programme (SPREP) points out that these measures have been used rather than a programmed or strategic approach to the funding of adaptation options and measures. SPREP argues that successful adaptation in small islands will depend on supportive institutions, finance, information and technological support. A donor consensus is needed for an climate adaptation strategy for the Pacific islands and should include a strategy for precautionary adaptation since it is difficult to predict far in advance how climate change will affect a particular site, sector or community. This would more than likely lead to better management of natural resources and sustainable development (SPREP 2006:4).

Uafato village has a number of environmentally focused projects such as the forest conservation project, honey bee project, community agro forestry and ecological restoration nursery, sea wall construction and flood prevention project. The honey bee project ended because of the lack of cooperation between the village members and suspicions of its management. Two of the projects (community agro forestry and ecological restoration nursery; flood prevention project) were still on-going during my time of data collection. If the resources allocated for these projects are utilised as stipulated by the donors the projects, they are likely to be successful. The community agro forestry and ecological restoration nursery project sustainability will rely on good management and transparency in the use of funds towards the village development.

The same environmental focus can be found in Taga village benefits from the forest conservation project and to ensure this project is being sustained collaboration with the village authorities, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and the Forests have been developed. Past project includes a water conservation project and a water tank project. Utuali'i village has benefited from an emergency shelter to be used in the event of severe cyclones.

In Poutasi village the women's committee is completing a project to protect its river, after damage by the tsunami. But most projects, including its environmental tree-planting activities, have

been mainly initiated by a businessman who holds a high chiefly title in the village and lives there. He operates the Poutasi Development Trust and its projects include a vegetable garden project, arts and craft center, ukulele workshop and the community center hall. All of these projects aim to generate income and employ people residing in the village. The sustainability on these projects is a question, however as they are dependent on one leader, and other leaders of the village say they are not aware of the actual costs, income and expenditure of these projects.

Bureaucracy (B)

As I have noted previously, the B for bureaucracy originally, in Bertram and Watter's formulation, referred to employment creation by government. Around 70% of Samoa's domestic economic activity occurs directly or indirectly in the Apia urban area which has only 40% of the nation's population. In my reformulation of the 'B' I point to the fact that the Government of Samoa delivers services to the entire population. Samoa provides decentralised district level access to 13 years of education as well as district level health, agriculture, and police services, although progress is needed in addressing the differences in the quality of, and access to, healthcare between urban and rural areas (DFAT 2020:23). As far as I have been able to find out, in no other Pacific Island state does every village have sealed roads, electricity, piped water, telecommunications and access to a full range of government services for health, education, law and justice, as is the case in Samoa.

Poutasi village is the best served of the four villages being the headquarters of its district, with government services in the form of an agriculture extension station, the district hospital, a police outpost, electricity, sealed roads, and the district secondary education college, as well as water supply and electricity. Taga village benefits from electricity supply, water supply, and sealed roads within its boundaries. Health care is accessed from either the district Faleolo hospital, or the Sataua hospital. Uafato is the least developed in terms of services because it is in a historically disadvantaged location, but it has an independent water supply system, electricity, and recently benefitted from a sealed road. Utuali'i has water supply, electricity, a new inland access road and other services easily accessible in the district or in town.

Samoa is often praised for its progress and good development indicators, but this is at least partly because of its advantageous geography, with virtually the whole population on two main islands linked by ferry services. There is an absence of remote outer islands, and a concentration of population on two of the adjacent islands, its village services are also encouraged by an electoral system that favours village voters (Fiti-Sinclair et.al. 2017). If rural Samoa is looked at from a modernisation perspective it presents a picture of state subsidisation and a consumer economy as indicated by modern houses and cars, yet at village level its economy remains predominantly 'traditional'.

Sustainable livelihoods and the MIRAB model

A comparative analysis of the social-economies to the four-case study village (Poutasi, Taga, Uafato and Utuali'i) presents a picture whereby in each village migration (MI), remittances (R), direct village project aid (A) and bureaucracy redefined as government services, are the backbone of socioeconomic development in the villages. Underlying these characteristics is the villagers' minimal reliance on commercial agriculture and in three cases, their focus on production that gives daily or weekly cash in hand by small market trading as well as supplying their staple foods.

My comparison of village socioeconomics confirms the heuristic value of MIRAB model. It initially stemmed from discussions of the problems of agricultural production and development in small Pacific Island economies (Hardaker, Fleming, and Harris 1984; Watters 1985). The MIRAB model rests on the notion that very small island states do not conform to standard modernisation theories about development, such as moving from an agricultural to an industrial economy. Tisdell (2014)

endorsed the model as the most relevant to island states such as Cook Island, Samoa and Tonga. According to Bertram 1999:107;

Conventional emphasis on the gross domestic product as the key economic growth indicator is based on the modernisation view that expenditure can only be sustained based on local (geographically bounded) output. The MIRAB model suggests that on the contrary, external sources of financing that do not leave a residue of debt-current account transfer are the key to the economic performance of small islands.

The most sustainable form of livelihood in the villages has been the traditional village subsistence agriculture and fisheries. It does not produce the foreign exchange necessary to support villagers in Samoa's modern cash-based economy but in three of the four villages, Poutasi, Taga and Uafato and to a more limited extent in Utuali'i, it provides a degree of basic food security.

Samoa relies on foreign aid to partially fund the service provisions and development operations of the government thereby creating employment for public servants, who also benefit indirectly from the aid by supporting their family and relatives, building houses and buying goods. Emigrants from MIRAB economies send remittances to families which, as Tisdell (2014:3) explained: 'Spending those remittances has a local multiplier effect on incomes and employment but this is damped by a high import leakage' because in MIRAB economies there is a small – or no – manufacturing sector, most goods, including food, are imported.

The Food and Agriculture organisation (2020) defined sustainable livelihood as;

A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base.

Samoa has a complex relationship with the world economy. In some ways, global links strengthen Samoa's economy. Greater integration into high-income countries' labour markets through permanent settlement and seasonal migration provides some access to higher-paid work opportunities. Migration can be seen as a risk-management strategy, with some households diversifying the locations of family members overseas. However, links to the world economy can also bring economic vulnerability. The 2008–09 global economic downturn compounded domestic economic volatility, contributing to a contraction of 5 % in the fiscal year 2008–09, the worst economic decline in two decades (World Bank 2010). The resulting projected budget deficit—equivalent to approximately 10% in the fiscal year 2009–10—could threaten the provision of essential social services. The combination of large government expenditures and a depreciating currency has contributed to high inflationary pressures, 6.1 % in 2009 (Akhtar et.al. 2010: 69).

Conclusion

A substantial literature now exists discussing the pros and cons of the MIRAB model (Connell 2003; Bertram and Watters 1986 (a); Hau'ofa 1993; Bertram 2006; McElroy and Oberst 2007; Poirine 1998; Finau 1994; Mines 1981; Fraenkel 2006; Mac-Master 1993; Duncan 1994; Browne 1995) and the question of whether MIRAB economies are sustainable over time. Despite various critiques of the model it continues to be applied and developed to take into account changes within Pacific economies and the importance of social relationships and personal agency (e.g. Bertram 2006; Evans 1999, 2001; Fraenkel 2006; Stahl and Appleyard 2007).

Samoa's increased external dependency on remittances, imported food, fuel and other goods does not present a picture of a sustainable economy. Sustainability in the context of Samoa is mainly discussed in terms of consideration of the natural environment: external economic dependence is seen as strength more than a weakness (ADB 2015). Lockwood concluded that village-based Samoans

have no interest in economic development, but his analysis was flawed. Bertram and Watters model of the Pacific Island MIRAB economy (1999) offers the best insights on why socio-economic changes has occurred in the four Samoan villages over 40 years since Lockwood's study.

Samoa has a small, open economy driven by agriculture, fisheries, tourism, remittances and, increasingly, the service sector. Subsistence agriculture and fishing are integral to Samoan livelihoods. Overall economic activity is concentrated in urban areas. In 2001 the Asian Development Bank (ADB) estimated that 70 % of Samoa's domestic economic activity took place in the Apia urban area (ADB 2011). Samoa also faces substantial structural economic challenges, unemployment, limited markets for agricultural production, limited land cultivation due to lack of young men to work the land and continued land disputes (DFAT 2012:13).

Overall constraints to a less dependent economic development mode include a narrow natural resource base, limited infrastructure in rural areas, small domestic markets, isolation from international markets and a heavy dependence on fuel imports. Its geographical remoteness from its main markets contributes to high transportation costs and few producers achieve the economies of scale necessary to compete in foreign markets. Distance from foreign markets also increases the cost of imported goods, contributing to a weak industrial base. Additionally, the overexploitation of natural resources, including forestry and fisheries, is threatening sustainable management and growth of these key sectors.

In conclusion, the modernisation perspective on development that informed Lockwood's work has proved insufficient to explain the trajectory of Samoa's village development. It was a perspective that envisaged village becoming economically viable and largely self-sufficient entities linked to export markets for tropical products. A deterrent to commercial agriculture, in addition to crop disease, climate events, and low prices has been fluctuations in the prices of traditional produce which can reduce cash flow dramatically. Aside from migration overseas the population is increasingly concentrated in North West Upolu close to areas of economic growth, commerce, communication, construction and transport— that are concentrated in there. My case studies show that households in rural Samoa face barriers to developing sustainable livelihoods using their own resources of land and labour. Although formal employment opportunities are very limited, households get by on a mixture of activities to provide food and cash. However, a final consideration is that the fish and crops that sustained Samoans historically before contact with the capitalist world are still produced in Samoa's villages and, in the event of some global event which dislocated its present globalised character, would allow rural villages to sustain themselves.

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