

Abstract

This paper demonstrates the importance of indigenous social dynamics to the operation of a planned development organization. It describes the case of a Polynesian self-help organization that successfully redistributed income to rural women through planned income-generating projects; the organization collapsed when, after seven successful years, overseas funding and supervisory support were withdrawn.

The analysis, using an anthropological approach to evaluate the success and failure of the development organization, argues that its success emerged, not from planned income-generating activities, but from long-term socioeconomic processes in village life that allowed women to parlay their traditional prestige into control of a development fund. The analysis demonstrates how, over time, these same socioeconomic processes structured an increasingly divisive organizational atmosphere along with diminishing financial returns which culminated in institutional collapse. The paper ultimately questions the extent to which the development enterprise, with its limited ability to affect deeper indigenous economic and social processes, can hope to institute or alter a course of social change.

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From the Ground Up: An Anthropological Version of a Women's Development Movement in Polynesia

by

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FROM THE GROUND UP: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL VERSION
OF A WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT MOVEMENT IN POLYNESIA

Most analyses of women's "self-help" development programs consist of short-term case studies of project failures, for the good reason that the majority of aid recipients in women and development schemes have been small women's groups which do not survive more than two years. Analyses have tended to focus on the immediate impediments to and problems with development plans, and have proceeded with the assumption that removing these impediments and problems will result in successful development. This paper presents the results of a long-term study of an active and successful aid-funded women's self-help organization administered by a sensitive bureaucracy. Its purpose is to consider the course of a development institution under favorable conditions, and thereby illuminate the underlying factors which determine development successes and failures.

The basic research for the paper was conducted between 1981 and 1984 and again in 1987 in the Kingdom of Tonga, South Pacific, where a national network of rural women's groups--called the fakalalakala, or "moving forward" groups--had been generating income for village and home improvement since 1978. Although village-to-village study of the "moving forward organization" was conducted, the mainstay of research consisted of intensive participant-observation study of groups in a single village.

By any measure, the moving forward organization (MFO) was an unqualified success. Within its first two years, moving forward (MF) groups were established in thirty-one villages on Tonga's main island, and the Foundation for Peoples of the South Pacific (FSP) estimated that the organization was realizing well over a 1000 percent return on every aid dollar. The tangible results of group activities during this time period included the building of 623 toilets, 336 dwelling houses, 390 kitchens, 157 water tanks, 497 fences, 261 pig pens, and 1819 vegetable gardens (Wylar 1981; Tonga FSP Office Report 1980)--accomplishments that have multiplied proportionally with the increase in membership and groups. The MFO quickly spread from Tonga's main island to its numerous outer islands, by 1984 reporting a membership of 400 groups in 97 villages and a return of more than \$57,500 from grant funds totalling \$5883.86 (Sexton 1985:8, 26). These figures are nothing short of incredible, given that Tonga has a total of some 150 villages and an official annual per capita income of less than T\$500 (T\$1 = US\$1).

Under pressure of budget cuts, funding for the organization on the main island was withdrawn in 1985, with the expectation that the MFO would continue operating on a self-sufficient basis. In 1987, however, the main island organization already showed signs of general collapse--declining membership, irregular meetings, and severe curtailing of income-generating and building activities.

This paper will neither provide a formula for the "successful development group" nor a critique of development planning decisions. The aim of the paper is to show how, once a development institution has been integrated into village life, it is then subject to the same economic and historical forces which shape all other social institutions. Indeed, the successes and failures

of the development institution will have less to do with the goals, structures, and policies of development planners than with the fundamental conditions affecting the choices and relationships of village women and, hence, the shape that any village institution will take.

This article will show that, although the MFO was initially constructed on a profit-making, self-help model, it became an institution of another order--one which converted traditional prestige and kinship obligations into a development fund and thereby redistributed village wealth into the hands of women. As the reader will see, the ability of the women's organization to do this underlay its success and the special nature of its construction. This ability, however, was based not on development planning nor structure, but on the deeper social and economic conditions which fostered this conversion and redistribution process, themselves the product of a long history. The same conditions which allowed women to draw and escrow resources for development, also over time, came to increase the investment necessary for women's participation and, ultimately, to divide and fragment the membership. This created an institution of diminishing returns and increased infighting--eventualities which explain, better than changes in administrative policy, the ultimate decline of MFO participation and accomplishment.

The article will first describe the basic operation of MF groups in the village of "Mu'a", and will provide an overview of the historical changes that have shaped the contemporary socioeconomic context in which these groups exist. Then the bases for the successes and the failures of the moving forward organization will be analyzed.

A Portrait of Moving Forward in the Village

Officially, the roots of the MFO trace to 1974 when a group of seven Tongan Roman Catholic sisters, who had been excused from their teaching duties, began The Tonga Village Women's Development Program (Sexton 1985:379). In the village of Mu'a, these first groups, begun by a resident Tongan nun, were organized as The Education for Religious Life Program, having a Catholic membership and a domestic focus on improving household nutrition, hygiene, and living standards. Such groups throughout the main island of Tongatapu became known as moving forward organization after 1978, when the FSP became involved in monitoring and supporting the nuns' activities with U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) grant funds. The new name reflected the organization's shift in status to a bonafide, fundable, development institution, based on the characteristics of the self-help model: non-sectarian, democratic, income-generating, and self-sufficient.

When I came to the village of Mu'a in mid-1981, the MF movement was well in place on the main island of Tongatapu. There were nine active MF groups in Mu'a, with a total of sixty-six women. This represented approximately half of those households with a "potential" MF woman, that is, a married woman of sufficient maturity that the time-consuming demands of child-rearing are either over or have devolved on older children.

At the beginning of each year, all nine MF groups in the village met together as a joint body to elect a slate of officers and to decide on their annual goals. Although individual groups could take on additional projects of

their choosing, usually the nine groups focused their efforts on the same goal--cement rain catchment tanks, bamboo kitchens with raised eating tables, new and more sanitary toilets, and so on. Each group proceeded with its plans by electing a chairwoman and treasurer, and by devising their own strategies and income-raising activities for the year, but every Sunday the nine groups met as one large group to discuss their problems and progress. In Mu'a, group meetings were originally presided over by the resident Tongan nun, who supervised District MF activities, but, in keeping with "self-help" tenets, leadership was later officially handed over to a duly elected chair.

The MF groups accomplish their goals ostensibly by means of cash earnings from their various income-raising activities. MF women in Mu'a have the advantage of controlling a Women's Hall built with USAID money and local labor. The Women's Hall is used as the staging area for MF income-raising schemes. Each week, one of the MF groups, in turn, controls the Women's Hall. During their week, the group stages various events to earn money--dances, movies, feasts, fund-raisers, and kava-drinking evenings, where the women prepare the mildly narcotic traditional drink for sale to circles of male drinkers. In each year, the earnings from a group's rotating control of the hall are used to buy the lumber, cement, nails, and other materials to accomplish group goals. The MFO also rents this hall for community and individual functions and receives additional income through these rental receipts.

Within and among themselves, MF groups in Mu'a have worked out a number of innovative arrangements for cooperation and mutual aid which have become characteristic of the moving forward organization as a whole. One group worked out a rotating system of labor and cash use. Each year, the group devoted its total earnings and group labor to the construction of water tanks for a portion of its group--the number of tanks being dependent on how many could be funded that year from group receipts. After three years of ongoing cooperation, this group completed tanks for all its members. Other groups have taken out group loans to provide supplementary funding for their activities.

In 1981, the Mu'a MFO voted in a new arrangement among village groups that operates as a sort of rotating credit association. Every week, each group contributed \$T10. to a central fund. The total fund of \$T90. was given as a "gift" to the one group who was controlling the women's hall during the week. The system was designed to ensure that, at the end of every year, every group would have a minimal base fund with which to work.

Cooperation among groups is not limited to groups of the same village, or even of the same island. Mu'a's MF groups maintain cooperative relations with a handful of villages on the eastern side of the island, and often support MF events in those villages by sending a busload of paying attendees. In turn, when Mu'a groups hold an event, an invitation will be made to the cooperating village to attend.

Inter-island mutual aid is evident as well. In 1982, when an outer-island MF group wanted to build rain catchment tanks on their home island, they appealed to their counterpart groups on the main island. The outer-island women sailed to Mu'a, where local groups staged a fund raising evening attended by hundreds of women and their kin. Funds were raised as each Mu'a

group danced, and friends, kin, and well-wishers placed Tongan bills on the bodies of the dancers. At the end of this one evening, the outer-island group was able to return home with T\$1100--this in a country where the daily wage was T\$2-3.

The accomplishment of MF goals is timed around what is called "inspections." Inspections, with a long history in Tonga,² today serve as devices for the public display of group accomplishment. During an inspection, an invited team of inspectors--typically composed of important figures in the community, the government, the church, and the MFO--formally views the achievements of women's groups. The inspectors are invited by moving forward women--often by written invitation--to walk from house to house and view the year's achievements. There is usually a formal roster of events, sometimes presented as a printed program for distribution to the inspectors, which includes opening and closing prayers, the house by house inspection rounds, celebratory feasting following the inspections, and formal speeches, where officials praise the energies of participating women and their husbands and families.

Inspection times are preceded by a flurry of activity. Group earnings accumulated throughout the year are typically divided in December. Building materials are purchased and husbands, children, and relatives are enlisted for construction tasks. Where funds fall short, group loans or family resources are used to supplement group earnings. The end result is a visible change in the village: free-standing bamboo kitchens, sealed water tanks, renovated toilets, and new fencing.

The accomplishments and activities of the MF movement, however, have come to extend beyond individual household improvements. In 1981, Mu'a women built a small store, with a refrigerated unit, in the Women's Hall. Known as the "Canteen," the store sells dry goods, snacks, and other refreshments most hours of the day and night. Tongans place a premium value on education, and this prompted MF women to begin the village's first pre-school program--a staffed kindergarten operating three days per week in the Women's Hall. The organization voted to open the "kindy" to both member and non-member families. And, in the name of family nutrition, MF women even entered into the agricultural domain of men. After a hurricane severely damaged Tongan crops in 1982, MF women organized a replanting scheme in which manioc, a resilient and fast-growing food crop, could be grown by all members.

MF members decided in 1982 that the local organization should visit sick members and voted to send T\$5 additionally to the ailing member's home as a token of support and solidarity--a policy later extended to births by members. Mu'a women subsequently voted that the MFO should be publicly represented at the funeral of a member's mother, father, husband or child and a gift of T\$10 should be made to the grieving member to help with funeral expenses.

One must conclude that the MFO in Mu'a has been not only successful but also remarkable as a development institution. While members presumably join for the personal benefit they will derive, the membership has managed to maintain a strong ethic of cooperation which has resulted in increasing networks of reciprocity and mutual aid. And while moving forward participation has made substantial changes in the material lives of member families, it has

also contributed to the life of the village and enjoys a place of community prestige and support.

The Background of Social Change

The moving forward organization seems a sterling example of how small group entrepreneurship can be instituted for local development and, by its profit-generating success, attract an ever-increasing number of participants and a place of community importance. In fact, though, the performance of the moving forward organization in drawing members, in generating community support, and in making development improvements is based on a whole different kind of economic and social foundation, as the details of its economic operation will attest.

To understand "moving forward," one must first know something about Tongan social structure and the last hundred years of Tonga's social history. Pre-contact Tonga was based on a complicated redistributive economic and political system defined by overlapping sub-systems of social hierarchy. The most obvious of these was societal "rank," which divided the population into the major categories of "chief" and "commoner" (Kaeppler 1971:179) and vested the chiefly class with spiritual, military, and economic control over Tongan commoners--fishers and farmers resident on chiefly land. The chiefly class was itself stratified into higher and lower chiefs based on their ability to trace a genealogical closeness to ancestral titled high chiefs.

A Tongan kinship system cross-cut rank strata. Both for chiefs and commoners, one's kin group, reckoned bilaterally, defined a person's universe of economic and social cooperation. However, like the system of rank, the kin group was also constructed hierarchically, with individuals "higher" and "lower" relative to each other, and these relative kinship positions implied a set of social and economic prerogatives.

Women have had a special place in Tongan kinship hierarchies, anchored by the important kinship principle that defines "sister" as socially higher than "brother." Thus, for instance, the highest ranking chief in Tonga--the Tu'i Tonga--was the supreme political leader and title-holder, yet his eldest sister was a figure of higher social prestige (Kaeppler 1971:183). In Tongan life, the "prestige" of the high chief's sister, just as the prestige of sisters in all strata, had enormous ramifications which affected social, economic, and even political power.

Within the family, while sons were the primary inheritors of land and property, daughters' superior "prestige" was the basis for their brothers' obligations of ongoing economic support. Brothers, and often brothers' wives, were obligated to their sisters' needs for labor, produce and other economic support throughout their lifetimes. These sibling obligations outweighed a man's obligation to his own household. By virtue of extended kinship principles, a man, and his children and their children, were also inferior in status to the children of his sister (Gifford 1929:22). In practice, a sister's child could legitimately appropriate any and all property of his/her mother's brother (Kaeppler 1971:177). Conversely, a father's sister had many rights over her brother's children including the right to determine their marriage partners, to veto their decisions, to receive and control ceremonial

wealth associated with the marriage, funeral, or birth of their children, and even to adopt their children (Rogers 1977; Gailey 1987:60).

The rights and status of sister and sister's line over brother and brother's line have been important, not only to the privileges women enjoyed, but to the political fortunes of different kin groups and lines. Tongan history is replete with examples where exerting woman's superior kinship status, as well as that of her children, has served to reinforce her descendants' claims to title or power or to eclipse the power of a "brother" line (Gailey 1987:63ff; Kaeppler 1978:178-9). Because of these often complex social dynamics, not only women but all Tongans have had a real investment in the status of women.

The power behind kinship hierarchies and obligations, including those which support the position of women, has always been bolstered by the system of rank, because through kinship hierarchies people of rank could manipulate their political status, and through these same hierarchies chiefs could assert their power over commoners. The bilateral kin group, and the hierarchies contained therein, was the vehicle through which chiefs appropriated the produce and labor of commoners and, subsequently, functioned as the avenue whereby land, wealth, and privilege were redistributed by chiefs to those "high" in the kinship unit to further redistribute to those below. In practice, kinship supported rank with labor, produce, and mobility, while rank reinforced kinship hierarchies through redistributed wealth, chiefly favor, and sanction.

Modern Tonga represents the current status of a long-term process in which this kin and rank-based redistributive system has moved toward a more equalized, individualized, and "commodity-based" form of production, family, and village. Over the last century, the major thrust of social change has been the declining chiefly involvement in commoner affairs, greater personal and economic freedoms for commoners, and also the decreasing importance of kinship hierarchies and constraints that had been reinforced by rank. The pre-contact Tongan system has given way to a more individualized, productive form of small-holder commoner farming that operates within an active but narrower and less obligatory set of kinship obligations and constraints.

These changes have had differential effects on the status of men and women. Because of the systemic connections between kinship and rank and the primacy of women in Tongan kinship, the waning powers of rank have weakened women's leverage as a class. Women's collective position has suffered as a result of the fact that kinship obligations to superiors are less strict, that the group to which those obligations obtain is smaller, and that the economic ramifications of status are fewer. Thus, for instance, sisters can less easily assert their superior status over brothers for economic gain, and the kinship leverage which women do maintain now applies to a shrinking kin network, leaving women with a diminished base of material support.

While women's position has been undercut by the changes of the last century, it has not been totally compromised. This is because the process of social change in Tonga has not resulted in the wholesale replacement of older Tongan values and productive forms with Western ones. Rather, as the economy has become more individualized, market-oriented, and cash-based, all Tongans have attempted to use their traditional position in rank and kinship to commandeer new economic privileges and new forms of wealth. Women--like

everyone with kinship or rank clout--have responded to the declining power of their kinship status by attempting to convert traditional prerogatives into their control in the modern sphere. At the same time, those whose fortunes have been favored by modern education and economic opportunity attempt to use their position in the modern realm to manipulate and control kinship relationships (Marcus 1978).

The reasons for these contemporary dynamics relate directly to the current state of the Tongan economy, which both reflects and depends on the opportunities of the market and economy, and on the labor, land, and resources of kinsmen. Modern aspirations, such as a village store or successful farm, are not easily secured without the support of kin, while kinship obligations, such as the provision of Tonga's elaborate funeral feasts, can no longer be satisfactorily fulfilled without the use of cash resources. Even the national economy depends both on capitalism and kinship. It is now kept afloat by a pattern of overseas migration for wage labor jobs which returns remittance dollars to resident Tongan kinsmen. And while land--the basis of Tonga's domestic and export economy--is in short supply, leaving almost 60 percent of Mu'ans landless, it remains the case that, through their kinship relationships, more than 90 percent of Mu'an households have regular access to land and/or agricultural produce (Small 1987:243-4).

In short, the alternative paths to Tongan mobility are interdependent and uncertain, making it difficult to proceed in any sphere, modern or traditional, without attending to both. The result of this is the contemporary dynamics of the day--dynamics which reproduce both "kinship" and "commodity relations," and in which Tongans generally attempt to convert control of one sphere into power over the other.

The balance of "cash and kin," however, is a precarious one because the conditions for its reproduction are in flux. Kinship has long served to mitigate the effects of the privatization and commoditization of production occurring in Tonga, as well as the social class structure which normally accompanies these economic changes. Nevertheless, wealth differences have begun to appear among commoners in the Tongan village and these differences now affect individual lifestyles and attitudes (Small 1984)--a sign of the growing importance of private wealth and the market economy in rural Tonga.

The dynamics of change throughout twentieth century Tonga have been embodied in its social institutions. A good example of this is the precursor of "moving forward" groups, kautaha--women's groups for the cooperative production of bark cloth. Bark cloth is the most important form of traditional wealth in Tonga and is exchanged at all important life occasions to assert and cement kin relations. Earlier in the century, these important property-owning groups were kin-based institutions in which leaders were noble women, membership was elitist, and member's extraction of group labor and the group product depended on kinship and rank status. In processes detailed elsewhere (Small 1987), these institutions gradually shifted in organization as kinship obligations weakened and land tenure individualized.

In post-World War II Tonga, these groups are characterized by the absence of noble women in leadership, the strictly equal distribution of labor and group product, and a membership open to all who are able to procure raw bark for manufacture. The traditional organization has become "modern" in structure, as well as commoditized in its production. Eighty percent of

Tonga's women now buy raw bark to supplement their supplies as a function of land shortage, and many women now sell tapa cloth to other Tongans--a market created by the fact that the buyers of tapa cloth, who are a creation of commoditization and wealth differences, are nevertheless using their cash to fulfill kinship obligations.

The traditional wealth institution, thus, has come to contain the social changes and social dynamics of the day. Traditional cloth manufacture, while still the major productive activity of Tongan women, is now carried out within an institution of "modern," commodity-based character. And although the bulk of tapa manufacture remains devoted to kin obligations, women are converting an increasing portion of their traditional wealth production into cash wealth through the sale of these cloths. It is an institution, which like all others, in modern Tonga depends on and perpetuates both commodity and kinship relations; even a "traditional" institution will be progressively refashioned over time to reflect this.

The dynamics which have shaped the current form of the indigenous, unplanned, traditional wealth organization have been no less influential in the planned and funded development organization. The modern development institution, just like the traditional wealth institution, has been pulled into the orbit of a system which reproduces the contemporary relationship of "cash" and "kin" principles. Despite its planned basis in entrepreneurial activity, MFO economics have come to be based on the escrow and accumulation of resources through relationships of kinship and prestige--relationships, themselves whose basis and character are in flux. The next section details why and how these conditions have created the MFO to be a zero profit institution, but one which, nevertheless, converts traditional obligations and status into a women-controlled development fund.

The Economic Foundations of "Moving Forward"

In 1981, I joined a MF group in the village of Mu'a and regularly attended group meetings and work sessions, joint group sessions, inspections, and income-raising events, remaining a member until 1984. With the kind indulgence of member women, I was able to audit all nine MF groups for a full year. My task involved counting up all the chickens, pigs, and kava roots donated by members for moving forward feasts and events, and totaling the various cash outlays made by members throughout the year.³

Yet even when I excluded labor time from the calculations, the audits of MF groups showed that, after a full year's work, the nine groups together had essentially made no money at all. As Table 1 indicates, four groups showed a minimal profit, an average of T\$8.56 per woman for the year, while five of the nine groups lost money, costing each member from 35 cents to 21 dollars for the year. As a whole, the finances of the MF groups can be summarized by saying that members almost broke even.

Despite the fact that each group had accumulated a cash fund to distribute for building and development purposes (see Table 1, column 1), the fund actually amounted to no more than the outlays made by members and member families through their various contributions throughout the year (see Table 1, column 2).⁴ Thus, reported statistics on the achievements and profits of the MFO can be said to be accurate in the sense in that end-of-year

accomplishments are substantial. However, they fail to disclose that, at least in the case of Mu'a, so-called "profits" are nothing more than the sum of member contributions. In fact, there was no "income-generation" at all--a fact which proved more surprising to me than to member women.

If, after a year of hard work, members had no more resources than they would have had anyway, then why did Tongan women continue to join the MF movement? As members themselves assert, they joined and would continue to join because they would have never gotten their kitchen or water tank or bathroom if they had not joined. Individual women simply would never have been able to siphon off household income individually for the purpose of development or home improvement. They would have had to contend with the demands of household and kin in the use of household income--demands which, in contemporary Tonga, make the accumulation of resources a difficult task.

Women's groups, in effect, provide a charter for individual women to control a portion of the household income that they would not easily be able to control without the group. This is an important feature in the success of Tongan women's groups and their attractiveness to women. Through the MFO, women could not only accumulate a fund of resources for development but also design its use.

The development fund created each year by MF groups depends, then, not on profits, but on the ongoing contributions of member women to the organization. But from where did these contributions come? My survey of the source of member contributions to their groups showed that husbands, as well as children and siblings (in that order) were significantly involved in the funding of MF activities. In 1981, 29 of 56 MF members interviewed (52%) reported that their own outlays to the MFO were provided in part or whole by their husbands. An additional 13 households received resources from close kin living in Tonga or overseas (either children, siblings, parents, or some combination of these). Only one quarter of the membership indicated that they funded their MF participation through their own means, and this discounts the sometimes sizable labor and material resources which must be used to supplement moving forward revenue in final building projects.

What accounts for the tremendous household support of MF women? I suggest that husbands and nuclear family kin so willingly funnel available funds to women because, by doing so, they are able to legitimately withhold family resources from the demands of kinsmen. A husband may be ambivalent about contributing to the activities of his wife may be ambivalent because he must give over immediate resources to his wife's control; but his support has the ultimate effect of staying the distribution of resources to the wider kin unit, and recycling those resources back into the household. MFO membership can be thought of as a partnership of mutual interest among husbands, wives, and immediate family to accumulate resources for the use and benefit of the nuclear family and, by extension, to remove resources from kin distribution. It is a partnership which derives not from good planning but from the right historical conditions.

The moving forward organization, then, operates as a kind of escrow fund under the management and control of women, which accumulates household income for development purposes. Many rules and practices of group organization, in fact, function to support the ability of MF women to extract and earmark resources for household improvement. The features of "cooperation" and

"reciprocity" which distinguish the moving forward organization as a model development institution are often little more than mechanisms to increase women's accumulation and escrow of resources.

Consider, for instance, one of the hallmarks of MF reciprocity: the system of "rotating gift-giving" established by Mu'a women in which, each week, the one group controlling the women's hall is given "cash gifts" from the remaining groups. Although no member or group will end up receiving any more in "gifts" than they actually contributed, the advantage of such a system is the inevitable accumulation of resources. By making weekly gifts to others a requirement of MF participation, it uses the charter of the group to extract resources from the household, and then to return those resources for development use. Inter-village and inter-island mutual aid work on similar principles in that contributions to other groups, requiring elevated levels of contribution by household and kin, will be returned by those same groups in the future, not to the kin of Mu'an MF members, but to the Mu'an development fund. In these examples, model "self-help" behaviors of mutual aid and reciprocity actually operate as an elaborate system of self-assessment designed to increase the development fund to its maximum size.⁵

Other forms of MF cooperation serve to augment the degree of felt obligation in a household to commit resources. The common practices of funding MF projects through initial group loans, or using groups revenues over several years to build water tanks for members in turn, make household and kin support of member commitments a matter of social obligation and prestige. Joint arrangements of this kind mean that a member's failure to meet obligations could threaten the future credit possibilities of her entire group and their households or could jeopardize building projects for the group as a whole. These are socially volatile and disrupting matters in the close-knit village communities of Tonga. For this reason, group borrowing, the rotating use of resources, and other such cooperative schemes effectively increase women's ability to secure household resources by producing a more binding and ongoing sense of member commitment and a more urgent sense of family and kin group obligation.

One can see that neither the popularity and the household support, nor the ethic of cooperation enjoyed by the MFO is a result of the effective operation of a self-help development plan. The organization makes household improvements, not from profits, but from its ability to transfer resources from one pocket to another. Its popularity with women depends not on entrepreneurial spirit but on women's ability to increase their personal control of household income. The MFO is supported by households and husbands, not because of family enlistment strategies, but because it allows the household to salvage its resources from the demands of the extended kin network. Mutual aid abounds, not because of group training seminars, but because cooperation reinforces the escrow functions of the institution.

The only missing piece of this puzzle is why the community-at-large would support an organization which operates to withhold resources from the community. It is important to realize that, not only is the community sanctioning an escrow of resources that it would not condone outside the organization, but it is also directly and materially participating in the funding of the organization. To see this, one must understand that the development fund available to MF members at the end of the year may equal the sum of their household contributions, but it is not the same money. What

really occurs is a conversion of resources, in which member contributions are applied to diverse obligations, including such items as feasts, capital costs, and building maintenance, and then re-created and returned as revenue in the form of paid attendance or fund-raising gifts at MF events. In the final analysis, MFO "profits" can only be realized through the financial support and direct participation of the local community at its events.

From the standpoint of a self-help planning model, community purchases and attendance at MFO dances, movies, feasts and other income-generating events would seem based on the entrepreneurial notion that the organization provides desired goods and services to the village. In practice, though, cash revenues from the community are largely the product of solicited kin obligation and support. Most MF events, especially the larger functions, involve the distribution of tickets to each member which are her obligation to sell. Members, in turn, approach their own extended kin group for support and villagers respond by exclusively buying tickets from their own member kin. MFO revenue, then, is essentially extended kin group money transferred to the organization through relationships of kinship and obligation. Given this, one can see why women, particularly in their role as sisters, are in an ideal position to run rural development efforts. Womens' traditional kinship status bolsters the strength of their petitions to kin for participation.

Most accurately stated, the MFO's end-of-year development fund represents the revenues provided by members' extended kin networks--the very people from whom resources are being withheld to enable the accumulation of development funds. MFO women seemingly accomplish what all Tongans today are trying to do: withholding resources from kin so they can use it for private mobility while, at the same time, enlisting kin to help them. In the end, though, women can be no more successful at working the system both ways than any other Tongan. To earn its charter, the MFO has had to reproduce the various relationships that underlie wider kinship support and community sanction and, importantly, to do so in accordance with the changing basis for their reproduction.

The implications of this process complete this analysis, and explain why, despite a year's worth of income-generating activities, the organization earned no profits. To elicit kinship support and community sanction, MF women have had to do the same thing that all Tongans wanting the support of kin must do: they have engaged in material reciprocity with the village; they have maximized their own social prestige. Accomplishing this, however, has required considerable resources--resources that, together with capital expenditures for events and hall maintenance, proved in the audit year to be equal the income earned from MF events.

The resources needed by women to reproduce relations of prestige and reciprocity in the village, and thereby to draw kin support, are a product of Tonga's social history. As the power of Tongan kinship status has weakened in its scope and material impact, and as traditional spheres have themselves become commoditized, the wealth necessary to secure the support of kin has both escalated and changed in kind. Whereas women could once command support on the strength of their kinship prestige and their distribution of prestige wealth, they must now, like all Tongans, reciprocate the flow of wealth and labor to them with greater levels and amounts of counter-gifts. These counter-gifts, moreover, increasingly involve the cash domain. In all, it now takes more resources, and more cash wealth, to sustain the prestige and reciprocity necessary for kinship support.

The pricetag on prestige in MF operations can be seen, for instance, in the "inspection," an occasion which elevates the status of the MFO by drawing traditional and modern figures of importance to its ranks. The written invitations, printed programs, and traditional feasts provided by MF women require not only enormous labor but outlays of hundreds of dollars as well. These expenditures make sense only when one understands that the prestige-value of the organization enables MF women to draw the sanction and participation of their kinsmen.

Prestige is also the logic behind the MFO's decision to act in a patron role, taking on activities often consistent with chiefly "philanthropy." Providing cash gifts to members during times of funerals, births, and sickness, attending ceremonial events in the community, extending overly liberal credit to canteen customers, making gifts to the church in its own name, and donating the women's hall without charge for important village events are just some of the prestige-seeking gestures that drain the MFO of resources. Reciprocity also has a monetary value, and, in the name of community spirit, a number of decisions have been made about the price and nature of moving forward events that have clearly affected profits, such as continuing to stage less lucrative but popular activities or lowering the price of hall rental to accommodate the village pocketbook. While shows of prestige and reciprocity secure the support needed by the MFO for community sanction and participation, by the same token they are what assures the MFO's lack of profits.

One can conclude that, although the MFO was planned and designed on a self-help and profit-making development model, it has become an elaborate "break-even" escrow fund which converts reciprocity and prestige into resources for a women's development fund. Women, as the carriers of traditional prestige, have been in a unique position to draw resources in such a system--a fact which accounts for the primacy of women in Tongan rural development. Yet women's ability to draw and hold modern resources has, under changing economic conditions, demanded significant material outlays, resulting in the break-even nature of the MFO's "profit-making" activities.

The MFO has been successful, not because of its planned development role, but because of the restructuring of its character and operation. Its success among women is not based on profits but on the MFO's role in allowing members to parlay their personal and institutional prestige into control of modern wealth, and to counter the declining material import of women's traditional status. The MFO has worked well for member husbands because it successfully diverted household income away from the demands of the wider kin group, and secured it for private household mobility, while the organization has enlisted the participation and sanction of wider kin and community group by investing heavily in prestige and reciprocity.

Despite the content of the development plan, the MFO has come to reproduce those dynamics embodied in the unplanned institution for traditional wealth production and in the social fabric at large. The importance of the MFO in Tonga today is not as a bonafide "development" group, but as a sanctioned institutional agent for private accumulation under social conditions which reinforce the distribution of resources, and as a vehicle for women's control of resources in a system in which women are increasingly losing their social and economic clout. In the end, it is these historical conditions and

indigenous dynamics that underlie the popularity, the character, and the success of the moving forward organization.

The Decline of the Moving Forward Movement

I returned to Mu'a in 1987 to find that a number of changes, centrally and locally, had occurred in the MFO. The FSP had moved from a monitor to a supervisor of the development agenda, while the Tongan Catholic nuns, no longer officially associated with the program, offered assistance on a sporadic and volunteer basis, as their schedules allowed.

Overseas budget cuts for small-scale women's programs had forced some new funding decisions. As the FSP administrator told me, the main island groups already had a long history of success. Moreover, group representatives were now petitioning the central organization for seed money to generate income for non-essential household improvements, such as vinyl flooring for their homes. Given the fact that many main island members now had water tanks, kitchens, pig fencing, and other basic improvements, the central organization turned its attention to the outer islands and ended the main island assistance, inspection, and monitoring program.

The changes I encountered at the village level were startling. Infighting and disinterest had led to a number of member dropouts that left many of the groups with only two or three members. As a result, and at the suggestion of a local nun, the MFO in Mu'a re-formed into two groups. The organization suspended their regular Sunday meetings, and there was notably poor attendance at even the infrequent meetings that were held.

Most surprising was the fact that there were no more group-based income-generating activities. Without these weekly activities, MF women also ended their rotating contribution fund. The MF Canteen was rented to a family, who operated the store as a family business in exchange for a minimal rental fee of \$T20 per month plus electricity. The Hall itself was given over to a men's group who ran kava-drinking parties for profit six days a week. They paid a rental of T\$60 per month, an amount which often simply covered electric costs, and agreed as well to provide free labor for the hall's varnishing and repairs. Movies, still held regularly, were run by an entrepreneur from the capital of Nuku'alofa, who gave the MFO 10 percent of the gate for each movie—an arrangement which resulted in minimal, if any, profit for the organization. The kindergarten continued to operate, officially under the auspices of the MFO. However, it was now run by a committee of kindergarten parents, from both member and non-member households, and on a separate budget with independent overseas funding.

In short, the MFO in Mu'a divested itself of all of its income-raising group activities, so there was no development fund for use at the end of the year. Accordingly, the organization ended its program of development inspections and reverted to one annual inspection, conducted locally, of traditional wealth, that is, bark-cloth and pandanus mats produced outside the organization itself.

At first glance, the MFO seems a familiar portrait of project failure, characterized by funding constraints and undercapitalization on the part of

planners, coupled with a lack of self-sufficiency and infighting on the part of participants. Seen from a short-term factor-oriented perspective, one is led to the conclusion that the withdrawal of central leadership and funding support resulted in the collapse of the rural development organization.

However, the processes of MF decline were in effect well before the planning decisions and funding cuts of 1986, as evidenced by membership rolls in Mu'a. Original groups were begun in 1974 with 100 women. By 1978, there were 88 active MF members. In 1981, the membership count was 66, and by 1983, they had dropped to 55. When I returned to Mu'a in 1987, only 30 women remained active members, and many of these in name only. Clearly there was a pattern of waning membership occurring throughout the 1980s, and the withdrawal of funding in 1985--which only amounted to \$30 annually for a group of ten--was not the kingpin of membership decline.

The factors which can account for the drop in membership involve both the internal dynamics of the MFO, and the changing economic context in which these were occurring. If we reorient the analysis to the long-term contextual perspective of this discussion, it is clear that the moving forward institution was a successful vital organization, based on very particular social conditions which themselves were in flux. The institutional successes and structures of the moving forward organization were contingent on the continuing importance of kinship, prestige, and reciprocity, set in a context of growing commoditization, personal mobility, and wealth differences. Although kinship had long served to mitigate the formation of bonafide social classes, wealth differences among Tongan commoners had already begun to appear and to affect both lifestyle and attitudes. These indigenous conditions, much more so than the vagaries of development planning and funding, can account for the changes that occurred in the MF movement.

In 1983, I conducted interviews with women who had dropped out of the MFO during the previous two years, to determine women's reasons for discontinuing their participation. Although overseas migration had claimed some members, and infighting others, the overwhelming consensus of dropouts was that the "kavena," that is, the responsibilities or burdens of moving forward membership, had become too much for their households to bear. The demands of membership on their time and their pocketbooks had caused women to reevaluate their membership and/or caused their husbands to withdraw their support, many demanding that their wives sit out.

If one understands the true basis of MFO economics, then one realizes that an increase in the economic burdens of membership was neither a peculiarity of one village nor the product of inadequate central planning. It was rather a direct consequence of the MFO's success. In a development institution whose accomplishments are really based on the escrow of personal resources, it stands to reason that the elevation of goals or the growth of functions will necessitate complementary increases in the level of contributed personal resources. And as MF women added functions like funeral gifts to members, as they invested in permanent structures demanding constant capital outlays for upkeep, like the store, hall, and kindy, and as they elevated their group goals from a clean toilet area to a free standing wooden kitchen, so too did they elevate the amount of resources they needed to divert to the MFO. Given the basis of institutional economics, the spiraling of "kavena" was built into its success and growth.

The upshot of MFO success was, thus, increased economic pressures on the membership--pressures which resulted in the loss of members. More specifically, under conditions of growing rural wealth differences, the consequence of economic pressure was the loss of its poorer members.

By 1984, the MFO was disproportionately drawing on the wealthier segment of the community. Tables 2 and 3 compare the economic status of MF households in 1984 with that of the village as a whole. Table 2 compares the economic "status" of households (High, High-Middle, Low-Middle, and Low) on the basis of rough "indicators" of disposable wealth (household type, toilet type, and the presence or absence of electricity).⁶ Table 3 compares MF membership to the village as a whole on the basis of land-holding.

Whether seen by indicators of economic status (Table 2) or by land-holding (Table 3), MF members are not representative of the village as a whole. Poorer households, some 22 percent of the village, are underrepresented in the MFO, contributing only 10 percent of the total membership. Conversely, the 24 percent of the village with "high" economic status are overrepresented in the organization, comprising 40 percent of membership rolls. And while 36 percent of village households hold neither registered nor unregistered land, a full 86 percent of MF households are landed. Thus, when FSP administrators received group petitions for help with member goals of vinyl flooring--an occurrence which contributed to ending the main island funding program--these petitions represented nothing less than a product of organizational dynamics. It was an expression of the general fact that the MFO was drawing on an increasingly narrow and wealthy segment of the community.

The immediate consequence of the organization's declining membership was not only that the participant base was wealthier but also that institutional responsibility devolved on a smaller and smaller core of women. There were fewer women to stage activities and fewer member households and kin groups to support the organization, despite the fact that many capital expenditures of the organization remained constant, for example, electricity and hall maintenance. In a development institution truly based on entrepreneurial capitalism, a smaller membership would simply result in greater per capita profits. However, in an institution whose funds are generated by the conversion of household income through community attendance at regularly staged events, fewer members meant fewer contributions, fewer events, and fewer funds to defray the costs of maintaining organizational functions or to escrow for a development fund. The moving forward organization became an institution of diminishing returns, with many of its activities beginning to lose money.

The burdens of membership, coupled with the growing economic division in the village, had other consequences for those who remained members. Where economic differences existed in the membership, it became harder for groups to cooperatively decide on mutual goals and/or to cooperatively bring those goals to fruition. While wealthier women might have wanted an annual goal of water tanks, poorer women simply wanted to rethatch their latrine area. Thus, some groups, decided to individualize member goals, inspecting different items for different members--a change which often made cooperative efforts, like building water tanks in rotation, untenable.

And even where groups agreed on the same goals, there often were problems based on economic differences: a member who must "sit out" during an inspection because the desired goal proved too ambitious, a woman who could not follow through on her group loan obligations. Invariably, the repercussions of such events involved the ongoing cooperative relations within the group. As I witnessed, the woman who could not meet inspection goals gave up her membership in the following year; the group in which one woman reneged on her group loan split angrily.

Even when members can decide and follow through on their goals, their arrangements to do so have become increasingly differentiated. While the wealthier woman can supplement group income with personal funds for building projects, women with more moderate resources may need to take out supplementary loans, often with others in the same economic circumstances. Poorer women may have to opt out of loan arrangements altogether, choosing instead to engage with others in some additional income-generating activity outside the MFO, such as the sale of prepared food in the village. The result, therefore, even when groups agreed on and accomplished their goals, is that many MF groups maintained "groups within groups" that made their own loan arrangements, formed their own savings associations, or conducted their own "businesses" or other economic activities.

Leadership, and its relationship to membership, has also been affected by wealth differences. While MF women continue to elect high-prestige figures to the more public village-wide offices, they have begun, at the more local level of groups, to choose their wealthiest women as leaders. In 1984, the majority of operating groups had chosen the wealthiest woman as their leader, and they did so with the common Tongan understanding that the leader would "help" them with group obligations. Thus, for inspection feasts, the leader is expected to shoulder the more onerous obligations, such as the provision of a pig.

In itself, new leadership patterns and expectations create new forms of social division. Some wealthier women approach their involvement with the idea that they really join to "help" others not so fortunate. Often such women feel they are giving much for little in return, especially when they have the personal resources to build kitchens or water tanks on their own. When group decisions do not go their way, or when personal slights occur within the group, these women tend drop to out in anger, feeling the group is ungrateful for their efforts. As one wealthier woman told me about leaving her group, "I can paddle my canoe alone." Members, on the other hand, may feel that their leader is not doing enough as "patron," or is "eating group money," that is, using her leadership to her own advantage rather than for the benefit of the group.

The growth of rural wealth differences, then, in concert with the spiraling burdens of MF membership, have had the overall effect of fragmenting the moving forward effort. Development efforts have become more divided and individualized, reducing the arenas for cooperative action. Internal relations among members and between leaders and members have become increasingly strained. And, together with the loss of cohesiveness, waning membership numbers have placed the cost of maintaining the organization on a shrinking core of women, with the result that even the possibility of "breaking even" on one's membership is threatened.

It is no wonder that MF women were content to end their "profit-generating" activities, to revert to inspections of traditional wealth only, and to hand over control of the Canteen, the Hall, and the Kindergarten to other interested parties. All these decisions are consistent in that, while they generate minimal income for the members, they eliminate the possibility that members will lose resources through their participation. The changes also obviate the need for close cooperative effort and mutual aid schemes among members--schemes which have been fraught with increasing difficulties and strains.

The membership, in effect, has become caretakers of an institution which, as before, no longer lost or gained anything for its members, but also which no longer generated a development fund. In other words, it has come to be a development failure.

Summary and Conclusions

The MFO is a case study of a sensitive bureaucracy, a favorable cultural environment, and a successful development institution which enabled the redistribution of wealth to women. However, the success of the MFO was never really based on the effectiveness of bureaucratic structure or even on the content of the development plan. The socioeconomic context of the contemporary Tongan village very quickly infused the planned institutional model of self-help--just as it did unplanned traditional wealth organization--reformulating its structure and operation to reproduce indigenous social dynamics. And it was these same social dynamics--rather than changes in development structures and policies--which ultimately resulted in the decline and failures of the moving forward organization.

While my case study argues for the benefits of long-term, contextually-oriented project evaluations and development research, the most important implication of this analysis is to call into question the entire development agenda. While development planners and agencies differ on the correct formula for Third World development, they converge on the notion that a "correctly" conceived, structured, and implemented plan will work. Thus, as programs continue to fail, they attend to the problems in their own organization and conception (e.g., the local and unconnected nature of women's small group rural projects) or to the implementation problems (e.g., the resistance of men) which need to be addressed in the future so that the program will be successful. The solutions, then, would seem to be to "integrate" women's projects with national development efforts or to include efforts toward "educating men" with the project implementation guidelines.

The question raised here, however, concerns the core assumption of the development enterprise: Can socioeconomic change--the ultimate purpose of all development--be planned? The answer, I suggest, is that it cannot; the factors which are really affecting institutional successes and failures at accomplishing change are at a social and historical depth which is beyond the ability of development planners to affect--at least, not given the economic and political limitations of the development enterprise.

It is, indeed, a form of arrogance to believe that the administrators, bureaucracies, and programs of the international planning community, without

the political or economic clout to significantly change a nation's social order, can transform or reverse social realities which proceed from that order. Thus, for instance, most development agencies are in the untenable position of attempting to alleviate the effects of class development--a process associated with a growing wealth differences between men and women, rich and poor--in a society undergoing class formation. And when our programs do not work, we look to improve our plans and bureaucratic strategies. It is, in my view, equally arrogant to presume that failures in Third World development proceed from some flaw in our own thinking or organization. Without both politicizing development efforts and recognizing the import of indigenous social processes (and, for instance, devoting support to indigenous movements like unions which tend to counter class inequities), development efforts will be futile. It is important to understand that, even if planners were able to assume more revolutionary directions, an unlikely scenario given the source of most development funding, planners can no more make "revolution" than they can make social change. Revolutionary programs can succeed only when there are indigenous revolutionary movements underway.

If there is a prescription here for planning and development, it is to recognize its limitations. This shift in the conception of the potency of the development enterprise would not only reduce the billions of wasted aid dollars which threaten to undermine any future support of the Third World but, more importantly, would more honestly represent the inflated promises of Third World development planning.

Notes

1. Mu'a is actually the name of the general area in which the case study village is located, but it is a pseudonym for the village in particular.
2. Inspections were always associated with "prestige" and the monitoring of household resources by people of rank, but, in pre-constitutional Tonga, they were conducted for the purpose of chiefly appropriation of commoner production.
3. Donations involving animals and agricultural produce were assessed at their market value and figured into the calculations as cash.
4. Outlays and revenues, while equal in amount, were not necessarily the same in kind. Outlays included such items as donations of produce for inspection feasts, expenses for staging events, contributions made to member families at funerals, and the maintenance and repair of the Women's Hall. Revenues comprised cash receipts from paid attendance at MF events or donations at MF fundraisers.
5. The requirement that members purchase tickets for their own attendance at major moving forward events amounts to a similar technique for securing resources. Despite the fact that members fund, stage, and work these events, moving forward women elect to charge members for their attendance. In fact, moving forward women have elected each year to establish two price structures for major affairs—one for members and one for non-members—with the seemingly curious provision that members pay more than non-members. The logic behind the practice, however, is that by charging themselves more, the women will have more to divide at the end.

By contrast, in contexts where accumulation is not the tacit purpose behind the rule, moving forward women establish rules that favor members. For instance, when a member is intending to privately raise cash through rental of the women's hall, charges to members will be less than to non-members.

6. Indicators represent features that are the contemporary markers of wealth to most Tongan villagers. A household of "high" economic status was considered to be one with a wooden or concrete house, electricity, and western plumbing with a flush toilet. "Middle" status households had wooden homes with a thatch-covered pit-latrine toilet; the "high" versus "low" divisions of this category were distinguished by the presence or absence of electricity. "Low" economic status, or poor, households were characterized by a thatched house with no electricity and a pit-latrine toilet.

Table 1
Annual Revenues, Outlays, and Profit/Loses
in Mu'a's Moving Forward Groups

Group	Revenues ^a (+)	Outlays (-)	Diff. (+) (-)	Profit/Loss per woman
1	\$188.80	\$280.90	-\$92.10	- \$9.21 (10)
2	220.20	170.00	+ 50.20	+ 5.02 (10)
3	184.00	202.50	- 18.50	- 4.63 (4)
4	263.52	232.34	+ 31.18	+ 6.23 (5)
5	235.52	363.70	-128.18	- 21.36 (6)
6	168.48	102.00	+ 66.48	+ 7.39 (9)
7	194.00	264.00	- 70.00	- 8.75 (8)
8	440.12	297.00	+143.12	+ 14.30 (10)
9	230.00	231.40	- 1.40	- 0.35 (4)
T	\$2,124.64	\$2,143.84	-\$19.20	-\$ 0.29 (66)

Source: Small 1987:395

^a Both revenues and outlays were less in this year than in subsequent years because the rotating contribution fund (see page 6) was not fully in effect.

Table 2

A Comparison of Economic Status in Moving Forward Households with the Village as a Whole

Economic Status	Moving (#)	Forward HH (%)	Village as a Whole	
			(#)	(%)
High	20	(40%)	62	(24%)
High-Middle	15	(30%)	82	(31%)
Low-Middle	10	(20%)	55	(21%)
Low	5	(10%)	57	(22%)
Total	50		263	

Source: Small 1987:425

Table 3

Land-Holding among Moving Forward Households and in the Village as a Whole

	Landed		Landless		Total
Moving Forward HH	43	(86%)	7	(14%)	50
Village HH as a Whole	168	(64%)	95	(36%)	263

Source: Small 1987:425

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