

# Navigating our Pacific heritage: Museums preserving traditions, mediating development and building local, regional and international relationships

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## **Abstract**

The Pacific Islands region as a whole is made up of over 20 states and territories in an area covering over half of the world's surface. With a total population of less than 10 million people, this region has one-fifth of the world's languages. This region has the highest rate of indigenous people within the national population of any region of the world, and also the highest rate of customary or traditional land ownership.

Due to globalization, economic development and urban migration, Pacific Islands communities are changing rapidly. Populations are expanding quickly, and over half of all Pacific Islanders are now in their teenage years or younger. Communities are becoming more ethnically diverse and are experiencing racial tensions. Contemporary realities are threatening Pacific identities thus risking a breakdown in communication between generations and highlighting inequities between classes and different ethnic groups in the community. Nations are trying to preserve, stabilise and strengthen their cultures and for their part, the 45 museums and cultural centres of the Pacific Islands are responding to these challenges in a number of creative and inspiring ways which this paper explores through five case studies.

Pacific museums and cultural centres work locally in their communities and through their regional organisation, the Pacific Islands Museums Association (PIMA) to protect and promote traditional art forms and cultures, preserve the region's material culture and heritage sites, engage communities in heritage management, educate visitors about rich, unique Pacific cultures, and create sustainable economic development in each country or territory. They aim, above all, to maintain local living cultures, in all their forms, and to assist people to live together in harmony.

This paper discusses the individual and regional efforts of Pacific museums in a number of areas including training workshops, international partnerships and public programs which demonstrate a cooperative approach to heritage management in the Pacific.

*Keywords: International activity, globalization, regionalization, localization, co-operation*

## Introduction

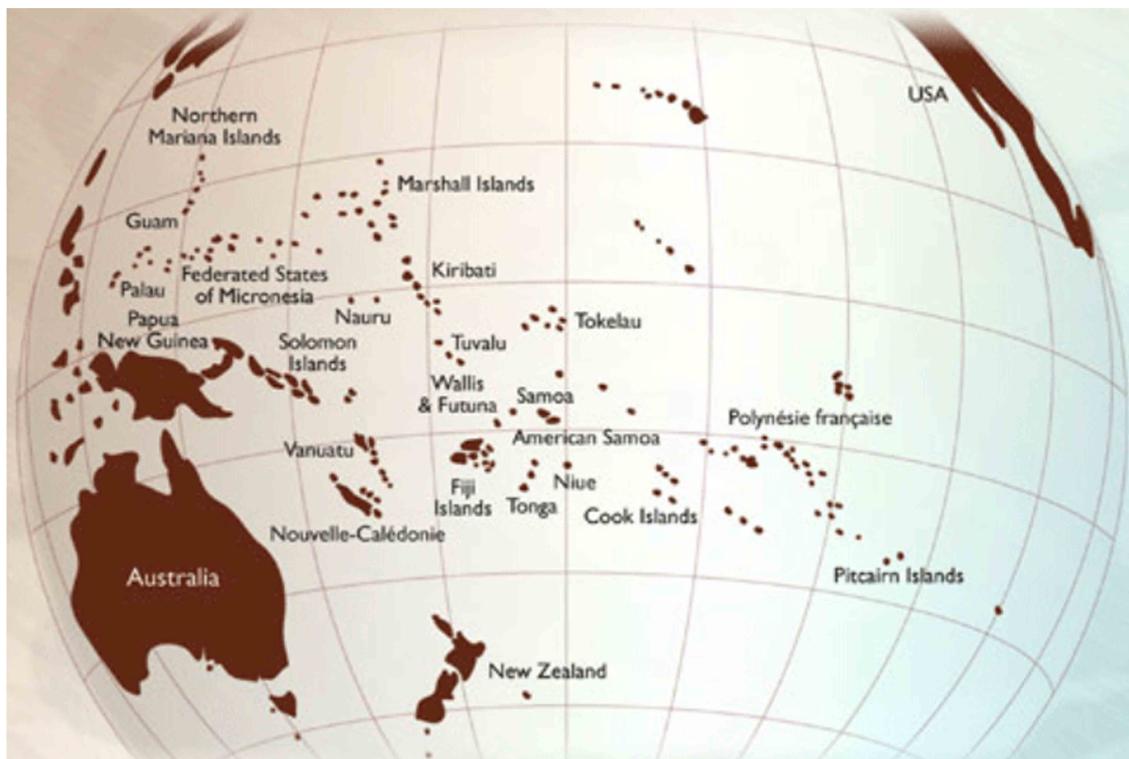
*Our cultures link us with other Pacific people, and with our seas, land and ancestors. They stimulate national unity and self-confidence and provide a constantly renewed source of wealth. Our cultures and languages are a major part of who we are.* (Eminent Persons Group quoted in Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2005, 2)

The above quote encompasses many of the themes covered in this paper. It provides a useful introduction to the geography and the demographics of the region and points to the central function of culture in the identity of Pacific Islands countries and territories. From this foundation we can then explore how the strategy of regionalism is used to achieve the common development aims of small island states in the Pacific, and why museums employ this same strategy to pursue their mutual advancement with their own Pacific Islands Museums Association (PIMA).

The Pacific Ocean is the largest

geographical feature on earth, covering about one third of the world's surface. There are 7500 islands spread over 30 million square kilometres of ocean; however only approximately 500 are inhabited, and more than 98% of the area is sea. Those 500 islands make up the 25 island Pacific Islands Countries and Territories, which are among the smallest countries in the world. These include: American Samoa, Cook Islands, Easter Island (Rapa Nui) the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam, Hawaii, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Caledonia, Norfolk Island, Northern Mariana Islands, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Pitcairn Island, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and Wallis and Futuna.

The people of the Pacific Islands share a voyaging tradition, with their societies developing through migration. Culturally however, they are very different, mainly due to the geographic isolation of the islands.



Map of the Pacific Region

Although the region is home to just 0.1 per cent of the world's population, it contains a remarkable 1200 languages, comprising one-fifth of the total number of languages in the World. Over 700 languages are spoken in Papua New Guinea alone. Three colonial languages of French, English and Spanish are also spoken in the Pacific. (Voi, 2000, 211)

The population of the region, predicted to reach 9 million by 2010, has the highest rate of indigenous people within the national population of any region of the world, and also the highest rate of customary or traditional land ownership. Pacific Islanders attach great cultural importance to land, and three out of four Islanders still live in rural areas.

Pacific Islands' cultures and cultural heritage have two distinct characteristics:

1. They are "living cultures" - the majority of people live and practise their customs and culture on a daily basis; and
2. They are by and large "intangible cultures" - because cultures are not literate, and because almost all material forms of cultural expression use organic biological materials (which quickly disappear in the tropical environment), cultural heritage is made up almost entirely of 'intangible' elements that are linked to places in the landscape (Regenvanu, April 2006, 1).

### **Regionalism in the Pacific**

*In the face of a rapidly changing world due to globalisation, the newly politically independent nations of the Pacific, as elsewhere, have and will continue to identify their vital interests in national terms...But in the immediate post-colonial period and in the arena of large developed sovereign states often unsympathetic to the particular vulnerabilities of the Pacific Islands, regionalism is seen as a policy that can work to pursue the common issues faced by all*

*Pacific countries and territories, to provide regional services to compensate for capacity limitations at a national level and increasing development opportunities through integration and the creation of larger markets.* (Urwin, 2005, 1)

Although governments like to talk about culture, they often see their museums as just places to attract tourists. PIMA endorses the view expressed by the Solomon Islands National Museum Director Mr Foana'ota, that "Museums are the focal centre for cultural preservation" (Foana'ota cited in PIMA, 1999, 2); however this view is not widely held by all in the region. At a recent regional arts festival, a senior government official referred to museums as 'dusty dead places, reserved for the display of taxidermy specimens.' This misunderstanding and lack of support from leaders is a crucial issue that Pacific museums need to counter and lobby against. They need to prove their own worth, and explain to governments how they are actively engaging communities, contributing to social development and cultural preservation and also supporting innovation in the arts.

Pacific museums need to earn and demand recognition and support from their own governments. However it remains that in many countries and territories in the Pacific, museums and cultural activities must compete with development and funding priorities such as the United Nations Millennium Development Goals concerned with 'eradicating extreme poverty, achieving universal primary education, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, and ensuring environmental sustainability.' (United Nations, 2005, website) In the face of such strong and worthy competition for development funds, government resources are just not allocated to museums in sufficient amounts to allow them to carry out their roles.

Pacific Islands nations and territories are

increasingly working together to achieve their aims, with regional organisations such as the Pacific Islands Forum and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community. Likewise, PIMA has created a network for the 45 museums and cultural centres of the Pacific. The Association advocates for the development of regional cultural resource management policies and practices, facilities training, and provides a forum for the exchange of ideas and skills. PIMA provides and encourages regional and global linkages, with individuals and organisations who support museums, or who mediate between museums and people, such as teachers, the media, politicians, artists and NGO's.

Practically, PIMA works through courses and workshops as a forum for the exchange of values, information and ideas, and through the development of exhibits and other regional projects.

*Over the years, PIMA has empowered many staff with knowledge and skills within a variety of areas that help museum staff deal with challenges and opportunities that come with heritage management in a changing environment. (Griffiths, Galloway & Gouty, 2004, 2)*

### **Case studies**

Nations and individuals in the Pacific are balancing modern and traditional lifestyles. In recognizing this, Pacific museums consider joining the past with the present and future in a positive way as a key priority. PIMA and its members advocate preserving tangible material collections, but more importantly, preserving and protecting living culture: languages, traditional beliefs, skills and knowledge systems, as well as cultural and natural sites. Cultural programs can help communities to negotiate development so that people can enjoy the benefits that modernity can offer, but without losing their very individuality and the unique cultures that define them. UNESCO Sub-regional Cultural

Advisor for the Pacific, Mali Voi sees museums as;

*...an instrument of reconciling the past with the present - constructing the future with a strong hope. This is because museums have a subtle way of bringing about social transformations more amicably than other forms of interventions. (Voi, 1998, 5)*

This paper will explore the exciting and dynamic approaches currently used by different Pacific museums and cultural centres in response to challenging issues faced by their communities. In researching the programs tailored for Pacific cultures currently experiencing erosion by mass communication and the dominance of global culture, urbanisation, rapid social change, social unrest and growing migration, the following examples stand out:

- The Student Docent Program at the National Museum of Palau
- Outreach Prisoner Education Program - Fiji Museum
- Fieldworkers Network - Vanuatu Cultural Centre
- Peace and Unity in Carving Project - Solomon Islands National Museum
- Tongan Ancestral Remains Repatriation Program - Bishop Museum, Hawai'i and National Museum of Tonga

### **Student docent program- Belau National Museum, Palau**

Although some cultures have remained unchanged, contemporary realities are threatening the maintenance of Pacific identities and risking a breakdown in communication between parents and children and within communities. Access to tertiary training in heritage management studies and meaningful subsequent employment in the museum sector is scarce, and a major constraint faced by Pacific museums and cultural centres is 'the lack of good human resources - the lack of motivated, qualified, competent staff with a passion for culture and

cultural heritage and sustainable development' (Regenvanu, February 2006, 6).

Museums also struggle to engage with young audiences, who are often more interested in mass (imported) media and entertainment than learning about their own heritage and traditions.

The Belau National Museum, of the Micronesian country of Palau, has recently taken steps to engage the youth sector of their community, and also to take positive steps in the role of formal education and curriculum provision.

The Belau National Museum is a non-profit semi-autonomous agency established in 1955 whose mission statement is as follows:

*In the belief that no song, no performance, no act of creation can be properly understood apart from the culture in which it is found and of which it is a part, it is the purpose of the Belau National Museum as a component of nation building to identify, contextualise, and record Palau's past and present through collection, identification, documentation, preservation, interpretation, education and research, and exhibition of cultural and natural property of the people of Palau.*

(Belau National Museum, 2006, website)

The Docent Students Program at the Belau National Museum is a program involving students from the high school level. High school students take classes at the museum in various aspects of museum work and earn credit towards their graduation.

Maintaining vital, healthy cultures that appeal to young people and help to build their own sense of identity is a priority for the Belau National Museum. The Belau National Museum staff agree with Fiji Museum Director, Ms. Sagale Buadromo, when she says that:

*We must promote our various cultures, as the thing we can all be proud of. Teach them in schools about old knowledge in medicinal herbs and secret practices, which are now*

*only remembered by the elderly. Such knowledge must be taken down and kept for our future, the names of all plants, animals, in the different dialects, to be said and remembered as they are in our poetry, songs and dances. Herein lies a possible key to a better future, in those who are now custodians of our heritage and traditions. Cultural professionals who are given the task of keeping artefacts, photographs, films, and recording oral traditions. People like us who have an immense responsibility to educate our people and community of their identity, their culture and thus exercising a strong influence on their behaviour and in the long run improving the economic prospects of our nation states.* (Buadromo, 2003, 3)

PIMA applauds this program and believes that the provision of heritage studies and vocational training as part of the informal (museum and traditional leader based) as well as formal (school based) education sectors is vital to serve younger Pacific generations. This training arms young people with the cultural confidence and knowledge to respond to the threats of globalisation and cultural absorption from larger, developed countries.

This program is a direct response to the recommendation that '*Cultural institutions must increase their relevance to enhance community participation, for example by involving young people, because they offer opportunities for adapting traditions to new realities.*' (Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2005, 3)

### **Outreach prisoner education program-Fiji Museum**

In the Pacific, societal pressures such as rapid modernisation, urbanisation, the breakdown of traditional village life and the decline of the traditional role of the family to teach community values, have led to a corresponding increase in crime and the subsequent imprisonment of offenders.

The Fiji Museum has been involved in public education for quite a number of years. Their program includes school visits, regular publishing of information in local media and running tours at the museum amongst other activities.

However, in recent years, Education Officers Mr. Tevita Seru and Mrs. Kelera Bulai have also been responsible for taking 'Traditional Arts and Exhibition & Cultural Classes' in various prison institutions around Suva, Fiji's capital city.

They aim to educate prisoners regarding 'customs and culture and things they need to know and understand' and state that:

*We must never forget our heritage, especially in this fast moving world; the young of today may not realise what they are missing out on. It is our duty to teach them all that they need to know regarding our customs and culture, our way of life. We believe that with this knowledge, they can learn to understand other people's culture and also learn to become better citizens of our multi-ethnic country tomorrow. (Seru, 2006, 1)*

The cultural classes are currently being held at Naboro Maximum Security Prison, Suva Prison, Nasinu Training School (Reform Centre) and Suva Women's Prison.

Typically classes are elective, have between 11-15 students and are run for 12 weeks. The curriculum for the above classes includes the following topics:

- The Fijian Society - Understanding what the Clan (Yasuva) is all about
- The Chiefly System (Traditional Fijian Leadership)
- Roles of a Traditional Leader
- Good Manners and Courtesy
- Traditional Relationships
- Traditional Justice
- Traditional Calendars
- Traditional Fishing Methods

At the end of their term students are given test papers to answer, and on completion of the courses are presented with participation

certificates.

These classes came about as the result from an inquiry from a prisoner in 2000 to the museum, who wanted to know about his background and cultural heritage.

The classes help prisoners, who may have grown up in urban areas away from villages or without the traditional extended family influence and inter-generational teachings, to remember and learn to appreciate their own and other people's culture. They learn most importantly about respect, for themselves, other people and for the unique Fijian way of life.

Tevita Seru reported that the class atmosphere, while initially apprehensive, relaxed as the weeks went by and as prisoners began to see their teachers not as guards but as their 'brother or sister' who were committed to helping them learn about the important, moral roles traditionally expected of men and women, fathers and mothers, and husbands and wives in Fijian communities. Students were active participants in class discussion and were interested in the subject matter, and reflected on what the teachings meant for their own lives. The classes were so successful that former prisoners, once released, came back as visitors to the prison to finish their classes, and the prison guards themselves attended classes out of interest.

The classes are seen as an intrinsic part of the prisoners' rehabilitation and are fully supported by the Prison Department who want to see the classes continued. The Fiji Museum Education Department has expressed interest in extending these classes to at-risk youth, to encourage the development of life skills and as a potential tool in crime prevention.

Whilst these useful and humane classes are totally in support of government policy "to rehabilitate and retrain offenders, develop preventative measures and emphasise vocational and skills training for young

persons to enhance their ability to rejoin society as productive members” (Fiji Government, 2005, 51) sadly the Fiji Museum receives no extra funding from the Government, or even official recognition of their efforts in this area of catering to their community. With publicity, and a joint appeal to the Government from both the Museum and the Prisons Department, it is hoped that support for the program will increase.

This example of public outreach from the Fiji Museum is a perfect case study of “modern Pacific museums evolving like any dynamic organisation, to respond to and accommodate the prevailing global, social and economic and political transformations of their society, so as to remain relevant” (Voi, 1998, 3).

#### **Fieldworkers network - Vanuatu Cultural Centre**

The model of a western-style museum is an imported concept in the Pacific. Traditionally, local populations have viewed museums as a colonial exercise, as ‘something for the white man’, and of value only to tourists. Museums exhibited artefacts out of the context of their original culture and were places of dead things - either taxidermy specimens, or relics from forgotten times. Museums have been viewed as alienating, irrelevant and removed from daily, vibrant expressions of culture.

UNESCO's Cultural Advisor for the Pacific, Mali Voi warns that:

*Such an attitude raises a very important concern for museum managers and administrators. The longer the local people regard the museums as foreign institutions, the less grassroots support will have for museums. If the museums are to gain an important place they have always commanded, they need to have grassroots support. It is at this level that living cultures are held and practiced (Voi, 1998, 3).*

The Vanuatu Cultural Centre is Vanuatu's

national cultural heritage management body and is comprised of the major national cultural heritage institutions in Vanuatu: the Museum, Library, Film and Sound Archive the Cultural Historic Sites Register, and Archives.

The majority of the population of Vanuatu lives in the outer islands, and have very little access to the Cultural Centre located in the nation's capital Port Vila. In an approach which seeks to engage grass-roots support and real ownership of cultural preservation, and to document the mainly oral and intangible heritage of Vanuatu, the Cultural Centre has recruited 60 men and 40 women fieldworkers who are each based in their own linguistic and cultural areas from all the islands.

Director Ralph Regenvanu says that “in fact the Cultural Centre in Port Vila is the tip of a hidden pyramid - with most of its activities being conducted in the outer islands of Vanuatu, with living people and cultures” (Regenvanu, February 2006, 4).

The volunteer fieldworkers receive no wages and work within their own communities to document the culture and history of their own and neighbouring areas and to promote the knowledge about cultural heritage. Every year they are given a topic of culture to explore, and engage in a wide variety of projects within their own communities: projects ranging from the recording of oral traditions to the organization of arts festivals, assisting in the revitalization of certain rituals and craft skills and providing resources for vernacular language and culture education in local schools.

Each year in November, the fieldworkers meet at the Cultural Centre and present the findings of their research and activities in the field. Both men and women meet separately for a week each, and discuss their techniques and experiences with fellow field workers, and receive training in the recording and preservation of oral traditions and histories. They also contribute to the creation of

indigenous language dictionaries, the recording of sites of cultural and historic importance, the regulation of traditional copyright and access rules and the promotion and revival of traditional skills and value. The proceedings of the workshops are recorded on audio-visual equipment, and published into books (in the national language of Vanuatu, Bislama) which are then distributed back to the fieldworkers and their communities.

Topics covered in workshops and published to date include:

- Grade-taking and chiefly power (1994 Men's Workshop)
- Death and associated ritual (1995 Men's Workshop)
- Traditional land tenure (1996 Men's Workshop)
- Women's ranking systems (1997 Women's Workshop)
- Traditional medicine and the traditional use of kava (1998 Men's Workshop)
- Traditional respect (1998 Women's Workshop)
- Traditional music, dance and instruments (1999 Men's Workshop)
- Traditional food preparation and preservation (1999 Women's Workshop)

As well as enhancing the role of the Cultural Centre in documenting the intangible heritage of the nation, the fieldworkers also perform an important role in liaising with outside groups for their respective communities, and as such have come to play a part in the outreach and awareness work of other Government departments and non-government organisations. Examples of programs they have assisted in facilitating at the grassroots level to date include eco-tourism projects, development impact assessment studies, family planning and HIV awareness programs and programs attempting to integrate traditional knowledge into natural resource management.

This ongoing project is the only one of its

kind directly concerned with preserving the invaluable cultural heritage of the nation. The fieldworker network of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre is recognised nationally and throughout the region and the world, including by the International Council of Museums (ICOM), as a model of grassroots cultural resource management, and it is continually being enhanced through the skills and experience gained by fieldworkers at the annual workshops.

Through this innovative program and others like it, the Vanuatu Cultural Centre becomes a “vibrant structure for not just housing the material culture of collections of the nation, but an area for living culture such as performance art, craft demonstrations, workshops, educational activities, festivals and a place to congregate as a community” (Bacchiochi, 1999, 2).

### **Peace and unity in carving project - Solomon Islands National Museum**

A joint public museum/private enterprise art project in the Solomon Islands was conducted in July this year. Its aim was to encourage traditional carving practices, beautify the capital town of Honiara. It recognised the restorative powers of culture to act as a uniting and peaceful force and celebrates the resilience of communities. Director of the Solomon Islands National Museum Mr. Lawrence Foana'ota said the message of the project was that “against all odds people can still live together” (Foana'ota, 2006, 2).

Political events in April 2006 saw an unfortunate return of social unrest in Honiara. After a peaceful election earlier in the month and months of calm, residents were hopeful of the continuation of law and order which they had been enjoying.

However over the two days of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> April, rioting, looting and burning took place in town, as people frantically purchased foodstuffs, fearful of a food shortage or

expected price rises. Extra army and police personnel arrived from Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and other Pacific Islands countries to restore law and order.

At the time all this was happening on the 18<sup>th</sup> April, the Director of the National Museum and staff remained in the Museum compound and watched as people rushed to and fro as black smoke rose from burning vehicles in the Parliament building complex.

Later that month, Mr. Foana'ota was approached by the Solomon Islands Tobacco Company Limited based in Honiara, with the idea of organizing a community project that would enable carvers/artists throughout the country to take part in a contemporary sculpture project. Providing collaborative work and learning experience for carvers and also for the Company and the Museum, this is the first time such a project has been organized and financed.

The Company provided the equipment, materials and funds while the National Museum Cultural Village was used as the main venue for the carvers to work from and exhibit the completed sculptures.

Mr. Foana'ota "saw the offer as an opportunity that should not be missed and established a working committee that consisted of staff from the Company, the Museum and the Solomon Islands Artists Association."

In May the committee established its strategic plan for the project, named the project "Peace and Unity in Carving Project" and set the following criteria for selecting artists:

- Carvers should represent each of the nine provinces making up the whole country.
- One expert, experienced carver to work with 2-3 young carvers. An objective is for carvers to demonstrate and pass on their skills to the next generation of carvers.
- Since the sculptures would be of a contemporary nature, carvers do not necessarily have to carve sculptures

representative of any particular province.

The most important issue is that both old and young carvers work together.

- They must produce examples of their previous work to prove that they are capable of completing the work within the time required and to an appropriate high standard.
- The carvers allow members of the general public to view them while working and the completed sculptures are displayed for the general public to admire and enjoy.

Ten large logs were carved and completed within a period of two and half weeks and erected temporarily around the National Museum Cultural Village complex. The exhibition was officially opened by the Honourable Minister of Culture and Tourism on the 6<sup>th</sup> July a day before the country celebrated its 28<sup>th</sup> Independence Anniversary on the 7<sup>th</sup> July.

The project also saw the repair of the thatched roofs and walls of the eight customhouses representing each of the Provinces within the Cultural Village at the National Museum and the carving of relief images around four posts of the existent Museum Shop building.

A significant outcome of the project was preserving, protection, promotion and development of tangible and intangible heritage of the people of Solomon Islands through the sculptures.

International partnerships similarly assist the museum with its aims. As part of the ICOM Australian Museum Partnership Program program, in September 2006 four staff members from the Queensland Museum and the Australian War Memorial Museum travelled to the Solomon Islands National Museum to assist staff to establish a computerized database for the national collection.

The Solomon Islands National Museum faces difficult challenges. Their staff is limited to 7 and they have an annual budget of just

over US\$50,000.00 which covers the daily running of the Museum programs, staff salaries, purchase acquisitions for the national collection, conduct exhibitions and maintain equipment. These conditions are typical of those faced by other museums in small developing Pacific nations.

Despite these constraints, and thanks to the dedication of the museum staff and their innovative domestic and international partnerships, the Solomon Islands National Museum has continued to deliver programs and services to the community over the past decades in order “to ensure the future generations are not deprived of their heritage that they equally have the right to appreciate and be proud of when we are gone” (Foana’ota, 2006, 6).

### **Tongan ancestral remains repatriation program - Bishop Museum, Hawai’i and the National Museum of Tonga**

One of the legacies of the colonial and missionary period of the Pacific Islands is the many Pacific natural and cultural treasures that lie in the vaults of international museums. Gathered by explorers, missionaries, colonial administrators, scientists, museums and travellers during the past two centuries, the result of these acquisitions has undoubtedly led to the preservation of the often organic objects, a fact acknowledged by PIMA.

These days the Pacific Islands manage professional museums, with controlled environmental conditions and trained conservation and collection managers. Pacific communities are eager to re-engage with their material culture from times past and the challenge lies ahead for Pacific peoples to gain access to their cultural and natural property held overseas.

The repatriation of Tongan ancestral remains in May this year from the Bishop Museum in Hawai’i to the Tongan National Museum is an inspiring example of Pacific museums working in regional cooperation

towards this aim.

Ms. Maile Drake, the Tongan cultural collections manager on the staff of the Bishop Museum, helped to facilitate the recent ceremony which returned the remains of 21 Tongan people, collected during the 1920s by W. McKern and MacGregor and held at the Bishop Museum for 85 years. The remains included that of Princess Fatafehi, the daughter of a royal dynasty that ruled Tonga for more than 600 years.

Ms. Betty Lou Kam, Vice President of Cultural Resources at the Bishop Museum explained that in the 1920's the Museum was the center of Pacific study:

*Museum staff were on the Bayard Dominick Expedition with other anthropologists and conducted an excavation with the permission of the Queen and the participation of Tongans to excavate two known but long-abandoned ‘langi’ or chiefly burial sites, believed to be the oldest in Tonga. The anthropologists studied burial sites and food remains in kitchen areas to determine the local diet (Agpar, 2006, 1).*

Along with the Princess, the remains of about 20 other individuals from Tongan burial sites were escorted home by a delegation of high Tongan officials. Each set of remains was carefully wrapped in tapa cloth supplied by women of the Tongan community in Hawai’i.

Ms. Drake said in an interview “I believe, as many Tongans believe, that when people die they live on in spirit, and we connect to them in our own way. This is a great and right thing to do. In the Tongan way, they are still people. They are mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, brothers and sisters - all returning home in dignity” (Agpar, 2006, 1).

The return of these ancestral remains in an act of mutual cooperation between the museums, demonstrates the dignity and respect with which people of the Pacific all honour their forebears and in a statement made on the occasion, Ms. Rehuher praised

the two museums, saying that:

*The dialogue opened between the museums of Hawaii and Tonga promotes mutual respect and understanding and is greatly encouraging. It shows the way for other museums in the region to initiate sensitive discussions with fellow Pacific museums, but also larger international museums about the return of ancestral remains and cultural property. If we can show international museums that here in the Pacific repatriation can and is being done, then we are leading by example. PIMA hopes that other museums in the region will follow your lead* (Rehuher, 2006, 1).

In February this year, PIMA completed writing a *Code of Ethics for Pacific Islands Museums and Cultural Centres*. One of the 'Guiding Principles' of this document is that our members "support the reconnection of ex-situ natural and cultural resources located domestically or internationally with their originator or creator communities" (PIMA, 2006, 1).

This project, between two current member museums of PIMA, upholds that Principle. The repatriation also demonstrates global best practice as promoted in the International Council of Museums Code of Ethics which openly states that museums have a duty to exercise respect for the feelings of human dignity held by all peoples, and "be prepared to initiate dialogues for the return of cultural property to a county or people of origin" (ICOM, 2006, 9).

### **Conclusion**

These case studies demonstrate the incredible resourcefulness, creativity, and initiative which can be found amongst the staff of Pacific Islands museums and cultural centres. Cultural professionals understand, are engaged with, and are responding to the needs of their communities who are navigating their futures through the turbulent waves of development.

Typically, the Pacific islands museums and cultural centres and their staff are:

- rich in living culture
  - full of ideas and innovations, and
  - passionate about their communities
- However, they are also constrained by:
- scarcity of financial and skilled human resources
  - lack of political support, and are
  - often housed in inappropriate buildings which pose a danger to the collections and even staff themselves.

PIMA does its best to service its member museums and cultural centres in their endeavours and is currently involved in training, fundraising and advocacy projects which attempt to address the issues mentioned above. However PIMA is a membership organisation, has no annual funding or grant to conduct its work and is very under-resourced. PIMA seeks financial and in-kind support, and hopes to develop new international partnerships to carry out the important work of heritage preservation in the Pacific.

A recent review by the Cultural Affairs Programme of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community has commented that: "PIMA remains as highly relevant to the needs of the museums sector in the Pacific as it was when it was conceived in 1994. PIMA enjoys continued support and a strong sense of ownership and trust from its members and stakeholders" (Griffiths, Galloway & Gouty, 1994, 2).

Numerous organisations including international museums, cultural agencies such as UNESCO, ICOM, ICCROM, ICOMOS and the World Heritage Centre, and universities and training centres within the Pacific and overseas have found PIMA a suitable partner in the field of heritage management. These organisations have been persuaded that "the competencies within the association will successfully achieve their objectives and they are anxious

to respect the choices of PIMA in regards to cultural and natural heritage development. They are convinced that from this collective regional voice, PIMA will continue to create

and evolve the new concept of museum with the communities input, which will stand as examples for many museums globally” (Bacchiochi, 1999, 6).

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Mr Ralph Regenvanu, Director Vanuatu National Cultural Council (PIMA Executive Board Member)

Ms Faustina K. Rehuher, Director Belau National Museum (Chair, PIMA Executive Board)

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Mr Mali Voi, Sub-regional Advisor for Culture, UNESCO Office for the Pacific (Trustee of PIMA)

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#### About the author

Ms. Meredith Blake BA (Hons) Grad Dip (Mus Stud) has worked as the Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Museums Association (PIMA) since September 2005. She holds this position as a Volunteer for International Development from Australia, a volunteer program managed by AusAID. In May 2006 she oversaw the relocation of PIMA's Secretariat from its office in the Fiji Museum in Suva to its present home at the Vanuatu Cultural Centre in Port Vila.

Ms. Blake holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Anthropology and History from the University of Melbourne and a Graduate Diploma in Museum Studies from Deakin University. She is currently working towards a Masters Degree in Cultural Heritage also at Deakin University.

Previously she was Assistant Curator of the Art and Heritage Collection at the City of Port Phillip in Melbourne and Administration Officer for the professional association Museums Australia (Victoria). From 1999-2000 she worked in the Emergency Management Policy Unit at the Victorian Department of Justice. She has worked in a voluntary capacity with The National Trust of Australia (Victoria), the Jewish Museum of Australia and Museum Victoria.

Ms. Blake is a member of the Australian National Committee of ICOM and in 2005 joined the working group which established the Australian National Committee of the International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS) for the protection of cultural property in the event of disasters and armed conflict.