

**PACIFIC ASSEMBLY AND IUCN SHARING POWER CONFERENCE
IN WHAKATANE, BAY OF PLENTY, AOTEAROA-NEW ZEALAND**

10-15 JANUARY 2011

Pacific Summer Assembly

Holding the January 2011 Pacific Assembly with the Sharing Power summer conference, hosted by the Ngati Awa tribe, brought the benefit of strong voices from Aotearoa and the ability to draw on Pacific and international ways to address economic, environmental and social issues in a climate for transformation. Pinky Cupino (Philippines) said 'it paid off'!

We had a pre-Assembly before the conference for the group which was supported through the FPH Assembly programme. These were people from Aotearoa, France, Samoa, Vanuatu, Philippines, Fiji, Australia, with a youth contingent and people from a whole range of social and professional fields. Unfortunately the Papua New Guinea representative had to withdraw.

Having Edith and Pinky was fantastic – allowing people in our Pacific network to meet the people we speak so enthusiastically about and to hear from them directly. Edith's talks to our group and to the wider conference brought a fresh explanation of the international initiatives on responsibility and ethics with her particularly engaging style of story telling brought insight and encouragement to our Aotearoa and Pacific network.



Young people gathering

Focus for Discussions

Holistic social and economic systems emerged as key platforms for navigating towards respectful and just relationships with people and planet. At the conference, an ethics of responsibility was often raised as framework to support the growing awareness of our love for earth and her bountiful provision for life. Responsibility was understood as a responsive and relational way to guide collective decision-making for the future. An ethics of

responsibility provides a form of public and citizen accountability for the use and management of human and environmental resources.

The holistic approach can be summed up in a phrase given by Winona La Duke (Ojibwe, USA) 'Don't talk to me of your philosophy unless you can grow corn' .



Winona LaDuke speaking to assembly

This encapsulates a key message shared by indigenous peoples world wide. Swedish Nobel prize winner Ellen Ostram added her weight to the concensus that sustainability is most robust where communities are directly engaged in managing their lands, fresh water, oceans, resources and food supplies. The huge variations in geography and ecologies mean that local enterprise has to be highly responsive to local conditions and built to the scale of local resources and social capacity. Food sovereignty in local communities and the production of energy according to local scales need to be strong dimensions of community sustenance.

Ellen Ostram's scientific account of strong sustainability achieved by local communities making desicions and managing their lands and waters and environmental resources add to the evidence of indigenous peoples that governance and management of their own lands and resources has the best long term environmental, economic and social outcomes. In both cases face-to-face relations between people and with the living world create recognition of interdependence. A distinctive point for indigenous peoples in this relational world view is the geneological relationship with earth and all living things.

Power with people and nature

With a conference theme of sharing power, the quintessence of this is treating others with respect and exercizing power responsibly. One of the young people said

We had all been talking about how we as people, we as individuals have power, no one had yet talked about power being external too, being in something other than humans, in nature. A learning from an Aboriginal elder that was shared was that every thing has power. Water has power, when we drink it, it becomes a part of us. The food that we eat has power and

when we eat it, it also becomes a part of us. In saying that what we put out contains our power also. Every time we say something aloud it contains a part of our power. Every action we take contains a part of our power.

I found this very insightful as it reconnects us to our environment, to nature. It is saying we as humans don't hold power over nature just as we don't hold power over each other. I thought this a great concept for the entire conference. It makes sense that those who are better connected to the land, those who understand the land's power are better suited to looking after it. It makes sense that each of us have power and that we all have to work together and *share our power* to make a greater difference. It also coincides beautifully with the idea of responsibility. Every one of our actions, every word we speak contains a part of our power. We are responsible for the effects it has. We are responsible in ensuring it is a good one.

Responsibility for moving towards economies of interdependence was proposed as a reference for guiding decisions when faced with dilemmas – both at a micro-scale – in families, parishes, social services and at macro-scales in communities, regions, nations and at the level of global corporates, treaties, UN Declarations, environmental protocols and climate change agreements. It was generally agreed that responsibility is not the same for everyone – it is proportionate to the exercise of power and influence.

Plenary sessions gave the opportunity to highlight the main themes and panels gave time for participants to share their knowledge and experience.

Inspiring and re-energizing learning, insights from the assembly

It was wonderful to listen to Edith Sizoo from the FPH Foundation in France speak about the mission and vision statements and the Ethics and Responsibility projects, in particular the gatherings of people in five different regions of the world, to meet and exchange ideas, practices for new models of governance, economic management and alternatives to 'development' to create a paradigmatic institutional change through systems and institutions that reflect mankind's interdependence with Mother Earth.

The idea of Sharing Power as a new vision for development was a focus to counteract the mis-use of power in managing environmental resources. The planet can't sustain the current development model so it was a timely to have in-depth citizen discussions with people with experience in many professional fields and from local practitioners. The young people in our group were inspired by being able to mix with so many people wanting to discuss these issues and to make change.

The conference was attended with over 200 participants and so many interesting presentations. The key note speakers gave powerful speeches: we heard from Sir Taihakurei Durie, who has visited the FPH and is involved in progressing the UN Declaration on Responsibility, and Professor Sir Sidney Mead of New Zealand; Winona LaDuke, Ojibwe First Nation, USA; and Ashok Khosla, President of IUCN, of India. The key note speakers had powerful messages of power sharing and sustainable development and the care for the

Mother Earth. During the 6 days we were together we were able to mingle and hold discussions both in sessions and over the marvellous meals.

Local hospitality

The generosity of Ngati Awa included magnificent facilitation and organization and providing food from the land and sea in abundance at the feasts, or hakari accompanying powhiri (welcome ceremonies) and during the conference – and even extended to oyster tarts with morning coffee. Field trips to neighbouring iwi – Ngati Tuwharetoa, Te Arawa, Tuhoe as well as to Ngati Awa Whale Island were accompanied with introductions to current challenges, agreements for co-management through Treaty settlements and the offer to drink from the deep springs of local knowledge and vision.

Challenges ahead

The message of the environmental and social benefits of local economies based on stewardship was argued for and affirmed. The political implications of this counter-balance to large scale corporate industrialized resource exploitation is that governments can either facilitate local economic development, or stand in the way. The challenge that continues is to bring social and environmental responsibility to multinationals, corporates, finance institutions and nations at a global scale.

The main purpose of this incredible gathering in Aotearoa-NZ was to bring indigenous approaches to sustainability to environmental and conservation policy internationally and to make progress towards bringing economic and social policy into harmony with the regenerating capacity of ecosystems and use of environmental resources.

Much more can be drawn from this extra-ordinary gathering with its invitation to share power and take up citizen responsibility - a way forward which the Pacific assembly was energized to continue. Next steps are being discussed and will emerge more clearly as our assembly participants let us know their comments, insights and plans.

Nga mihi nui ki Ngati Awa, kia ora mo o manaaki ki a matou.

Betsan, Te Kawehau, Maria and Victor