CONCEPTUALIZING AN ECOLOGICAL MODEL OF WELLBEING*

INTRODUCTION

‘Wellbeing’ is a multifaceted concept drawing on both environmental and intrapsychic factors. An ecological model of wellbeing assumes that a healthy ecological system is the foundation for a functional economy and social system that can sustain a high quality of life for its residents. In Western societies, wellbeing is measured using indicators such as asset income, poverty rates, residential stability, and disease and mortality rates (Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, 1997). In non-Western cultures, including those of indigenous Pacific Islanders, human wellbeing is often synonymous with the health and vitality of natural resources in addition to the perpetuation of cultural traditions and a communal identity (McGregor, Minerbi & Matsuoka, 1998; Papa Ola Lokahi, 1992).

A number of theorists have, 1977, 1995; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). Bronfenbrenner (1995) asserted that human proposed ecological systems models that explain the effects of environment on personal identity and predispositions, family structure and roles, and communal networks and patterns. Development and wellbeing were established through a series of reciprocal interactions between biopsychological human beings and their social and physical environments. This proximal process occurs between individuals and their families and within peer, learning, and recreational activities. The significance and impact of features within the proximal realm is apt to vary across cultures.

Social Impact Assessments (SIA) conducted in the context of non-Western cultures, indigenous cultures, or subcultures within a predominant Western one, should consider the culturally distinct properties associated with wellbeing. SIAs are a critical means of determining the anticipated impacts of land development on people in the context of social systems. They provide planners and decision-makers with a basis for deciding whether to
approve development proposals and ways to mitigate negative social impacts. In the past, SIAs have generally omitted variables that are critical to an analysis of impacts affecting indigenous peoples. Factors including spirituality, subsistence practices and indigenous economies, collective and mutual social patterns, sense of place, and “ways of knowing” have been missing from conventional approaches to impact assessment. Yet, as development encroaches closer to pristine ecological and cultural areas, it poses greater threats to the lifeways of indigenous people who draw their existence from the elements of nature.

Native Hawaiians are a prime example of a population that has been severely impacted by Western development. Nevertheless, throughout the islands of Hawai‘i, there are distinct rural Hawaiian communities where the concept of wellbeing is deeply imbued in an interdependence between people and nature, in beliefs in the sacredness of the animate and inanimate world, in collective gathering and sharing, and in the centrality of the ‘ohana or organic family system. Thus, the authors conceptualize an ecological model of wellbeing for indigenous peoples using the phenomena and experience related to rural Native Hawaiian communities.

AN ECOLOGICAL CONTEXT TO HAWAIIAN WELLBEING

In traditional Hawaiian genealogies and origin myths, all life springs from the ‘aina or land and nature. Aloha ‘aina or love of land and nature is a pervasive cultural theme that refers to having a deep appreciation for nature’s abundant offerings and a spiritual rootedness to the land. A legacy connected to ancestral lands, sacred sites, and nature deities is transmitted to each successive generation. A unique set of place-based competencies are instilled in developing children and leads to the formation of the community’s local character. Hawaiian psyche and identity is partly derived from belonging to the land itself (Watson, 1990).
Due to the centrality given to the `aina or sacred land and nature, changes in land and natural resources ultimately impact on the lives of the people at various levels of the social system. Western notions that suggest social systems can remain intact, or that sociocultural impacts can be mitigated in the face of land transformations, imply a degree of separation of people from the land. For Hawaiians and indigenous peoples generally, wellbeing is synonymous with people-environment kinship and an organic relationship that bonds humans to the land. A human ecological analysis is a way to understand how human systems-ranging from the national to community and family levels-interact with the environment and lead to social outcomes. In the case of Native Hawaiian rural communities, the health of all social systems is inherently tied to the `aina. Knowing the dynamic process of interaction of the `ohana and community with natural resources is critical in terms of predicting outcomes spurred by changes to those resources.

**Figure 1:** An Ecological Model of Hawaiian Wellbeing.

The Ecological Model (see Figure 1) is a visual aid in conceptualising how human systems interact within the context of the `aina. The model also assumes that individuals, families and their communities have reciprocal effects on each other. What happens to an individual affects the family. This, in turn, affects the community, and vice versa. Thus, cohesive, healthy, functional families generally produce healthy individuals, who ultimately contribute to healthy communities. Cohesive, healthy communities reinforce the positive behaviours of young people. When
families fall short of their responsibilities, the community may serve as a surrogate source of support, and thereby, prevent children from neglect or delinquency. The ecological model of wellbeing, therefore, serves as a tool when conducting an SIA. The model aids in understanding the systematic relationships that contribute to Hawaiian wellbeing at various levels, and in assessing potential impacts on native wellbeing.

‘ĀINA WELLBEING

The ‘aina (land and natural resources) are the foundation of traditional Native Hawaiian cultural and spiritual custom, belief, and practice. Land and all of nature are alive, respected, treasured, praised and honored. Throughout the islands, many Native Hawaiian ‘ohana in rural communities continue to practice subsistence cultivation, gathering, fishing, and hunting as part of their livelihoods. Rural Hawaiians conduct subsistence activities in accordance with the cultural and spiritual values and responsibilities they were taught by their ancestors who nurtured both physical and spiritual relationships with the ancestral lands. ‘Aina is ‘one hanau, sands of birth, and Kula iwi, resting place of ancestral bones. The land has provided for generations of Native Hawaiians and will provide for those yet to come.

`Āina Wellbeing

Figure 2: Aina Wellbeing.
At the core of traditional Native Hawaiian spirituality is the belief that the land lives as do the ‘uhane, or spirits of family ancestors, who cared for the ancestral lands in their lifetime. The land has provided for generations of Hawaiians, and will provide for those yet to come. In communities where Native Hawaiians live on and work the land, they become knowledgeable about the life of the land. In daily activities, they develop a partnership with the land so as to know when to plant, fish, or heal the mind and body according to the ever changing weather, seasons and moons. Native Hawaiian subsistence practitioners speak of their cultural and spiritual relation to the lands of their ancestors, and their commitment to take care of it and protect it for future generations. Hawaiians acknowledge the ‘aumakua and akua, the ancestral spirits and gods of special areas. They even make offerings to them. They learn the many personalities of the land, its form, character and resources. They name its features as they do their own children. The land is not viewed as a commodity; it is the foundation of their cultural and spiritual identity as Hawaiians. They trace their lineage to the lands in the region as being originally settled by their ancestors. The land is a part of their ‘ohana and they care for it the same as they care for the other members of their families.

The quality and abundance of the natural resources in many rural Hawaiian communities has preserved community wellbeing in those communities. However, an inherent aspect of the ‘ohana values is the practice of conservation to ensure availability of natural resources for present and future generations. The ancestral knowledge about the land and its resources is reinforced through continued subsistence practices. While travelling to the various locations where these traditional cultural practices take place - along dirt roads and trails, by spring-fed streams and the shore-villagers continually renew their cultural knowledge and understanding of the landscape, the place names, traditional names of the winds and the rains, traditional legends, historical cultural sites, and the location of various native plants and animals. The villagers stay alert to the condition of the landscape and the resources, and they observe the changes due to seasonal and lifecycle transformations. This orientation is critical to the preservation of the natural and cultural landscape.

There are five basic principles of Hawaiian stewardship and use of natural and cultural resources, which are relevant to sustaining Native Hawaiian wellbeing. These principles identify the principal elements which must be protected in order to sustain the wellbeing of the ‘aina.
First, the ahupua’a is the basic unit of Hawaiian cultural resource management. An ahupua’a runs from the sea to the mountains and contains a sea fishery and beach, a stretch of kula or open cultivable land and higher up, the forest. The court of the Hawaiian Kingdom described the ahupua’a principle of land use in the case In Re Boundaries of Pulehunui, 4 Haw. 239, 241 (1879) as follows:

A principle very largely obtaining in these divisions of territory [ahupua’a] was that a land should run from the sea to the mountains, thus affording to the chief and his people a fishery residence at the warm seaside, together with products of the high lands, such as fuel, canoe timber, mountain birds, and the right of way to the same, and all the varied products of the intermediate land as might be suitable to the soil and climate of the different altitudes from sea soil to mountainside or top.

Second, the natural elements -land, air, water, ocean- are interconnected and interdependent. The atmosphere affects the lands which, in turn, affects running streams, the watertable and the beaches and ocean. Cultural land management must take all aspects of the natural environment into account. Hawaiians consider the land and ocean to be integrally united, and that these land sections also include the shoreline as well as inshore and offshore ocean areas such as fishponds, reefs, channels, and deep sea fishing grounds. Coastal shrines called fishing ko’a were constructed and maintained as markers for the offshore fishing grounds that were part of that ahupua’a.

Third, of all the natural elements, fresh water is the most important for life and needs to be considered in every aspect of land use and planning. The Hawaiian word for water is wai and the Hawaiian word for wealth is waiwai, indicating that water is the source of wellbeing and wealth.

Fourth, Hawaiians ancestors studied the natural elements and the land and became very familiar with its features and assets. Ancestral knowledge of the land was recorded and passed down through place names. Chants name the winds, rains, features of particular districts, and legends. Hawaiians applied their expert knowledge of the natural environment in constructing their homes, temples, cultivation, and irrigation networks. Hawaiian place names, chants and legends inform Hawaiians -and others who know the traditions -of the natural and cultural resources of a particular district. Insights about the natural and cultural resources inform those who use the land about how to locate and construct structures and infrastructure so as to have the least negative impact on the land. This ancestral knowledge about the
land and its resources is reinforced through continued subsistence practices.

Fifth, an inherent aspect of Hawaiian stewardship and use of cultural and natural resources is the practice of malama ‘aina or conservation to ensure the sustainability of natural resources for present and future generations. These rules of behavior are tied to cultural beliefs and values regarding: (1) respect of the ‘aina, (2) the virtue of sharing and not taking too much, and (3) a holistic perspective of organisms and ecosystems that emphasize balance and coexistence. The Hawaiian outlook, which shapes these customs and practices, is lokahi or maintaining spiritual, cultural, and natural balance with the elemental life forces of nature. Hawaiian families who rely upon subsistence for a primary part of their diet respect and care for their surrounding natural resources. They only use and take what is needed in order to allow the natural resources to reproduce. They share what is gathered with family and neighbors. Through understanding the cycles of the various natural resources-and how changes in the moon phase and the seasons affect the abundance and distribution of the resources-the subsistence practitioners are able to plan and adjust their activities to keep the resources healthy. Such knowledge has been passed down from generation to generation, through working alongside their kupuna or elders.

Throughout the islands of Hawai‘i, wellbeing and subsistence livelihoods thrive in particular rural communities (Matsuoka, McGregor & Minerbi, 1997). Surrounding these communities are pristine and abundant natural resources in the ocean, the streams, and the forest. This is largely due to the continued practices of aloha ‘aina/kai (cherish the land and ocean) and malama ‘aina/kai (care for the land and ocean). These rural communities were bypassed by mainstream economic, political, and social development (Matsuoka et al., 1997). Hawaiians living in these communities continued, as their ancestors before them, to practise subsistence cultivation, gathering, fishing and hunting for survival. Thus, we find in these areas that the natural resources sustained a subsistence lifestyle, and that this subsistence lifestyle, in return, sustained the natural resources.

A comprehensive SIA would assess impacts on natural and cultural resources utilized by indigenous peoples for subsistence, cultural, and spiritual purposes. Impacts to assess include changes in the condition, integrity, use, access to, boundaries of, ownership of, and quality of experience with natural and cultural resources.
Figure 3: Nation Wellbeing.

NATION WELLBEING

Native Hawaiian ʻohana and communities all function within the framework of a sovereign nation. A nation is a historically constituted stable community with a shared unique language; culture and spirituality; ancestral national lands; economic life and governance structure (see Figure 3). Native Hawaiian language, which was at the edge of extinction in the 1980s, has made a remarkable recovery with the establishment of Punana Leo Hawaiian language immersion preschools, the Kula Kaiapuni/Native Hawaiian Language Immersion Public Schools, and various Hawaiian language charter schools. In the 1999-2000 school
year, for example, some 1750 students were enrolled in 18 Hawaiian language immersion public schools.

Beginning in the 1970s, Native Hawaiians engaged in a cultural renaissance which reaffirmed the consciousness, pride, and practice of Hawaiian cultural and spiritual customs and beliefs. In rallying around protection of the island of Kaho'olawe from bombing by the United States military, the traditional practice of aloha 'aina gained prominence and Hawaiian religious practices, such as the Makahiki or annual harvest ceremonies were revived on the island. Traditional navigational arts and skills were revived with the transpacific voyages of the Polynesian Voyaging Society on the traditional voyaging canoes, Hokule'a, the Hawai'i Loa, and the Makali'i. The schools that teach traditional Hawaiian dance and chant, Halau hula, increased and flourished. La'au Lapa'u, traditional herbal and spiritual healing practices were recognized as valid holistic medicinal practices. Hawaiian studies, from the elementary to university level, was established as part of the regular curricula. Hawaiian music evolved into new forms of expression and gained greater popularity.

Rural Hawaiian communities which were threatened with development organized to protect their subsistence livelihoods, ancestral landholdings and natural resources in their districts from the assault of proposed tourist, commercial and industrial development. For example, on the island of Hawai‘i, Ka‘u Hawaiians formed the Ka ‘Ohana O KaLae to protect the natural and cultural resources of their district from a planned spaceport to launch missiles. The Pele Defense Fund formed to protect the volcano deity, Pele, from the development of geothermal energy to fuel electric plants. On the island of Moloka‘i, community groups (e.g. Hui Ala Loa, Ka Leo O Mana‘e, and Hui Ho‘opakela ‘Aina) formed to protect the natural and cultural resources from tourist resort development.

Native Hawaiians have not had their own distinct governance structure, since the Hawaiian monarchy was overthrown by United States naval forces on January 17, 1893. One hundred years later in November 1993, the United States Congress passed an Apology Resolution (Public Law 103-150, 107 Stat. 1510) which explicitly acknowledged that the inherent sovereignty of the Native Hawaiian people at the time of the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom was never relinquished. The unique and distinct status of Native Hawaiians was also recognized. The Resolution stated, “the Native Hawaiian people are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territory, and their
cultural identity in accordance with their own spiritual and traditional beliefs, customs, practices, language, and social institutions.”

At one level, nation wellbeing is reflected in the exercise of indigenous rights. These would include rights customarily and traditionally exercised for subsistence, cultural, and religious purposes, such as access rights, fishing rights, and water rights. Impacts on Hawaiian Rights would include any change which would affect the exercise of the Hawaiian rights and responsibilities outlined above. Changes that would affect the quality, integrity, use of, and access to the natural and cultural resources would constitute an impact upon the rights of Native Hawaiians. Development projects and infrastructure can affect the present and future access to, the condition and the use of natural resources.

The national land base of the Native Hawaiian people include lands now under US federal and state governments which were originally the Crown and Government lands of the Kingdom of Hawai‘i. It also includes lands which are part of charitable trusts endowed by the Hawaiian chiefs for their people, including the trust lands of The Kamehameha Schools, the Queen Emma Foundation, the Queen Lili‘uokalani Children’s Center, and the Lunalilo Home. Development projects can affect future uses of the lands, the value of the lands, and revenues generated from the leases, rents, royalties, and use fees.

COMMUNITY WELLBEING

Traditional Hawaiian communities can be conceptualised as aggregates of family or ’ohana systems which have a long history of residing in one locale. The term wahi noholike I ka po’e is a Hawaiian term for community that translates into “the place where people live together.”

The term suggests that social and environmental factors have shaped the character and values of residents over a long evolutionary course. Further, communal and cultural identity is formed by lengthy exposure to a set of physical attributes and by the transmission of place-based behaviors and mores.

A sense of place, which has spiritual and psychological meaning, is derived over time from a reliance on the natural resources within a prescribed locale. Social structures and systems emerged from the local economy, and cultural beliefs and spirituality support and promote human wellbeing. Communities are habitats that have critical effects on human behavior. Hawaiian communities are not merely places for co-existence, they are places for social interaction and organisational activity, and the development of a collective identity.
Hawaiians and other Pacific peoples place a premium on gathering places where formal and informal social, cultural, and political activities take place. Today’s gathering places may be of historic and spiritual importance where forebears engaged in similar events in earlier times. The *mana* or spiritual energy from these places bolster contemporary practice and connect people with their past. The significance of gathering places that have historic meaning comes from a continuity that brings together ancestral legacies and modern, often restorative activities.

Physical settings are critical in shaping and guiding human behavior. Qualities emitted from the environment condition behavior and act as determinants of future behavior. Some gathering places serve to elicit formal behavioral protocols associated with traditional events and spiritual beliefs. They may be places of worship where chants, prayers, and gift-giving are a way to pay homage to deities. Ceremonies carry with them prescriptive and proscriptive norms related to social hierarchies, styles of dress, and inappropriate behaviors.
In Hawaiian culture, there is also the notion of pu‘uhonua or place of refuge. They are historic places where individuals under threat can find respite and safety.

Gathering places, such as recreational facilities and community centers, and places associated with certain activities, such as schools and churches, promote prosocial behaviors. The opportunity to engage regularly in structured activities is inversely related to involvement in anti-social activities that are often attributed to a lack of structure and adult supervision. Physical facilities are the focal point, or node of activity, for community and family events and youth activities. Social functions such as luau that celebrate the first anniversary of the birth of a child, or a high school graduation, are often held at community centers and social halls. They bring together residents in celebrations which enhance social bonds and community cohesiveness.

Communities that have places for social gathering are able to offer programs and services to meet the desires and needs of residents, to influence the socialisation of children, and support senior citizens. Community gathering places also include less formal and physically nondescript settings. They may be at the beach, the park, a playground, restaurants and shopping areas. They are places where people, drawn together by common interests and schedules, gather to converse and find mutual social support. Informal gathering places are especially critical to more vulnerable age cohorts such as the elderly and youth.

Opportunities to engage in prosocial cultural activities, however, are not always associated with a community center or physical structure. Hawaiian youth are often mentored in various cultural activities that occur in natural environs. The development or restoration of a lo‘i kalo (taro patch) and fishponds, the gathering of medicinal plants and learning of their uses, learning traditional fishing and gathering methods, canoe paddling, and the maintenance of sacred areas are examples of traditional activities that are the basis for a cultural resurgence.

Traditionally, Hawaiians were the caretakers of resources and ecosystems that lie within or are adjacent to their communities. They practised a system referred to as kapu, which carried highly prescriptive norms related to resource management. For example, fish and limu (seaweed) were harvested seasonally and not during spawning season. When it was deemed that resource levels were declining, areas were designated off-limits to fishers and harvesters. Violators were severely punished. Many of the historic sentiments and practices related to resource
management and kapu remain today. The long-time residents of an area assume caretaking responsibility for resource management within their geographic domain and dissuade outsiders from coming in—especially those who are inclined to misuse or over-harvest resources for commercial purposes.

In some communities, critical habitats have the designation of Community Management Areas. That is, community residents are authorized to manage and patrol particular resource areas. There are strict controls placed on times, amounts, species/types, and methods used in acquiring resources.

Many communities have been involved in initiatives to empower themselves through community-based planning processes. They have engaged multiple constituencies in a dialogue to develop a vision for their community. Mapping techniques are often used to identify the services, resources, and other qualities that lie within the community. It is a means to assess deficits and strengths as a basis for developing a strategic plan. Community Development Corporations are also becoming a common approach to promoting a range of community-based activities related to programs and services, economic and technical innovations, resource protection and sustainability, and cultural preservation.

Many Hawaiian communities have been economically deprived and marginalised by a western market economy. Economic development and formal jobs are not analogous to human wellbeing. In fact, they often detract from traditional and customary practices by diminishing vital natural resources, depriving access to traditional grounds, and lead to environmental and cultural degradation. Conversely, many community-based economic initiatives in Hawaiian communities reflect a set of values and principles that emphasise empowerment and self-sufficiency, cultural preservation and resource conservation and protection.

Subsistence economies in rural Hawaiian communities need to be recognised as viable alternatives to western economic models. The protection of natural resources and habitats, access routes, and associated customs and practices will ensure the continuation of indigenous economies that are the foundation to Hawaiian culture and wellbeing.

When assessing economic vitality related to Hawaiians and other indigenous communities, it is critical to redress notions and biases related to formalised work, employment rates, gross domestic product and other economic indicators. The benefits derived from subsistence economies are not adequately valued because they cannot be enumerat-
ed. Subsistence provides a regimen of physical activity that binds practitioners to the ‘aina, enhances a nature-based spirituality, produces healthy food products for family consumption, cultivates social cohesion in the community through the sharing and exchange of resources, and promotes social welfare as younger practitioners share resources with older, less ambulatory residents. A regimen of subsistence-related activities reduces the likelihood of less healthy behaviors (e.g., listlessness leading to obesity, substance abuse) that are often associated with having too much discretionary time.

An economic system that is based on sharing and exchange involves other activities beyond the transfer of goods. For instance, childcare, adult care, and a variety of other service exchange (e.g., hula lessons, rock wall building) represent aspects of an indigenous economic system where skills are a commodity. Small, community-based businesses that serve to keep money in the community, and employ family members and local residents, can be encouraged through business development programs and low-interest start-up loans. Job training programs teach skills to youth and young adults and help to orient the previously unemployed or unemployable to work roles.

Community-based strategic planning is a community-wide process involving the major constituent or stakeholder groups. The process involves creating a vision for the future of the community and then developing strategies on how to implement the vision. Enhancing social capital is a critical precursor to community building. This involves stimulating resident interest in community affairs and higher levels of civic participation. This facilitates the building of social bonds in order to form collaborative non-political associations.

The community-building process focuses on building organisational capacity through participation and leadership development. The process begins with support for those recognised community leaders who are able to garner the support and participation of residents as they move towards developing and implementing a set of community-based goals and objectives. Building capacity requires an organisational structure and process, resources, training and staff development, and people qualified to perform specialised activities. Leadership development is critical to the longevity of an organisation as leaders retire from civic duty and young leaders are needed to continue the mission.

The following are types of impacts that might be considered when examining Native Hawaiian and indigenous communities in the
conduct of an SIA:

- Change in multicultural balance/percent leading to greater cultural homogeneity and decreased diversity
- Alteration or loss of social/cultural activity nodes/interchange
- Change in adequacy of social/cultural infrastructure to accommodate community needs related to quality
- Change in population size, distribution/nodes, in relation to multiculturalism
- Change in demographic characteristics of a community which correlates with changing values
- Disruption in the natural course of community development, continuity, and family permanence
- Change in activities and attributes that constitute lifestyle/lifeways; the persistence of indigenous economies
- Increase in rate, type, and severity of crimes with indigenous perpetrators
- Increase in rate of substance abuse and type of substance; its influence on behavior and related problems (e.g., crime)
- Change in rate, patterns and severity of domestic violence; family and community response
- Change in educational achievement and aptitude; delinquency (e.g. substance abuse, crime, status offences); socio-emotional issues/family supports; educational, employment, and recreational opportunities
- Change in social cohesion; degree of social/racial integration or conflict; changes in community leadership
- Change in number and types of events/activities, participation rates, relevance to traditional and contemporary conditions, decision-making power
- Change in levels of community/cultural identity, personal sense of connection and pride tied to a locale; related to genealogical and intergenerational ties.

`OHANA WELLBEING

Native Hawaiians, like other indigenous peoples, sustain extended family relationships that are multigenerational. In Hawaiian, the `ohana or family, extends beyond the immediate family to include distant cousins and `keiki hänai (adopted children). `Ohana ties were closest to but not limited to the living or to those born into blood relationship” (Pukui, 1972, 167). This deep sense of relatedness is at the core of Hawaiian values, beliefs, ways of knowing and being, and Hawaiians’ relationship with the `äina (earth, land). A culturally appropriate and
relevant SIA, therefore, requires an understanding of Hawaiian ways—the nature of relationships, values, beliefs, interactions, processes, and traditions that form the foundation of harmonious `ohana life.

As members of various `ohana, Native Hawaiians are linked to a long line of progenitors, descendants and unborn future generations in a manner that transcends time. This connection between past, present and future is embodied in the concept of triple piko, which refers to shared spiritual and emotional bonds (piko has many meanings: umbilical cord, genital organs, crown of the head, or relationship with one’s ancestors, living relatives and descendants) (Pukui, 1972, 182). To begin with, Native Hawaiians are symbolically connected to their ancestors via the po’o (head), where the family aumäku (ancestor gods; the god spirits of those who were in life forebears of those now living) hover and his own ‘uhane (spirit) resides (Pukui, 1972: 35,188). In the ‘Ohana Wellbeing (see Figure 5) segment of the Model of Hawaiian Wellbeing (MHW), we refer to this connection as the piko aumäku, the link to one’s ancestors or heritage. Second, a Native Hawaiian’s

**Figure 5:** Family Wellbeing Ohana Wellbeing.
connection to her/his immediate family and the present is represented by *piko ‘iēwe* (placenta) as in the bond between mother and infant. Finally, the connection to future generations is represented by *piko ‘iwi kuamo’o* (genitals).

This traditional understanding of the connection between Native Hawaiians and *piko amumäkua, piko ‘iēwe* and *piko ‘iwi kuamo’o*, ancestral heritage, the immediate family and future generations, is a central concept in revitalizing, sustaining and fostering *‘ohana* wellbeing. Figure 5 depicts the key elements of the triple *piko* conceptualization: values, beliefs, processes, knowledge, resources, and practices that support *‘ohana* wellbeing. Equally important, the *lokahi* (balance or harmony) of the triple *piko* processes in relation to the individual and his *‘ohana* must be examined in the assessment of wellbeing among Native Hawaiians (Blaisdell and Mokuau, 1991).

The model hypothesizes that *‘ohana* wellbeing is enhanced when:

1. Hawaiians *mälama ‘āina* (care for the land, earth) reaffirming their sense of place and their relationship to the ancestral lands and genealogy, the *piko amumäkua*;

2. The activities, processes and resources that support and enhance the immediate or present family which includes the extended family (*piko ‘iēwe*) are maintained; and

3. The transmission of culture, language, values and Hawaiian ways of knowing and being are sustained and carried forward for future generations (*piko ‘iwi kuamo’o*).

The triple *piko* conceptualization of *‘ohana* wellbeing finds support in systems-based research on healthy family processes (Walsh, 1998), which has identified key processes that contribute to family resilience and wellbeing:

1. **Family belief systems:** Utilizing relationally-based strengths, making meaning of adversity, positive outlook, transcendence and spirituality;

2. **Organizational patterns:** Flexibility, connectedness, mutual support, and social and economic resources;

3. **Communication processes:** Clarity, open emotional expression, collaborative problem solving.

Another essential piece to understanding the nature of wellbeing among Native Hawaiians is the distinction between the relational and linear worldviews. The relational perspective recognizes the intuitive, spiritual, non-temporal, fluid nature of collective cultures in their search for balance and harmony in all relationships between humans, nature, earth and the universe as well as
the events of life (Cross, 1998). In contrast, the linear worldview, the dominant perspective of western science, holds that cause always precedes effect. This temporal view has enabled the development of narrowly defined, sophisticated measurement techniques, which have facilitated new knowledge, theories and interventions (Cross, 1998) to be performed by sanctioned experts. However, the linear perspective may obscure our view of people’s processes within their cultural, geopolitical and historic contexts. For example, the focus of treatment for mental illness among indigenous people living in a western society is most often the individual, not adjustments to the social systems or environmental circumstances. Nor do treatments take into account the indigenous group’s worldview. This limits the potential for healing that could include cultural practices and family support networks.

The distinction between relational and linear worldviews is a critical prerequisite to developing funding policies that support the wellbeing of indigenous people such as Hawaiians. For example, an indigenous family seeking help for issues around emotional wellbeing utilizing the public health system or medical insurance is usually limited to western psychiatric treatment services. The culturally-based practice such as ho’oponopono-a well-defined healing process in Hawaiian culture—is not a recognized treatment option.

The relational-linear distinction can also serve as an aid in recognizing the limitations of conducting SIAs that exclusively utilise quantitative indicators and methods. For example, the effectiveness of a social policy designed to get Hawaiian families off welfare and back to work with the help of a time-limited structure of resources cannot be measured simply by the number of individuals that find employment. A realistic evaluation will need to examine: the suitability of job options for the individual, appropriate training methods that accommodate cultural nuances, and consider the family’s beliefs regarding employment, for example, gender appropriate work, and socio-cultural norms about productivity and work.

Changes that cause disruption and imbalance may impact `ohana stability and wellbeing in multiple ways. The family’s structure, its ability to maintain its economic means of survival, its organizational patterns, communication processes and belief system may be impacted by:

- Change in the `ohana family system (e.g. increase in nuclear families rather than the traditional extended family, and single parent families)
• Change in marital status (e.g. increase in divorce, widowhood, and isolation of individuals)
• Household composition, change in the number of families per household
• Imbalanced age distribution (e.g. more children under 18 or more adults per household, isolation of the elderly)
• Increased employment, unemployment or under-employment
• Change in employment status (e.g. increased dependency on public assistance, decline in subsistence resources)
• Change in amount of gross family income and or subsistence resources
• Change in types and levels of socio-emotional support: food, resource sharing, advice sharing, child-care rearing, elderly care, kokua labor (shared labor), hanai children (family adoption)
• Change in number of relatives living within close proximity and kinship patterns
• Intergenerational conflicts (e.g. differential acculturation), change in quality of relational exchange between children, parents and grandparents
• Departure/retention of youth, increased retention or out-migration of youth
• Housing situation, increased home ownership, renting or homelessness
• Increased rates of domestic violence, incest/child sexual abuse
• Change in teen pregnancy rate
• Youth psychosocial problems, change in rate of mental health and delinquency among youth
• Change in general patterns and practices related to child-rearing which ultimately lead to changing values and personality, land dispossession and loss of burial family grounds/sites
• Change from a collective/family orientation to an individualistic identity

Unfortunately, within the context of western society, Native Hawaiian practices and family processes that maintain lokahi or harmony and balance within the `ohana may be a source of conflict to the individual and therefore not always serve Native Hawaiians’ survival in the mainstream society. For example, when the transmission of culture (or lack of culture transmission which is critical to Hawaiians’ sense of self) contributes to discord
with the mainstream society, it may affect the individual’s outlook on life, be a source of stress, and contribute to depression or loss of meaningfulness in life. Depression in one ʻohana member may affect other members, leaving them physically, emotionally, economically and spiritually vulnerable (Crabbe, 1998). Therefore, a SIA of indigenous families requires multifaceted efforts. In order to capture important processes and complexities, they need to examine family systems, resiliency processes, maintenance of belief systems, spirituality, organizational patterns and communication as well as the historic geopolitical context of their survival.

CONCLUSION

The model of Hawaiian well-being presented here is based on a structural adaptation of an ecological paradigm. It can be used to assess critically changes in the lifeways of Hawaiians and other indigenous peoples. We have emphasized the significance of cultural systems and their distinct components. The ecological paradigm provides us with a basis for understanding the dynamic relationship between people and their environments. Special emphasis was placed on the organic relationship Hawaiians have with the land and sea.

The conceptualization calls for novel and culturally appropriate approaches to designing SIAs. Cultural Impact Assessments (CIA) have become a major legal requirement in the approval process for development in Hawaii. Within the United States, numerous laws at the federal, state and county levels impinge on the legal compliance and defensibility of CIAs (Federal Clean Water Act, National Register Bulletin, Hawaii Revised Statute 343). Despite such legal requirements, CIA guidelines continue to be amorphous and they vary in terms of how they are conducted. The framework presented in this paper provides a scope of analysis and study that is intended to promote consistency, uniformity, integrity, and higher levels of impact predictability.

We have promoted a conceptual model that represents cultural issues and meanings that are drawn from within Hawaiian culture. We have paired these elements with a human ecological approach that is highly consistent with Hawaiian phenomenology. We believe that these are critical first steps towards developing culturally appropriate approaches to assessing the sociocultural impacts of development. The social wellbeing of Hawaiians and other indigenous groups is at stake when development encroaches on their traditional domains. New approaches to social and cultural assessment must reflect the complexities and
subtleties, as well as the tangible and intangible aspects of their life experiences to preserve the wellbeing of Indigenous groups.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


