School buildings are unfinished or in disrepair. And the project's ledgers have not been checked by an outside auditor since the council lost its independence from the traditional leaders.

Worse yet, community members are now alienated, disillusioned, angry, and scared. One man said that if you protest the chief's actions, "The sun will not set on you." Another said, "I don't mind if they steal something. Anybody would do that. But don't steal it all." A woman, when asked about the project, replied with scorn and resignation, "It's theirs, not ours."

Outsiders who should be overseeing the project are blind to the problems. We were told repeatedly by officials at government agencies and nongovernmental organizations in Harare that the project is successful, and that the primary obstacle to further success is that full authority has not yet been devolved to the community (the regional government still retains control over contractual arrangements with the professional guide and the hotel firm). Community members in Mahenye, however, said that while the regional government is also corrupt and puts its own interests first, it is the only curb on the chief's power. They argued strongly against further devolution.

The Mahenye experience raises many questions for the theory and practice of community-based conservation and development. What is "community"? How much authority should be devolved to communities, and who should decide? How should outside groups deal with a traditional, indigenous community in which the leadership may not speak for the group as a whole? And how can an independent, democratic, participatory governing process be helped to survive in a traditional, hierarchical, feudal society?

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Community and the Internet: Tobi Islanders in a Globalizing World

BY PETER W. BLACK

The insular Pacific, the region of the world perhaps most dramatically transformed by recent globalization processes, offers many opportunities to learn what happens when a recently dispersed community turns to new information technologies.

For several generations, the peoples of Oceania have been leaving their remote island homes for port towns and cities where the schools, hospitals, governments, and businesses of their new nations are located. More recently, ever-larger numbers have left this global hinterland for the continents that fringe their ancestral ocean. A pan-Pacific pattern is emerging: three-part societies composed of a largely depopulated ancestral island or village, an urban central core, and a scattered group of mostly younger people living alone or in small clusters all over the world. These newly globalized communities use information technology to stay connected and, with varying degrees of success, to sustain social cohesion.

Among the Pacific peoples exploring the community-building utility of the Internet are the Tobians. Until just a few decades ago, they were one of the most isolated of human communities; now, they are one of the most widely dispersed.

A small, low, coral island in the Republic of Palau, Tobi (also known as Hatohobei) is about 400 miles southwest of Koror, the nearest town of any size, and national capital of Palau.

During the latter part of the 20th century, more and more families left Tobi; today, there are only a few year-round residents. Most Tobians live in Koror, but increasingly they have left Palau to live in the wider world. Many attend American colleges and universities, others serve in the American military, and still others have relocated for family or employment reasons. Tobians now live on Guam and Saipan in the western Pacific; in Hawaii; and in the continental United States in such cities as Baltimore, New York City, Oklahoma City, Syracuse, and Washington, D.C. Other recent addresses for Tobians include Australia, Bosnia, Fiji, Germany, Iraq, Japan, Kuwait, and the Solomon Islands.

Telephone calls and old-fashioned letters have been joined recently by the Internet as Tobians begin to use computers to resist the attenuation of family and community networks. E-mails, discussion lists, and web sites have come to play an ever-larger role in attempts to sustain and strengthen the widely dispersed—indeed, global—community of Tobians.

Central to the Tobian experience with the Internet has been FOTI, (**cas.gmu.edu/~tobi**) an ethnographic web site that Peter and Barbara Black launched in 1995 and have continued to develop.

How has the Internet served the Tobian community? In some respects, it has served the community very well indeed, primarily because it is so fast. The transmission speed of messages rivals that of the traditional word-of-mouth system; thus, news reaches virtually every Tobian in an astonishingly short time. This is true regardless of whether they are connected directly to the Internet, and no matter where they live. In this way at least, the Internet obliterates not only distance, but even

history. Not since the early years of the 20th century and the beginning of the dispersal of the community—first to Koror and then beyond—has word spread so rapidly and thoroughly. Given this, one would expect electronic communication to play a large role in strengthening the capacity of the Tobians as a community to deal with fragmentation and other issues by strengthening the ties between the three parts of Tobian society: those living on the home island, those living in Koror, and those living outside Palau. This is not necessarily the case, and most of the reasons why have to do with key Tobian understandings about talk.

Most messages Tobians send via e-mail are remarkably vacuous. Conflicts, public decisions, and future directions for the community are simply not addressed. Inevitably, such topics require discussion of personalities. Tobian talk about people is always done with great discretion and indirection in nonpublic settings. Deniability is critical, and great subtlety is also essential. E-mail, which is only as private as the recipient wants it to be, is clearly not suited for this mode of communication.

Tobians use the Internet to ease loneliness, demonstrate commitment to one another, and transmit the occasional bombshell information—birth, death, marriage. The Tobian way of talking about people, which is grounded in the realities of life in a small community, has a profound impact on the ways in which they use information technology. Surely they are not alone in this. Claims about the impact of the Internet based on understanding of the technology, but ignorant of the culture of the people using the technology, are best viewed with some skepticism.

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