



EMERGING LEADERS

FOR THE DIGITAL WORLD

EXTRACT

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Sala Tamanikaiwaimaro from Fiji is on the lookout for ways to strengthen capacity in the region and to impact policy



My name is Salanieta Tudrau Tamanikaiwaimaro, but my friends call me Sala. Fiji is an archipelago in the South Pacific Ocean, a rich melting pot of people from the Pacific Islands, Asia and Europe. It also has an indigenous population called the I-Taukei, of which I am a part.

We I-Taukei are identified by our extended family unit, our clan, our tribe, and finally our village: my Totatoka (extended family unit) is Vuniuto, my Mataqali (clan) is Natamavarua, my Yavusa (tribe) is Naveisere, and my Koro (village) is Naisausau.

A cultural childhood

I have awesome parents who inculcated a rich awareness of our environment and the world around us in my two brothers (Aisea and Tevita Jnr) and me.

The impact of their parenting, coupled with the guidance of my grandfather who was a constant source of wisdom, instilled within me a deep sense of social responsibility. I remember from a very young age that, when I found something new and useful, I always wanted to share it. For example, I would invite the other children in my neighbourhood to a programme called 'Happy Hour' with Mrs Pickering.

The nature of my Ta's (Dad's) work as an engineer for a sugar company that ran its operations throughout the country meant that my family was constantly moving. Consequently, I was continuously experiencing change, being immersed in diverse cultures, picking up the various official languages, and thus developing an appreciation of the localities where I lived. My Nau (Mother) teaches secondary school students, and her constant encouragement helped me persevere. One of the poems that she taught me was 'Don't Quit'.

One of the best parts of moving from place to place was developing an appreciation for the country's diversity. Fiji's most precious resource is not her natural resources, or her beautiful rainforests, or her white sandy beaches; her most precious resource is her



people. For this reason, I have developed a love for people and for interacting with them and appreciating the challenges that they face. This led me to join organisations that were actively involved in making a difference. Having attended public and private schools, an Indian school, a Muslim school, a Catholic school, government schools, and a Chinese school, I came to appreciate and respect the diversity of perspectives.

At a very young age, I witnessed the first recorded major political upheaval, 17 years after Fiji's independence from Great Britain. As a seven-year-old, I saw the impact this had on the various communities that I would eventually become a part of, and this left its mark on me. Segregation consciously started, and I witnessed my friends migrate. At this early age, I saw how the economy was affected by the political turbulence.

Education

I went to university to study Education and Technology, but

this was disrupted following the Coup d'Etat in 2000. I did not fancy AutoCAD, as I had never taken Technology Drawing in my life. My father had warned me that Engineering was not for me, but I wanted to try it anyway. Nevertheless, I came to see the wisdom in my father's counsel and opted to study law instead. I was inspired by a scripture that had seemed to leap out at me, 'Seek justice for the oppressed and defend the fatherless and the widows.'

I had to travel to another part of the Pacific to study law, to the beautiful island country called Vanuatu. Whilst in Vanuatu, we also visited the Solomon Islands following its political crisis and saw firsthand the impact on the economy, with the one chicken costing \$59 Solomon at that time.

Career and introduction to ICT

I continue to witness the challenges that most Pacific Island countries are facing. High oil prices affect energy grids, transportation, and

subsequently information and communication technologies (ICT) deployment. Using C.W. Mills 'Sociological Imagination' tool, it is possible to see how this affects individuals and communities in the Pacific. Whilst there are moves by governments in the region to invest in alternative renewable energy programmes, even these are expensive to start up. I worked as an associate in a law firm, and then as a senior analyst within the Regulator of Capital Markets and subsequently interned as a young professional within the Political, Governance and Security Division of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, so I have had the opportunity to see and appreciate the structures that hold things together. The mentoring I received from C-WBN through its sectors, such as the Reformation Teaching Advance, the Global Leadership Interlink, and from Josiah Qalovaki, has harnessed and developed my ability to quickly distil issues, find the root and crux of problems, and solve them by designing solutions.

My introduction to the ICT realm took place when I joined a licensed telecommunications operator. I engaged in this world with a passion to absorb and assimilate as much new information as possible. I found this world fascinating, so dynamic. I did a few telecommunications courses with the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) on universal services obligations and with Neotelis on telecommunications



essentials. At a Pacific Islands Telecommunications Association (PITA) conference that was held back-to-back with the ITU and Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation (CTO) conference in Nadi, Fiji, I met Gisa Purcell, who had lost her luggage in Geneva. Out of character for me, I had 'over-packed' and shared my clothes with her – which is the Pacific way. We became firm and fast friends, and it was at dinner with Gisa and a few others that I first learned about Diplo.

Introduction to the IG world

My immersion in the world of IG began with DiploFoundation. I was excited about studying with classmates from around the world. The dynamic facilitation created an enabling environment. My classmates, all established professionals from around the world, rocked. My brother also enrolled in the class.

My immersion in IG helped me to better understand the ICT industry – it just began to make

sense. My favourite part was the poem by John Godfrey Saxe about the blind men and the elephant and the importance of appreciating the various perspectives on IG issues. I met people from the far side of the world who were passionate about development.

It was great to attend the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) in Vilnius, Lithuania, where I met great people from all walks of life and most especially my wider Diplo 'online' family. This was possible through the generous sponsorship of the Canadian government through the ITU. I also was fortunate enough to have been sent by Diplo to Noumea earlier this year, where I attended the inaugural Pacific Regional Internet Governance Forum (PrIGF), where I met interesting people. I actively participated in the PrIGF and raised the challenges that I saw facing the Pacific region and the need for a multistakeholder process to policy-making, training, capacity development, etc.

Keith Davidson from Pacific Internet Partners, one of the organisers of PrIGF, approached me a few months later to ask me to represent the Pacific at the Asia Pacific Regional Internet Governance Forum (APrIGF) and to speak about the PrIGF in Singapore, which I did. I was also invited by Dot Asia's Edmon Chung, one of the organisers, to help judge the Youth IGF at the Nanyang Technological University, where the themes discussed were cyber-addiction, digital divide, and privacy. I saw the excellent work being done by the APrIGF in ensuring succession. I was also invited to speak at the ISOC Advisory Meeting, which was a closed meeting on the PrIGF. I have seen post-liberalisation challenges facing the telecommunications industry and the capacity development needs within regulators. As a practitioner, I have also seen how Pacific Island countries are often ill-advised about adopting model laws without first conducting clear, holistic, empirical research on matters on the ground. I have witnessed the challenges and bottlenecks that come with this approach. I am a strong advocate of empirical research preceding policy formulation, which precedes regulation.

The future

There is still a lag in the region as key stakeholders are slow to recognise the importance of IG and its impact on the economic, sociocultural, and political structures within the country. I have a strong sense



of responsibility to advocate IG wherever I go.

I also see an increasing responsibility for leaders to govern equitably, fairly, and with justice. Their flexibility and openness to drive the nation and the region forward is becoming increasingly evident. I sense that a generation is emerging that is taking the bull by the horns and taking ownership of their destiny as individuals, as communities, as a nation, and as a region. There is an emergence of internal strength, resolve, inner wealth (in the form of values such as relationship, partnership, sense of community, collaboration, sharing of resources), passion, and drive to create sustainable solutions that will benefit our people. Our Pacific leaders have had the foresight to create a

Pacific Plan. I believe that IG needs to be incorporated into that plan.

At the moment, I wear a few hats, one of which is as Chair of the Fiji Cyber Security Working Group. I was appointed to this by the Ministry of Defence in October 2010. My training with Diplo has helped me better understand the issues and has also allowed me to tap into the network of Diplo alumni and the global IG community from whom I can draw on. We ran our first workshop and did it in a multistakeholder fashion. I am also one of the coordinators of the Young Professional Training Development Forum, which is made up of professionals from various Pacific Island countries and from all walks of life who are committed to developing the region. I am passionate

about improving the quality of life within Fiji and in the Pacific. A look at developed economies will reveal that strong economies have robust ICT structures. In the Pacific, where the challenges are diverse and complex, the advocacy of IG is a critical part of the equation in bringing sustainable solutions. It will help address all sorts of issues, such as poor anti-dumping laws, intellectual property laws, e-commerce, universal service, and the lack of Internet exchange points. I am always on the lookout for ways to strengthen capacity in the region, and for the means to impact policy.

Sala Tamanikaiwaimaro is Chair of the Fiji Cyber Security Working Group and a coordinator of the Young Professional Training Development Forum. ■

