

## Pacific Islands Management Model as Practiced at ASPA

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In cooperation with the Department of Interior, the Asian Development Bank, the Republic of the Marshall Islands government on Ebeye , ASPA has fashioned a paradigm for the development of infrastructure in the less developed Pacific islands including American Samoa. This we call the **Pacific Islands Management Model** or **PIMM**.

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The successful economic models applicable to large populations were not necessarily successful in the islands. On Ebeye, government intervention was not the answer. Privatization didn't work either. Private companies contracted to operate island utilities necessarily focused on profit, which was understandable. They also gave up too easily and did not train local employees. On the other hand, the Pacific Islands Management Model defers to the **Mission**, which is determined by the key stakeholders—the governments, communities and aid donors.

PIMM is a hybrid of the two approaches, of government and private sector:

- a. Follow commercial principles and practices (e.g., sound management, auditable financial statements).
- b. Strive to meet government social responsibilities (e.g. to meet the needs of the neglected remote-island citizens).

Institutional strengthening is important for the same reasons that long term planning is important. Critical short and medium-term needs of the operations however, must take precedent over IS. For example a water utility should not be investing its valuable resources preparing glossy customer-service brochures when its water treatment plants are inoperable. The water treatment plants must be fixed first.

We face a budgeting challenge created by three areas within the utility: quality control of water; requirements of Section 106 (Archaeology) and ICT (Information & Communications Technology). Quality control is a public health issue necessary for the protection of health of consumers. The archaeological requirements are sapping capital previously set aside for extending the infrastructure. The jury is still out on ICT, whether the benefits of the ease of communication exceed the costs of resources allocated to it.

**2** Community involvement means to live in the community and to empathize with its needs. The community must be an integral part of the organization's mission. Lead by example—if litter abounds, promote a community clean-up program. Raise the standards of the community by example, not by promoting “us” versus “them” neighborhood enclaves. In the 50's the squalor of the workers' camp on Kwajalein was an affront to the middle-class sensibilities of the Americans working on Kwajalein; so the workers' were relocated to Ebeye, out of sight out of mind. On Ebeye the squalor continued. The **Pacific Island Management Model** fixes the infrastructure and, in the process, attempts to bring everyone up to an acceptable standard of living.

The limited resources in the islands mean that “those who can help, do”. The connection between public health and sanitary engineering is obvious. Therefore, you would expect a close cooperation between water, waste water & solid waste services and the department of health. Even the utility wellness program can be extended to helping, for example, the diabetes program through sponsoring pickathons.

**3** Funding sources—national government and aid donors—are eager to work with entities that can complete assignments, commission capital works and institutionalize improvements. Studies have shown that the most successful aid programs from rich countries to the developing world are those that are awarded to countries actively involved in policy reforms including the reduction of corruption. There is no reason why a similar approach on a much smaller scale cannot work between the United States and its flag territories.

Too many capital works built in the islands fall apart for lack of maintenance; much of these improvements were funded by the Department of Interior and USEPA through its role as steward to the Territories. The solutions to improved maintenance are ever evolving. ASPA believes that PIMM is the best model so far for improved facilities maintenance. PIMM incorporates the incremental successes (and learned from the failures) over the years of managing a multi-service utility in the least developed of the US Territories.

One of those successes was introduced by the USDOJ. The US Department of Interior provides a useful aid model in its **Capital Improvement Program (CIP)** and **Operations & Maintenance Improvement Program (OMIP)**. One of the reasons it works is that matching is required. Five percent of CIP is set aside with 5% matching from the recipient to be used for maintenance. Incorporated in the PIMM is training in Preventive Maintenance. OMIP is aid specifically targeted for operations and maintenance improvements—the recipient matches the aid dollar for dollar.

**4** The islands and populations are small and geographically remote. The means of economic production are limited. A small labor pool means there is a limited work force from which to choose managers, administrators, teachers, health professionals,

engineers, accountants, writers, economists, technicians, computer specialists, trades workers and so forth.

Continuing to import expatriate labor (from first world countries) is not a viable medium or long-term solution for building the knowledge capacity of the community.

The solution is to expand the “island” entity to include the “island region.” We need to locate skilled workers from other islands in the region and share human resources. Skilled workers need to be retained in the region rather than allowing the region to suffer from a brain drain. This can be accomplished by:

- Paying them well
- Hiring those who possess marketable skills and come fired with an uncommon **missionary zeal**.
- Educating and training promising young islanders.
- Creating a work environment that is attractive to them.
- Sending them on field assignments to other islands of the Pacific and engaging them in “real” work.

**Integrated training** in the Pacific Island Management Model can be described as the controlled shotgun approach to employee training and education.

- Training must include technical as well as supervisory skills.
- It must be repetitive and follow-up must be continual.
- Invest up to 15% of payroll on training and education (where tenured employees are encouraged to complete college degrees at company expense).
- Employees engaged in lengthy training & education coursework need to sign non-compete contracts.
- Use the services of small “mom & pop” consultancies where the consultants adjust to our needs rather than the other way around.

The highlights of training in PIMM are Buddy System; Lineman Training; Micronesian Water Training; and Training Within Industry.

We consider **apprenticeship** training separately because of its singular importance to the organization, institutional strengthening and the community. Only through apprenticeship training can the necessary depth of technical skills be obtained within a reasonable period of time. We follow:

- a. The German model for training technicians that requires the apprentice to sandwich hands-on work experience between classroom and laboratory work.
- b. The Singapore planning model which poses the following questions:
  - What do we need more today, graduate engineers or technicians?
  - How many of each and when should they be employed?

We reiterate that the Pacific Islands Management Model is a calling for employees imbued with missionary fervor. Those who know what it is like to be without, make for ideal recruits in the PIMM.

Such individuals are those who can sincerely say of the less fortunate, “There but for the grace of God go I”.