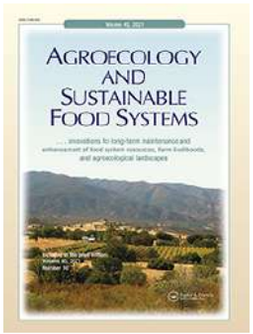

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Sustainable development at the policy-practice nexus: insights from south West Bay, Malakula Island, Vanuatu

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ABSTRACT

The attainment of sustainable development in many contexts remains challenging. In rural/peripheral parts of many developing countries, the situation is exacerbated by globalization. Using an example from Vanuatu (South West Bay, Malakula Island), this study explains how Government policy around sustainable development is disseminated and the impacts it has on practice. In the study area, there is little direct knowledge of policy although it is often well aligned with traditional (*kastom*) practice. Three case studies illustrate the policy-practice nexus here. The *sengtau* system ensures all clan members benefit from the use of clan lands, a system currently threatened by a shift from subsistence agriculture to cash cropping. A hybrid land-lease system involves leasing part of clan lands for commercial *kava* production, a situation concerning some who see it as a betrayal of customary practice. The use of taboo/closure of fishing grounds to allow regeneration of seafood capacity appears driven by dietary change and cash availability. While such traditions are rooted in cultural practice, the inroads made by globalization and the market economy pose threats to their sustainability. This shows the importance of having national policy guide on-ground practice alongside support for subsistence agriculture and associated social safety nets.

KEYWORDS

Sustainable development; Pacific Island countries; Vanuatu; policy; practice; subsistence; cash crops; climate change; markets; agriculture

Introduction

As human pressures on earth's resources grow, the importance of developing and maintaining sustainable interactions is becoming daily more acute. Nowhere is this more important than on oceanic islands, comparatively small and remote from global markets that are conspicuously resource-constrained compared to most other parts of the world (Kelman 2018; Nunn and Kumar 2018).

At every level – global, regional and national – policy has been developed with the goal of achieving sustainable development through the control of resource access and monitoring of human-environment interactions. Such

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top-down interventions have proven extremely difficult to achieve, especially in developing countries where governments are sometimes unable to effectively engage all their citizens, particularly those living in more peripheral areas. Yet in many such places, there often exist reserves of community resilience that represent the multi-generational experience of residents and which can provide guides to sustainable resource management that are helpful in planning for the future. In several such contexts, practice is often governed by policy that is community-owned and driven and grounded in culture (Maru et al. 2014; Nunn and Kumar 2019b; Nunn et al. 2017). Policy is a term used in this study to refer both to government direction of its country's affairs but also culturally-rooted practice that underwrote sustainable livelihoods in pre-contact times

The pace of global climate change is accelerating and with it the magnitude of the challenges of sustaining livelihoods, especially in more peripheral parts of developing countries. In most such countries, a key nexus is the promotion of globalization agendas by governments, which stress individual enterprise and incentivize increased engagement in the formal economy, and the culturally-grounded community resilience that may be the best way to adapt to climate change. In the face of increasing impacts from climate change, it may be that the community's strength to adapt to climate changes lies in its capacity for acting collectively (Adger et al. 2003), with local institutions (both formal and informal) playing a pivotal role in reducing vulnerability to climate change (Berman, Quinn, and Paavola 2012; McNamara et al. 2020). With this in mind, a study was undertaken in a rural part of Vanuatu, an island country in the southwest Pacific Ocean, which is uncommonly exposed to natural disasters (Welle and Birkmann 2015), to understand the complex interplay between government policy, community/cultural policy, and on-the-ground practices of interaction between rural dwellers and the environments that sustain them. The goal of this research was to identify the most effective policy pathways for achieving sustainable development in an uncertain future world.

Parts of Melanesia are amongst the last remaining countries in the world where the traditional economy (also known as the subsistence or *kastom* [custom] economy) takes precedence over the market economy in terms of providing for livelihoods (Regenvanu 2010). Agriculture (including crops, livestock, forestry, and fisheries) and tourism are the largest contributors to the economies of Vanuatu yet the contribution of the subsistence economy to the livelihoods and resilience of Ni Vanuatu (the people of Vanuatu) is often underestimated. Low levels of absolute poverty and malnutrition in rural Vanuatu can be attributed to an inclusive land tenure system and to robust social safety nets. While an increasing number of households in Vanuatu are engaging more in the cash economy, it is important that these social safety nets and the role of the

traditional (subsistence) economy are also supported, a view increasingly expressed elsewhere in the Pacific Islands region (Korovulavula et al. 2019; Nunn and Kumar 2019a).

Yet many studies and policies continue to evaluate customary land systems by focusing on economically profitable activities while sidelining the importance of subsistence and traditional activities. Traditional farming systems have long played a vital role in achieving food security; social security; biodiversity protection and ecological stability; in addition to providing natural medicines, and cultural continuity (Anderson 2011). Measuring shifts in agricultural practices to unsustainable methods and focusing solely on market gains as livelihood improvements is an "ecological blind spot in development theory" (McMichael 2012, 9). Most people in Vanuatu live in rural areas and secure their subsistence and cash income from traditional farming and fishing systems. These traditional farming systems act as safety nets providing resilience against external shocks as well as safeguarding food security and maintaining economic stability.

Supporting the traditional economy and maintaining the customary land tenure in Vanuatu (as the basis for food and social security) is one of the key objectives of the Government of Vanuatu's National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP, 2016–2030). The traditional economy is seen to "encourage sustainable economic activity at the individual and household level, while operating within reciprocal networks of exchange and obligation at the community level" (Addinsall et al. 2015, 693).

Studies are showing that the increasing participation in the formal economy is driving a shift in consumption patterns, leading Vanuatu to become highly dependent on imported foods, while the consumption and availability of local, fresh food is decreasing. These transitions are also contributing to increased prominence of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), with over 20% of the adult population suffering with diabetes, soaring food import bills, land tenure disputes, and attrition of social reciprocal systems that have sustained Ni Vanuatu society for millennia.

This study explores this nexus in detail allowing insights into the current state of policy understanding/uptake and practice in a representative rural/peripheral part of a developing country, showing the nature of conflicts emerging between global and local (culturally-grounded) sustainability agendas. The next section describes the study area, followed by one detailing the research methods used. Then, there is a section describing the results and another discussing their main implications and the lessons they have for comparable developing-world contexts.

The study area

About 150 km NNW of Efate Island, where the capital city of Vanuatu, Port Vila, and most of its development activities are located, lies the island of Malakula (Malekula) which is typical of rural/peripheral islands in the country. With a population of some 23,000 people, Malakula is culturally diverse with over 30 different languages spoken on the island. Most of its inhabitants are engaged in agriculture and fishing, largely for purposes of subsistence, but with a little commercial agriculture (especially cocoa, copra, and *kava*) in places where there is easy access to markets, mostly off-island. Most people in Malakula survive through a subsistence economy, supported largely by slash-and-burn (swidden) horticulture involving staples like yams and taro, green vegetables, fish and pork.

The study area of South West Bay (Figure 1) is such a place, connected by boat and plane to Efate yet without road access to most other parts of Malakula. Communities visited extended from Malfakal in the south to Dixon Reef (Tavendrua) in the north, representing those encompassed by the Area Council, which is based at the provincial center of Wintua, adjoining the airport and other government support infrastructure.

Institutional governance in South West Bay involves the Area Council (which interfaces with Government), Village Councils (that articulate Government policy) to *nakamals* (culturally-defined clans that sustain, develop, and implement traditional [*kastom*] practices) and households.[1] Government policy moves through this chain top-down from the Area Council to households while traditional practice generally moves outwards from *nakamals* to households and from *nakamals* to Village Councils, occasionally to the Area Council.

Part of the reason for the dichotomy of policy and practice, which is explored in more detail below, is around land tenure. All land in Vanuatu is community owned and managed,[2] which often makes it difficult for the government to implement and enforce national-scale policy on a range of issues, from sustainable development to resource management. Compounding this situation is that the Government of Vanuatu, like many of its archipelagic Pacific Island neighbors, does not have the capacity to implement policy on the ground across hundreds of rural communities on 65 inhabited islands, especially when much national capacity (and complementary donor support) is channeled toward responding to the effects of disaster, especially tropical cyclones and volcanism (Le De et al. 2018; Magee et al. 2016; McNamara and Prasad 2014).

Many of the country-wide issues with land tenure apply to South West Bay. The dependence of ownership and land boundaries on oral histories is a perennial cause of disputes, as are variations in inheritance practice, increased in-country mobility, and development more generally. Infrastructure or investments of (potential) value have all led in Vanuatu (as elsewhere in the Pacific Islands region) to friction amongst claimants to

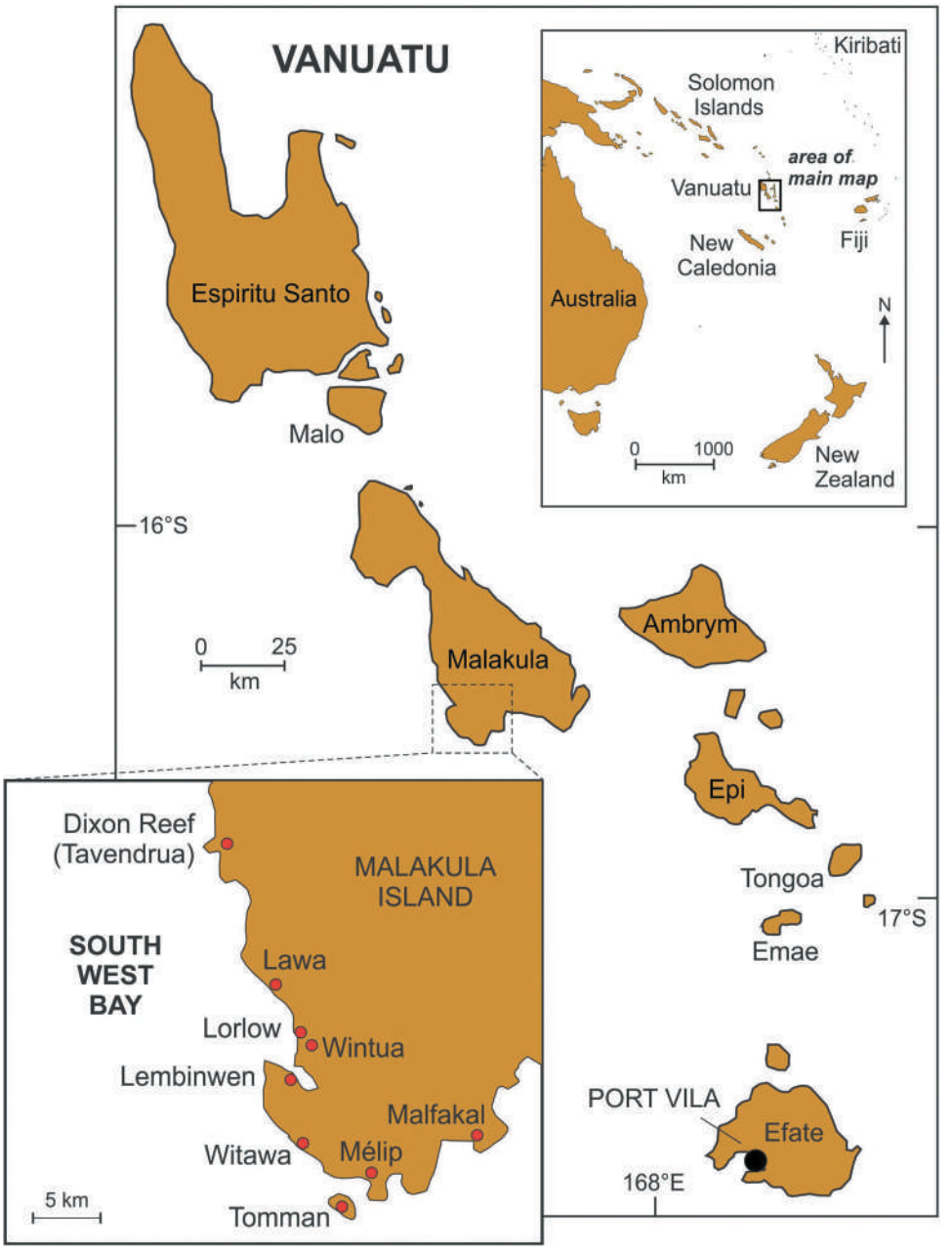

Figure 1.

particular pieces of land. The situation in South West Bay is complicated by its comparatively high population density, its cultural-linguistic diversity (nine languages are routinely spoken within the study area), and the socio-economic

outfall (elaborated below) of the rapidly escalating potential for *kava* growing that has spread through the area over the past decade as accessibility to lucrative markets on Efate Island has steadily increased.

Methodology and methods

The relationships between rural livelihoods, traditional economy, and the cash economy in rural contexts like those on Malakula Island have been found to be dynamic, complex, and locally specific with few frameworks adequate to address associated concerns (Glaus et al. 2019; Harrison 2008; Ollenburg and Buckley 2007; Upton et al. 2008). For sustainable development to succeed in a Pacific Islands context, it must be adapted to local conditions and cultural contexts and should acknowledge Pacific epistemologies. Such education is key to achieving the positive societal transformation needed to allow Pacific Island countries to manage their resources equitably and to develop in ways that might be regarded as sustainable (Corcoran and Koshy 2010; Savelyeva and Rickards 2017).

Responding to this challenge, Addinsall et al. (2015) developed the Agroecology and Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Framework (ASRLF) to recognize the traditional economy, culture, and *kastom* as influencing sustainable livelihoods through beliefs, tradition, identity, language, sacred sites, ceremonies, and festivals in addition to the influence of these factors on social networks and social capital through reciprocity, redistribution, and exchange as well as attachment to land. The ASRLF recognizes the traditional economy as a 'values based' livelihood activity and outcome that may not generate income *per se* but is important in contributing to a person's well-being. While entering into the cash economy is seen as an important strategy for rural areas in the Pacific, focusing solely on economic growth may undermine development goals essential for well-being, equity and sustainability.

It is an essential requirement of case study research that the unit of analysis be determined. As the aim of this research was to gain insights into the current state of policy understanding/uptake and practice, two separate villages were the unit of analysis within which the relationship between policy and engagements in the traditional and cash economies and rural Ni-Vanuatu livelihoods were explored. Based on the criteria of the ASRLF, initial contact is particularly important and must take place at the community/village level to ensure the research safeguards culturally-based reciprocal obligation systems. Once the villages had been fully informed of the research processes, the unit of analysis then narrowed into the household and individual level, taking into consideration culturally appropriate methods such as *storian* sessions (Addinsall et al. 2017b; Warrick 2009), a Bislama term for chatting, yarning or exchanging stories. The division of four categories in the ASRLF each requires a different

unit of analysis and scale beginning with the village, progressing to household/individual, external organizations and institutions, and then concluding back at the village level for validation of results and to ensure a participatory involvement of the community.

Qualitative data was collected from *storian* sessions with 20 households in the villages of Wintua and Lorlow (10 in each) using the respondents' preferred vernacular languages (Mewun and Nati). Interviewer gender (male) made direct communication with females culturally inappropriate; to have insisted otherwise would have jeopardized the entire research. Heads of all households interviewed (not all households in the area) were also male, typically the oldest male resident. All *storian* sessions were recorded, selected parts (relevant to the research) were subsequently translated into English and transcribed. *Storian* sessions were supplemented by interviews with public-sector officials, both in South West Bay and in Port Vila, as well as informal discussions and observations across the study area.

Talking points (conversation prompts) used in *storian* and interviews in South West Bay were as follows.

- What changes in planting crops have you observed in the past few decades? What led to these changes?
- Are you aware of Government's policies regarding sustainable development? How do you source information about what Government is doing? How useful do you regard this information?
- Describe *kastom* controls on land use in South West Bay. Do you pay more attention to *kastom* or Government? Does your household operate independently of *kastom* and Government?
- Over the next 10 years, how do you expect your agricultural and fishing practices to change? Why is this? Would you be happy with more *kastom* or Government control on these practices in the future?

Results and interpretation

This section reports the results of this research in three parts. The first reviews the degree to which awareness of Government policy around sustainable development, especially in the agriculture sector, has penetrated to rural parts of Vanuatu like South West Bay. The second describes three community-based (*kastom*) policies relevant to sustainable development that operate within the study area. The final section discusses the ways in which respondents see the future of South West Bay unfolding.

Government policy and its application

The Government of Vanuatu's National Sustainable Development Plan 2016–2030 (NSDP) has a vision of building 'a stable, sustainable and prosperous nation' and was launched in 2016 as a national response to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Outward-looking, the NSDP is focused on preserving the natural environment and its resources, enhancing resilience to climate change and natural disasters, and strengthening both the traditional and formal (cash) economies to improve the well-bring of Ni Vanuatu. These goals are complemented in the NSDP by a desire to 'nurture a vibrant cultural identity' and to produce 'a peaceful, just and inclusive' society.

There was little awareness among respondents in South West Bay about the NSDP and related Government policy although they shared many of the same goals and aspirations. This might be considered a failure of policy but it can also be regarded as an alignment of policy with stakeholder (Ni-Vanuatu) values that makes it more likely to succeed, albeit along unanticipated routes. Where there appears to be clear misalignment – such as the facilitating of market access for kava without reference to the loss of sustainable livelihoods – was between the intended interventions by Government (to implement and sustain sustainable practice) that are implicit in the NSDP and the help that respondents reported having received from Government. Several respondents stated that their sense was that Government was more like a benefactor from whom help could be sought following a natural disaster. Other respondents stated that Government helped with infrastructure and schools, it helped 'oil the wheels' of everyday activities by maintaining the associated infrastructure and airstrip, by supplying seeds, by subsiding transport, but did not appear to be directing such activities.

Community (culturally-grounded) policies

While 'policy' is usually a word used to refer to government efforts to direct and manage a country's affairs, it is also used in the context of this study to refer to culturally-grounded efforts to control various aspects of land-linked resource use. This approach is further justified by the conflict that invariably arises when Government and *kastom* policy are juxtaposed, something discussed further below. Three *kastom* policies of this kind were described by respondents in South West Bay – the *sengtau* land tenure system, a recently-evolved hybrid lease system, and a marine-protected area system.

The *Sengtau* system

The *Sengtau* system exists throughout the entire area of South West Bay and predates European arrival in the area in the 1890s. *Sengtau* is a traditional governance system based around land sharing that was developed to support livelihoods following disaster or at times when there was a need for particular residents to increase food production, perhaps because the numbers of people they had to feed had increased or because the land they formerly used was no longer productive. In a time when almost all productive land was used to grow food crops, consumed locally, the *sengtau* system ensured sustainability, giving all the inhabitants of South West Bay the best chance for survival.

With the advent of cash crops, especially *kava*, the situation has changed. Land once readily shared by its titular owners/users is now sequestered for cash cropping. Chief Kailick Massing, head of a major landholding group, stated that "*ol yangfala no gat respect mo save long kastom fasin from oli planem tumas kava from vatu*," meaning that young people no long respect *sengtau* owing to their shift from food production to cash cropping. The view was also expressed that there was a growing need to reintroduce *sengtau* and to force younger farmers to start sharing land again according to the needs of individual households.

The loss of *sengtau* has not only been driven by the growth of the cash economy but was also attributed by some respondents to increasing variations in the weather. In particular, a prolonged drought in 2015 impacted agricultural production throughout South West Bay. In response, one of the leading *nakamals*, Mindua Nakamal, released extra (unutilized) land to 26 farming households so they could raise production. The cultural expectation is that a royalty payment called *nemetenahane*, comprising an offering of the first crops, would subsequently be made to the leaders of this *nakamal* but this had not occurred by the time of fieldwork in late 2018, something attributed to the use of this land for production of *kava*, a slow-growing yet lucrative cash crop. Surveys showed that there are over 10,400 kava plants growing on Mindua Nakamal lands, something that might yield a total over half a million US dollars upon sale in Port Vila.

The understandable spread of *kava* production across farmlands in South West Bay that were formerly used almost exclusively for food cropping has had widespread socio-economic impacts on traditional Ni-Vanuatu society there. Not only has it seen the loss of culturally-grounded strategies for sustaining livelihoods like that of the *sengtau* but it has also involved an increase in cash availability within the community and an associated demand for goods to purchase. The latter commonly include imported (rather than locally-produced) foods, which are usually processed and of low nutritional value rather than natural and healthy. Parallel to this development has been

a reduction in local food production, former food gardens having been replaced with *kava* plantations. The loss of supply of local foods has been matched by an increased consumption of imported foods, the consequence of which has been a decline in individual (especially children's) health.

The hybrid lease system in Looremew

The contemporary failings of the *sengtau* system in the Mindua Nakamal have not gone unnoticed elsewhere in South West Bay. In nearby Looremew Nakamal, a different hybridized approach has been developed for this reason. The situation in Looremew is that, while the land belongs to all, it is the chief who manages it and controls use of its resources (current and potential) on behalf of every clan member.

In 2017, concerned that Looremew might follow Mindua in losing valuable food production to *kava* plantations, the chief decided that he would offer land for lease to an investor. The investor in question leased twenty hectares for fifteen years to plant *kava* for a substantial upfront payment followed by a more modest monthly payment. On the face of it, this approach might appear far-sighted, given that it alienates an area of *nakamal* land for a fixed period and yields revenue that can be used for the benefit of all clan members. But it has unsettled many in the Looremew community, principally because the lease (or sale) of land is anathemic to Ni-Vanuatu culture; land is not a commodity to be bought or sold, it has spiritual as well as material value.

More pragmatically, while this hybrid agreement has helped commercialize *kava* production in South West Bay, smallholder producers now being able to piggyback on the commercial transport and transactions, the direct revenue it produces is widely regarded as insufficient to make any meaningful difference to the wellbeing of *nakamal* members and their families.

Noho – the marine-protected area

In the Mewun dialect, *noho* has the same meaning as taboo when applied as a tool for resource management. Since times immemorial, the people of South West Bay have monitored their catches of seafood (especially fish) and have periodically placed a *noho* on particular areas, a practice similar to that in other Pacific Island contexts (Foale et al. 2011; Johannes 2002). The *noho* has a set time frame, commonly two years, and means that no person can enter the forbidden area for the purpose of catching any seafoods.

At the time of fieldwork in 2018, a *noho* had been placed by three nakamals (Alo, Tibuse and Venebangewei) on an area about 4 km^2 extending from Venabongmus fishing grounds south of Lorlow to Nepohkovet fishing grounds south of Wintua and extending to the offshore reefs of Eraigol and Lebulsong. The motivation behind the declaration of this *noho* is instructive. In past times,

it was observations of the numbers and sizes of fish (and other marine organisms) being caught from particular places that led to a *noho* being declared. But this *noho* was based less on observation and more on impressions of unsustainability that appear to have been informed, at least in some households, by a heightened consumption of tinned fish. *Storian* data reveal in some cases that this was itself a function of changed diets arising from less locally-grown food being produced and consumed by South West Bay households (see above), which arose from greater amounts of cash in the community. Some households clearly preferred the convenience of using this cash to purchase tinned fish rather than spending time and effort catching fresh fish, so declared the latter more difficult to acquire, which led to the *noho* being declared.

In its quest to improve food and nutritional security in Vanuatu, the NSDP and other policies place emphasis on traditional diets utilizing organic locally-produced or caught foods, especially fresh fish, which have helped sustain life in these islands for millennia. The *noho* is a culturally-grounded policy with the same goals but its effects may be different to what they would once have been. For, given that many households in South West Bay, bolstered by income from *kava* sales, have developed a preference for consuming tinned fish (often imported), it is not assured that once the *noho* expires, it will result in any greater consumption of fresh fish. This exemplifies the point that such traditional practices work well when people have no choice but to access natural/local food sources but that they might actually embed poor (dietary and ecological) practice in a situation where other sources of food are available.

Stakeholder views about the future

While concern was expressed about the encroachment of *kava* production into areas of former food gardens and the knock-on effects of this for many aspects of life in South West Bay, there was also an anxiety expressed by a few respondents about what might happen if the price of *kava* were to fall. It was stated that it would be difficult to reduce *kava* production and revert plantations to food production. It was thus suggested that, in case such a situation arose, local authorities (*nakamals*) should insist that a percentage of land was kept in food production.

Some respondents were concerned about the loss of tradition (*kastom*) implicit in the sidelining of *sengtau* and bemoaned the fact that systems, which had sustained their ancestors for hundreds of years were now under threat. "*Ol yangfala ilo lusum kastom fasin and yumi mas toktok long olgeta*," stated Elder Maxing from Wintua, meaning that the younger generations have forgotten traditional practice and that their elders had the responsibility of teaching them this once more.

While several respondents declared that the hybrid system adopted by Looremew was a sensible way to proceed in the future, because it exposed clan members to commerce and provided them with a revenue for which they did not need to work, the particular instance was generally recognized as inadequate, largely because the terms of the lease (especially the monthly payments) were regarded as unduly generous toward the lessee. That said, some respondents expressed the view that the situation could be resolved in a *kastom* way, that is that traditional agreements negotiated in a customary manner would eventually supersede the legal agreement. Other respondents doubted this would happen, highlighting the dangers of weakening *kastom* law and replacing it with alien law, intimating that traditional ways of doing things would have been better suited to the Looremew situation.

Most elderly stakeholders expressed great faith in the abilities of time-honored (*kastom*) ways of doing things, like the *noho*, for sustaining livelihoods in South West Bay. Many also expressed their fear that younger adults in the area lacked knowledge of such strategies for managing natural resources and feared for the future unless these strategies were systematically re-learned.

Discussion

In South West Bay, as in many other rural locations in the Pacific Islands and developing countries elsewhere, there has been a shift toward cash cropping (and imported food production) at the expense of local food production sustained by traditional practices like *sengtau*. It seems clear that government policies around sustainable development, even though these are well aligned, are not being translated effectively into local practice. If this situation continues, then it could have ramifications throughout the country.

The attempt by Looremew Nakamal to avoid a situation where traditional practices like *sengtau* declined as clan members become more involved in cash cropping by entering into a legal agreement for leasing land may represent the way forward for many *nakamals* in South West Bay and elsewhere where the land is especially suited to the production of cash crops like *kava* and where there is comparatively good market access. Yet such agreements need to be consensual rather than the decision of a single individual and should perhaps be overseen by regulations, which stipulate a minimum fee (for the lease of a hectare) and a minimum term that realistically reflects landowners' wishes for the future development of their land. It is important in a Vanuatu context to not reduce the value of land as an economic asset to be sold, mortgaged, or as investment in the formal economy. Land rights for Ni Vanuatu are not primarily marketable assets but rather a secure foundation for making a living and sheltering and nurturing their families (Meinzen-Dick et al. 1997). This

notion is empowering and subversive in itself as it challenges the dominant patriarchal and capitalist principles, which drive conceptualizations of the value of land.

The anxieties expressed by many older residents of South West Bay about a future in which the culturally-grounded stock of community knowledge that underpins their resilience is lost (or depleted) appear well founded. Many younger adults in the area are more interested in the short-term gains that can be made from *kava* sales and the new purchasing opportunities these bring, rather than the old, more labor-intensive, methods of food acquisition that are no longer considered needed.

Given the vulnerability that these dual stresses – loss of traditional (*kastom*) knowledge and disdain for old ways – bring, especially around the exposure of livelihoods in South West Bay should have the demand/price of *kava* in Port Vila (and beyond) fall, there is clearly an opportunity for Government to intervene. This might be through regulation of the *kava* price and removal of subsidies that facilitate market access or, less punitively, in association with local *nakamals* to require that every farmer devote a fixed proportion of land to food production in the name of sustainable development.

Conclusions

The contemporary livelihood challenges faced by rural dwellers in South West Bay are comparable to those in other developing countries (Korovulavula et al. 2019; McMillen et al. 2014; Scheyvens et al. 2017). The balance between custom and policy is a delicate one, the precise nature of which should be determined based on goals and pathways. Climate change represents a significant livelihood stressor to future livelihoods in South West Bay, especially in terms of sea-level rise but also around food resource depletion associated with warming and ocean acidification (Weir, Dovey, and Orcherton 2017). Over the next few decades, it is clear that livelihoods in South West Bay will change in response to such external forces as well as the complex interplay of market forces and policy, local, and national, outlined here.

Discussions about development in the Pacific Islands continue to emphasize growth, efficiency, reform and governance, while only a handful of publications from NGOs and researchers questions the sustainability of current economic and trade policy (Addinsall et al. 2017b; Addinsall et al. 2015, 2017a; Douglas, Eti-Tofinga, and Singh 2018; Regenvanu 2010; Vickers 2018). The push for reform of customary ownership of land (with the replacement of freehold or individual title) from neo-classical economists, who see customary ownership as a critical barrier to economic growth, informs the agendas of many development

agencies operating in Vanuatu. This fails to recognize the reality in Vanuatu, where most people live in rural areas and are supported by vibrant smallholder subsistence and cash-cropping economies (Allen 2015). It is therefore crucial that all Government heads in Vanuatu speak the same language and better align to the objectives of the NSDP. The priority must be balancing the need for economic growth while simultaneously protecting the traditional values and way of life in Vanuatu, which have sustained Ni Vanuatu (people) for millennia against external threats, which are set to increase as a consequence of global climate change.

Notes

1. *Nakamal* is a Bislama word used properly to denote clan but also today often employed colloquially as a term for a *kava* bar. *Kastom* is the Bislama term for the Ni-Vanuatu way of doing things and is a commonly-used referend for a range of traditional (customary) practices.
2. The Constitution states that "All land in the Republic of Vanuatu belongs to the indigenous custom owners and their descendants" and that *kastom* rules govern land ownership and usage.

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