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TOWARDS INDIGENOUS POLICY AND PRACTICE: A TUVALUAN FRAMEWORK FOR WELLBEING, OLA LEI

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ABSTRACT: Ola Lei 'wellbeing' is an ethnographically derived framework that builds upon Tuvaluan cultural concepts and practices. It has value as a conceptual model by which to assess and build health, education and development initiatives. Te feke 'the octopus' represents what Tuvaluans think and do about wellbeing, based on ethnographic research by the first author. Like the octopus, this framework is dynamic and adaptable, illustrating how wellbeing intertwines with social, cultural, economic and spiritual life, with education, with land and ocean. After describing the components of Ola Lei and how they were derived from participant observation and interviews, we suggest applications in policy and practice. The Ola Lei Framework articulated here provides an example of scholars taking indigenous concepts seriously as theory.

Keywords: health, wellbeing, indigenous frameworks, Ola Lei Framework, Pacific, Tuvalu

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Everyone aspires to a good life. "But what makes for a good life?" (OECD 2017). And how do nations, organisations and institutions develop models of health and wellbeing that align to their people's ideas, values and practices? These key questions occupied Tufoua during his doctoral ethnographic research with Tuvaluans in Funafuti and Vaitupu, Tuvalu, and in New Zealand, from 2010 to 2014. (See Appendix for a description of our team's research process.) His first step was to define health, but this was no easy question, as the following discussion shows.[1]

Tufoua: You may know that this Tuvaluan word, ola lei, is now used by us as a Tuvaluan word for this English word, health, right? What is your understanding about this word, ola lei? What is ola lei to you?

Interviewee: Ola lei? You mean ola lei? [looks stonily at the ceiling]

Tufoua: Yes! Ola lei.

Interviewee: Oh! Oh [pause]. Oh [silent for eight to ten seconds]. Ola lei, huh?

Tufoua: Yes.

Interviewee: You mean which ola lei? Ola lei in terms of having good life or ola lei in terms of the Department of Health?

Tufoua: Any.

Interviewee: Uhmmm [pause]. Ola lei, huh? Oh [pause]. Oh [pause]. It is hard, aye? I don't know [pause]. I could not express it in words.

Tufoua: Why not?

Interviewee: I don't know [pause]. Probably because ola lei is a very big word, aye? Ola lei has so many tentacles [pause]. Like the tentacles of an octopus [*te feke*] [laughs].

In Tuvalu, the term *ola lei* usually encompasses both the Department of Health's concept of 'health' and the local concept of 'good life', 'wellbeing' or (in the verb form) 'living well'. We also use ola lei to include both meanings. This interviewee's use of *te feke* 'the octopus' to illustrate the complexity of ola lei became the basis for the visual model we later developed as the Ola Lei Framework (Fig. 1), which incorporates these indigenous concepts and is the synthesis of our research.[2]

PACIFIC CONCEPTS OF WELLBEING

Pacific concepts of wellbeing have continued to attract research attention in the 36 years since *Healing Practices in the South Pacific* (Parsons 1985a) was published and are increasingly seen as essential for effective planning and service delivery. Though specific emphases and ideas regarding health and wellbeing differ among Pacific societies, commonalities are also apparent. Some of these include an emphasis on the importance of harmonious relations with the living, the spirit world and the environment; the centrality of the collectivity; the relevance of Christianity and spirituality more generally; and physical–mental–social dimensions (Anae *et al*. 2002; Capstick *et al.* 2009; Durie 1994; Fountain and Troughton 2019; Kupa 2009; Laing and Mitaera 1994; Macpherson and Macpherson 1990; McGrath 2003; Mila-Schaaf 2009; Taniela *et al*. 2012). In sum, as noted by Sanga and Reynolds (2020: 262) in their recent review of indigenous Pacific research, "Pacific

theoretical frameworks generally assert a holistic view of the world. As a consequence, many areas of life such as leadership, research, health, and education may all be navigated through a common framework." Only some qualities of these indigenous approaches are congruent with the dominant western medical orientation to health, however.

As a result, research has shown indigenous wellness concepts to be useful in a range of applied contexts. For example, Anae and colleagues (2010: 5), focusing on facilitating the educational success of Pasifika 'a term used in New Zealand for people of Pacific Islands, especially Polynesian, heritage' students in New Zealand, captured the importance of caring for relatedness in the phrase "*teu le va*". Attention to the *teu* 'nurturing' of the *va* 'space between' sustains optimal relationships among people and all beings, as Mila-Schaaf and Hudson (2009) argued when discussing culturally appropriate approaches to Pasifika mental health. Getting along together, working together and maintaining social and spiritual harmony are also seen as essential in Tuvalu.

Similar values, and the practices supporting them, are widely shared across the Pacific as well. In Sāmoa, for example, scholars have repeatedly referenced the importance of equilibrium between people, and people and *aitu* 'spirits', for health and wellbeing (e.g., Macpherson 1985: 13; Macpherson and Macpherson 1990: 151). Drozdow-St Christian (2002) documented some of the ways in which this was achieved in Sāmoa. Among Sāmoan people in New Zealand, the importance of *va fealoa'i* 'reciprocal and harmonious relationships' within families to produce good people was also noted in a study carried out in the late 1990s (Anae *et al*. 2000: 62). In Tonga, as Parsons (1985b: 90) explains, harmony in communities and between people both living and dead is what maintains wellbeing. Many additional comparisons could be adduced. In all these approaches, conceptual and practical dimensions of life, as well as individual and group dimensions, are seen as conjoined.

In addition, as Sanga and Reynolds (2020) noted, metaphor is frequently used to articulate the interconnections. Just as Tufoua found in Tuvalu, the image of the octopus seems to be especially resonant with Pacific understandings of health and wellbeing. For example, Pere (1988) used the image of the octopus, *te wheke*, in her description of Māori health, with the head of the octopus representing the family unit and the tentacles various dimensions of health. Her model expanded on the more familiar *te whare tapa whā* 'four cornerstones of Māori health' offered by Mason Durie (1994: 77), who helpfully compared te whare and te wheke models and one other Māori metaphor, *ngā pou mana* 'four supports', in his influential book, *Whaiora.* All three Māori models of health see balance in various dimensions of health and harmonious relationships among people, the spiritual realm

and the environment as key to wellbeing. Like them, the Tuvalu model of te feke presents the various aspects of wellbeing as intertwined and recognises the key roles played by spirituality, relatedness, vitality and cultural knowledge and practices. There are two major differences between the feke and wheke models, however. One is that the feke metaphor grew out of specific ethnographic research; the second is that it identifies both values and the practical guidelines which together provide support for those values.

The Ola Lei Framework described here contributes an additional research-based Pacific model of wellbeing and specifies the activities that are seen as enabling it. As will become apparent below, the Tuvaluan view of health intertwines relational, economic, physical and spiritual dimensions of life, offering both explanatory utility and practical guidelines for living well. This relational Tuvaluan approach to wellbeing is an example of local theory (Connell 2007: 207), grounded in ethnographic fieldwork and presented through a visual metaphor resonant with local meaning.

Tuvalu's isolation and limited resources make development of effective, culturally responsive health efforts particularly important. This independent Polynesian nation, the fourth smallest in the world, consists of nine small coral atolls and reef islands scattered over a 650 km arc in the Pacific Ocean. The total land area is only 26 km^2 and population density is high.[3] Over half the population now lives in the crowded capital, Funafuti, drawn there by the logistics of transport, medical needs, access to government facilities, ties with relatives already there, economic opportunities and entrepreneurial ambitions. Meanwhile, the seven outer island communities remain vibrant, the heart of social life and identity, though transportation challenges limit medical and other services. Throughout Tuvalu, most food is imported, wage employment is scarce and climate change brings increasing threats from tropical cyclones, drought and rising waters.

Offsetting these limitations are significant cultural advantages. These include egalitarian social institutions, communitarian values and sharing-based economic traditions. Though amalgamated from eight distinctive communities, the nation of Tuvalu has a single language,[4] one dominant religious tradition and a generally shared cultural orientation only partially disrupted by colonial experiences. Traditions underlying contemporary life largely derive from the cultural adaptations that facilitated survival in the inherently marginal, precarious environment of these low coral islands. The Tuvaluan approach to wellness described below is also intimately informed by this long-standing context of precarity. As will become apparent, both its value components and practical guidelines are culturally responsive to local conditions and health challenges.

WHAT IS OLA LEI AND HOW DOES ONE ACHIEVE IT?

We think of theory as a tool to help us understand the world. Typically, a theory comprises a number of interrelated concepts. For example, biological theories of human health and wellbeing would posit humans as organisms living in relation with their environment and introduce concepts of infectious agents, immune response, hygiene and so on. More holistic theories of health introduce social, cultural and spiritual components and include concepts like social stressors and social support which interact with human biology and environment. The Ola Lei Framework is an example of a holistic theory based in Tuvaluan thought and practice, which nowadays also incorporates some elements of biomedical theory.

Seeking a holistic understanding of Tuvaluan ideas about health and wellbeing, Tufoua repeatedly put the question "What is ola lei?" to community elders and leaders, health professionals and traditional healers, schoolteachers, students and community members. His participant observation in schools, family households, communal activities and hospitals provided additional information about ola lei practices. Of course, since people focus inevitably on characteristics most relevant to their personal experience and understanding, not everyone identified all of the qualities and practices included in the final framework. However, integration between the conceptual and practical aspects of ola lei proved to be a defining feature of Tufoua's discussions with individuals and of his ethnographic observations. In the visual model developed from his research data, values that people focused on form the head of the octopus, and the practices, the tentacles (see Fig. 1).

THE HEAD OF THE OCTOPUS: QUALITIES OF OLA LEI

Four central qualities together constitute the head of the octopus: *filemuu* 'harmoniousness, peacefulness', *fiafia* 'happiness, contentment', *malosi* 'fitness' and *ola leva* 'longevity'. All of these qualities are interrelated and mutually supportive in complex ways. While malosi and ola leva primarily relate to a physical state of wellbeing, filemuu and fiafia make a primarily emotional connection and also have spiritual resonances. As will become apparent, an emphasis on relationality underlies them all.

Filemuu 'Harmoniousness, Peacefulness'

Filemuu assumes that fights and arguments will be avoided or minimised and that people will interact in peaceful, respectful ways, thereby creating a harmonious society. Peacefulness is a source of pride for Tuvaluans; its maintenance is a conscious goal and its absence a source of shame. In

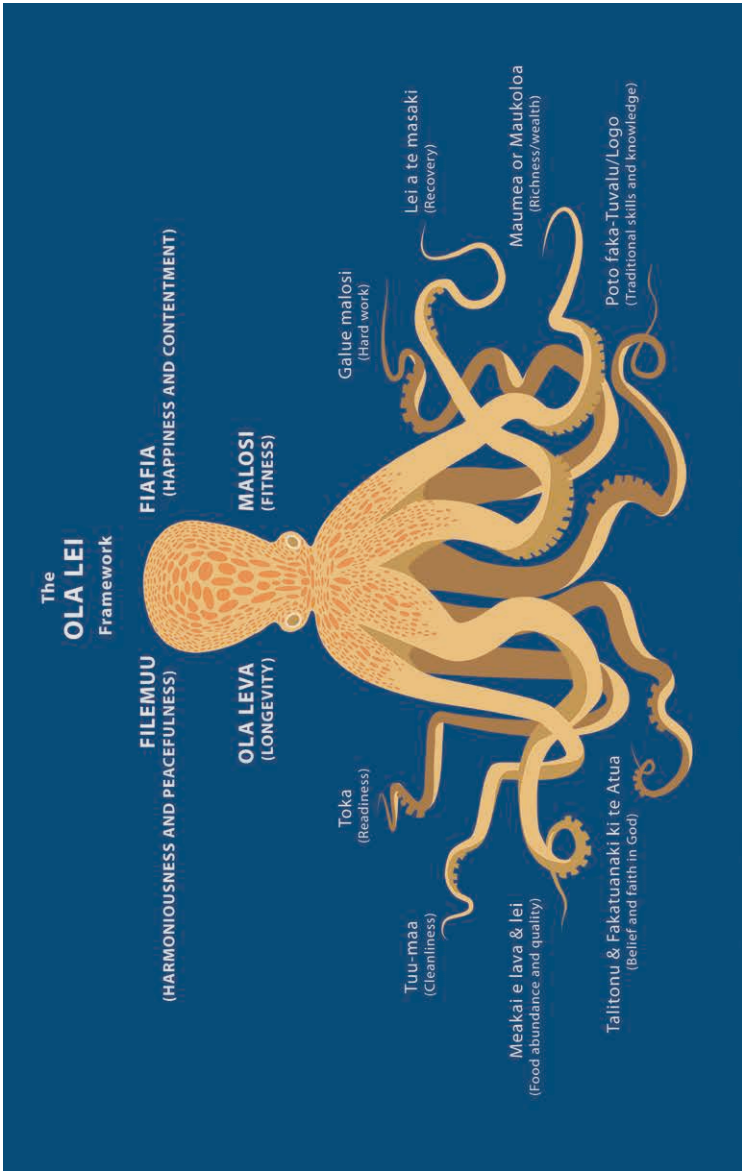

Figure 1. The *Ola Lei* conceptual framework.

village social settings and family life alike, care is taken to maintain the calm decorousness that embodies filemuu, and parents are expected to teach their children to sit quietly in gatherings. As the following incident demonstrates, rowdy behaviour is quickly censored:

> In the church services that I attended, children were often seated in the front of the church, with a few Sunday school teachers surrounding them. If some kids were rowdy, a teacher would call out with a stern voice: '*Filemuu!*' The kids would quickly calm down. (Tufoua's fieldnotes 2011)

Community people see filemuu as the essential context for a lifestyle conducive to wellbeing.

Deeply embedded in traditional customs, activities and value systems, filemuu was sometimes seen by adult interviewees as a point of concern. For example, several elders said that they feared for community wellbeing because of increasing disregard of filemuu. As one explained:

> Some other things that I can see these days … those people who are trying to break our customs and traditions. … people who carelessly [get] drunk and [go] shouting around in the village … That's not ola lei! (Community elder and healer, 60+ years old)

In most Tuvaluan communities, people are prohibited from making noise after ten at night or holding drinking parties within the village since these typically involve rowdy behaviour and often culminate in fighting. Some interviewees simply equated filemuu with community wellbeing. For example, one middle-aged school matron asserted: "Ola lei is when we or students live happily and peacefully."

As Chambers and Chambers (2001: 191–218) documented for Nanumea, social life in Tuvalu is intensively organised by an array of groupings with overlapping memberships, a structure that militates against polarisation and development of divisive factions. Public displays of structured competition both express and reinforce the community solidarity on which filemuu depends. Demonstrations of *lotofenua* 'community heartedness' are expected from leaders and community members alike. The practical aspects of ola lei described below provide numerous examples of filemuu-supporting behaviours.

But despite the value placed on cohesion and filemuu, its achievement is always tenuous, a fact with which leaders at all levels must come to terms. When conflicting relationships or strong differences develop within a community, the space between different factions is expected to be negotiated,

reconciled and nurtured. Relatives, as well as community and religious officials, are expected to take leadership roles to resolve disagreements and restore filemuu. While filemuu is primarily expected to be taught in the home, it is continually reinforced in all social interactions and by behavioural expectations as well. For example, calling attention to one's own achievements is discouraged and people should avoid seeking personal recognition, practices that help maintain harmonious public interactions. Like other institutionalised forms of social control, such expectations reinforce the community cohesion on which Tuvaluan social life is premised. One primary school headteacher suggested that traditional forms of respect and peaceful living should be taught explicitly in school, lest the emphasis on physical health in the school curriculum overshadow the relational values seen as so essential to Tuvaluan wellbeing. Interestingly, none of the students interviewed identified filemuu as contributing to health.

Fiafia 'Happiness, Contentment'

Most afternoons during fieldwork on Vaitupu, Tufoua went to chief Seu's house to tell stories and play board games. One afternoon the chief told Tufoua that he had heard about a friend's interview regarding ola lei.

> *Tufoua:* Yes … I did interview him on what he knows or what his explanation is about this word: ola lei.
>
> *Chief:* Ola lei? Ola lei?
>
> *Tufoua:* Yes, ola lei. What do you think? Is this board game we play every day part of ola lei? [laughs]
>
> *Chief:* [laughs] Brother, this game … makes us happy. Happiness is ola lei. Ola lei is happiness! You see those children who play there … and you hear the cheery shouting from the young men and women who play volleyball there … they are happy, right? Even those women who play bingo over there, they are happy, though they are losing their money [laughs]. Hearts and minds are happy … the souls and bodies are satisfied, the minds are at ease and relaxed; we laugh but are not sad. That's happiness … it's ola lei. … Anyway, let's play the game of Sorry!… let me defeat you so that you may get sadness: then you will not get ola lei [laughs].

This conversation made Tufoua attend closely to the familiar village scene: indeed, activities producing fiafia were common parts of the daily lives of adults and children alike. Even on Sundays, when reverential quiet prevails, people gain contentment from hymn singing and togetherness in church and enjoyment from the special midday family meal that follows. Clearly, fiafia permeates everyday socialising and the cooperative lifestyle typical of Tuvalu.

Seu went on to describe fiafia as a continuum ranging from contentment (in spirit and mind) to deep joy. In its normal form, fiafia is characterised by the calm, cheerful, agreeable behaviour that fuels positive social interactions and cooperation. Widely specified by interviewees as a key emotional aspect of ola lei, fiafia provides the basic stance expected in community life and for personal choices. Maintaining a *mata fiafia* 'happy or contented face' is an oft-emphasised value and implies agreement with the way things are going. It is also interpreted as indicating a personal character that is reliably cooperative, amenable and non-contentious. By contrast, behaviours and demeanours indicative of opposition, irritation and anger are stigmatising, negatively impacting not only a person's own reputation but also contributing to a bad reputation (*luma*) for a family. Because of this considerable social pressure to maintain an appearance of fiafia, the Tuvaluan saying "The most important thing in this life is just to be happy" carries a range of possible interpretations. Of course, maximising fiafia can also justify discounting increasingly prevalent medical advice about diet and exercise, ultimately leading to a lowered experience of ola lei.

At the "deep joy" end of the continuum, fiafia and the activities creating it are an example of that "modality of social relationship" which Victor Turner (1969: 360) termed "communitas". This is the experience of an intense social bond, a recognition of togetherness outside of (but still in tandem with) the structured social relationships constituting society. Edith Turner (2012) aptly referred to communitas as "collective joy". The sense of flow engendered by participating in encompassing, sustained, collective activities (singing, music, dancing, sports) draws people together in an emotional bond, disregarding hierarchy and other structures that separate people from each other. Communitas can also transform work into an emotionally vibrant social experience. In Tuvalu, if singing and dancing at a community celebration begin to feel dull, elders may call out: "The day seems to be quiet. Increase the wind [*momea ake te matagi*]." In response, participants will re-energise their singing, dancing and drumming. Someone may jump up and begin to humorously "conduct", teasing the other side, and more people will get up to join the dancers. That is, the fiafia that already characterises the festivity will intensify toward the "deep joy" of communitas, solidifying participants' feelings of communal commitment and connection.

Given its ability to create a community space conducive to collective wellbeing, fiafia proved particularly significant for community leaders in their descriptions of ola lei. As one secondary school principal explained:

> The ola lei is, anything that you do, you should feel contented. Your body and mind are fit and function well. You are happy with the people you live with, in the family and working place. Anything that you do, you do it in good heart and happiness, right?

In Tuvalu, the effectiveness of a leader is assessed by his or her ability to make decisions that create contentment and peacefulness in the community. Less affluent community members also often mentioned fiafia in discussing ola lei, recognising that lack of access to material items and associated social status can have an impact on contentment. For example, residents of a poorer part of Funafuti described fiafia as a state of being that they consciously worked to create. For them, fiafia seemed to involve both acceptance and hope. As a mother in her forties reflected:

> Every day, we try hard to be happy with what we've got or graciously accept the things we got on the day. And we also pray that we may get life, happiness and blessings on the next day. Happiness is ola lei, right? If there is no happiness, the family would break up, right?

Like filemuu, fiafia was specified as an integral component of ola lei mainly by older Tuvaluans. Just one primary school student mentioned fiafia and only about a quarter of the secondary school students included it.

Malosi 'Fitness'

Malosi literally means fitness, but it carries connotations of the commitment and strength that enable a person or collectivity to be active and effective in daily life. Malosi includes three main dimensions: physical (*malosi faka-te-foitino*), mental (*malosi faka-te-mafaufau/loto*) and spiritual (*malosi faka-te-agaaga*). The general term malosi also provides the common reference point of wellbeing in everyday greetings:

> *Person 1: Talofa. Eaa mai koe i te aso tenei?* Good day. How are you today?
> *Person 2: Fakafetai. Au e malosi fua.* Thank you. I am fine.

When respondents feel unwell in a particular aspect, they may specify it:

> *E malosi a toku agaaga mo te mafaufau/loto, kae ko te foitino e vaivai.*
> My spirit/soul and mind/heart are fine, but my physical body is weak.

Or:

> *E malosi a te foitino, kae vaivai a te agaaga mo te loto.*
> The physical body is fit, but the spirit and mind are weak.

Interviewees usually focused on only one or two aspects of malosi. Emphasis on positive spiritual and mental states was most common among older people. One ardent Christian claimed that we need only spiritual fitness to make us ola lei, but this was unusual. The most frequently specified

aspect of malosi, however, was physical: malosi faka-te-foitino. Besides 'not being ill', this includes physical attributes such as strength, endurance, ability to perform hard work and (for children especially) growth and normal development. As one local government officer said:

> Ola lei is a thing that we live with … if we are strong and hardworking, our family will be ola lei, right? These are the words of our ancestors, that is … if we are strong enough to look after our family, our children will live happily, right?

For men especially, being able to work hard is synonymous with wellness.[5]

Malosi faka-te-foitino was particularly salient for those who had experienced serious illnesses. A male diabetic patient in his fifties explained ruefully:

> I also saw the link between ola lei and sicknesses. Ola lei is the taking care of our bodies to prevent us from getting sick. … Now I see that a good complete body [pointing to his amputated leg] with a strong body … or not ill is ola lei, right? … I know now the importance of ola lei … . I wish I had listened to [diabetic] awareness programmes … . It's just too late.

About half of the students interviewed simply defined ola lei as being malosi, that is, physically fit and not ill. From the viewpoint of most older Tuvaluans, however, this is an incomplete understanding of malosi.

Ola Leva 'Longevity'

Ola leva literally means living a long life. Initially, only two young people (no adults) mentioned ola leva, and when Tufoua encouraged them to elaborate, they just shrugged their shoulders and said, "Ola lei is ola leva." Fortunately, comments made at a cricket game by an elder in his eighties brought the concept of ola leva into clearer focus:

> *Tufoua's Fieldnotes: "Ola Leva i te Kilikiti"* (Longevity in Cricket)
> It was my turn to bat. The man before me was sent off—out for a duck—accompanied by loud laughter. I walked over to a breadfruit tree to our team's bats. As I was choosing a suitable bat, an old man, a well-known former cricketer, called my name and gave me a tip: "Tufoua, try and pray that you hit the first bowled ball. If you hit the first bowled ball, you will know that you will ola leva."
>
> What interested me was the phrase ola leva. The most respected group of people in a Tuvaluan community is the elders. The level of respect should increase as age increases. Ola leva symbolises respect and authority as well as ola lei. For example, elderly family members are served first with the best food. The relationship between ola leva and "respect" is often taught and

discussed in families and in church. People believe that respecting and being kind to people will help you live long.

A few days later, during a community function, I ran into this same old man. I asked him for an interview. I reminded him of his "hit the first bowled ball" advice and its relation to ola leva and ola lei. The old man theorised:

> Living long [batting for a long time] in cricket is just the same concept as living long in this life. Ola leva is often associated with "having the first thing". To use a new or first product/item/thing is important for ola lei. Breathing the fresh air of the early morning makes you ola lei; you eat the first fruit/crop of the harvest—it is important, right? The toddy juice[6] of the morning is more fresh and sweet than the afternoon toddy juice, right? The earlier the fisherman goes to the sea … the more fish he will catch. Tufoua, that's the same concept of why you have to hit the first bowled ball … because as that first bowled ball hits your [cricket] bat, it will give out an important thudding sound … you will know that [thudding sound] will make the bowlers panic … and you will know that you will be ola leva [batting for a long time] and your whole team will feel alive as well.[7]

However, longevity is rarely viewed as the primary goal in itself. Instead, people expect long life, happiness and wellness to be connected. As a 60-year-old man explained:

> It is true, long living is useful as you can … see life for a longer time or see your grandchildren and great grandchildren, eh? However, what I value more is living a happy life while I live. When I die, I am satisfied as it is God's will and power. But I only want to live well but not suffer during the time I live.

Some older people added the idea that ola leva is given to good people, a gift from God.

THE TENTACLES OF THE OCTOPUS: HOW TO ACHIEVE OLA LEI?

But what will ensure ola lei? Interview analysis showed that most people were strongly focused on the actual practices that enabled them to achieve wellness. For example, the elder who explained the importance of ola leva to Tufoua went on to link his longevity to consuming fresh local food from the land and sea and to living in a clean environment. This was his explanation for living to be 80 in a developing country that had a male life expectancy of only 67.4 years at the time of Tufoua's research (Government of Tuvalu 2011: 23). The eight practices and pragmatic qualities described below are those that interviewees most commonly identified as contributing to the achievement of ola lei in the context of Tuvalu. These constitute the ever-moving, entwined tentacles of the octopus (see Fig. 1). The support each practice provides to the others is noteworthy.

Meakai e Lava e Lei 'Food Abundance and Quality'

In Tuvalu, abundant food represents generosity, hospitality and prosperity. Displaying quantities of food, especially quality food, and eating it together is the standard way to show appreciation, celebrate important events or even apologise. In daily life, sharing food creates solidarity in both families and communities. As Chambers and Chambers (2001: 130–46) documented for Nanumea, continual flows of food gifts among village households express relationships of *alofa* 'compassion, love, empathy'. For example, families with active fishermen or access to local and imported resources should be proactively generous in their distributions, not just acceding to requests for assistance but giving what others may need or enjoy without being asked. Insofar as possible, households prepare enough food each day so that it can be shared with neighbours and relatives and also offered to visitors.

Lack of food can also create shame, however, and shame certainly has negative impacts on fiafia and overall wellbeing. One man in his sixties described this shamefulness: "When one cries of hunger and suffering, that is not ola lei, right?" He explained that a typical Vaitupu response to the question "Why are the kids crying?" is "They are hungry". He elaborated that very soon "people will arrive with baskets of food to that house for the kids to eat … kids eating enough, not always crying, that is ola lei, right?" Parents warn their children not to fight, argue heatedly or cry loudly: "Don't fight or cry as people may think that we don't have food."

Not surprisingly then, food was usually the first thing mentioned when people talked about ola lei, and students mentioned food quality second only to cleanliness. Only some students and a few educated people specified the importance of a balanced diet when defining ola lei, however. Instead, food quantity rather than quality tended to be the primary focus for most interviewees. Perhaps this is not surprising since before the advent of substantial food imports, Tuvalu's atoll environment limited the range of foodstuffs available both in daily life and at festive celebrations. The same locally produced items (primarily coconut products, a wide variety of fish, crabs and other seafoods, breadfruit, pulaka,[8] taro and bananas plus chicken, pigs and wild birds on occasion) were generally available to everyone. Sharing expectations among kin and neighbours also supported equal access, reinforcing food abundance as a positive criterion.

Community people usually assess the quality of foods largely by their cultural importance, which is not necessarily the same as the food's nutritional quality. At feasts, local foods like turtle meat, fish, pigs, *fekei*,[9] coconut crabs, lobsters and drinking coconuts are seen as quality foods. So are canned and packaged food and loaves of bread. A prime example of these "culturally important" foods was evident at the farewell feast for Vaitupu's outgoing pastor, honouring his high status and years of service.

The value placed on food abundance, too, was shown by the size of the enormous (2 × 3 m) plywood platter presented to him, covered in a great variety of local and imported foods, which required several men to carry.[10]

Food quality means different things to different people. Some culturally valued foods that are high in saturated fat are now known to aggravate diabetes, heart disease and hypertension. This health information shocked some Tuvaluans, especially elders, who had been eating local foods such as coconuts all their lives and regarded them as a healthy food choice. The clash of perceptions was clear at a health talk given to diabetic and hypertensive patients. The presenter had a tray of different foods, which were grouped into: "eat this food more" and "eat this food less". After the brief talk, the patients asked questions.

> *Patient:* Does this mean that coconut (*niu*) is also included in the foods that we should *not* eat more of?
>
> *Nurse:* Yes! Remember that the coconut has a lot of creamy oil within it, so it is not quite good for us who have diabetes. Just eat it once a week.
>
> *Patient:* Oh! Oh my! I really like to eat coconut. Oh my! [laughs]

Because "local food" is often used as a cover term for healthy food choices, this confusion is understandable. In addition, generalised dietary recommendations can founder on differences in the composition of parts of the same plant.[11] For example, the mature flesh of the coconut, the immature "jelly" flesh, coconut water and sprouting coconut kernel have very different nutritional values. Both mature coconut flesh and the coconut cream made from it are high in calories and saturated fat. However, mature coconut flesh is also an excellent source of fats which bolster "good" cholesterol and contains fibre and important minerals. The sprouting kernel is a source of soluble sugars, starch, fibre and minerals, with high antioxidant activity and little fat (Manivannan *et al*. 2018). In addition, unlike the active lifestyle typical in Tuvalu in the past, most people now lead more sedentary lives, making some traditional food preferences and eating patterns problematic.

In an everyday meal, families mainly try to ensure that there is sufficient food on the table. As often as they can, they also try to include fresh fish and local crops such as taro, pulaka, breadfruit, banana and coconut. For those living in urban Funafuti, all of these are scarce and difficult to obtain. As a result, people must usually rely on imported store foods, including rice, flour, sugar and packaged and canned items. All respondents, however, agreed that abundant, high-quality food enhances the defining features of wellbeing: happiness, physical fitness, longevity and peacefulness.

Tuu-Maa 'Cleanliness'

Tuu-maa was the most frequently discussed practice facilitating ola lei, primarily involving a clean environment, houses, clothes, food, water and body. As a local government officer explained:

> Ola lei refers to the cleanliness of the place that we live in. That is the first thing about ola lei, the place we live in has to be clean, right? If the place that a human being lives in is clean, the things that we use like food will also be clean. … then we can have this thing called ola lei.

A student said almost the same thing: "Ola lei includes the food that we eat and the clothes and places that we live in should be good and clean."

As Mary Douglas (1966) has shown, "dirty" and "clean" are culturally constructed categories. In their descriptions of cleanliness, adults as well as secondary school students foregrounded tidy dwellings and litter-free surroundings, though they also recognised a general relationship between dirt and disease. This emphasis is easily seen every day in village life. Women and girls sweep around and inside their houses each morning and evening, carefully disposing of sweepings. It is shameful for a family, especially its females, when their home's interior is messy or its surroundings are littered with leaves or trash. Many local village councils also conduct monthly inspections to maintain the tidiness of houses and their surroundings. The cultural value ascribed to these particular cleaning practices has probably been reinforced by a century of western health initiatives. Interviewees saw cleanliness as enhancing both malosi faka-te-foitino and fiafia.

Older secondary students also talked about cleanliness as an important dimension of ola lei*,* even though neither their living quarters nor water reservoirs received much regular cleaning attention. Only two primary school students mentioned cleanliness of surroundings as part of ola lei. However, all students were familiar with personal hygiene (brushing teeth, wearing clean clothes, washing hands) because they practised these activities in school.

Of course, attaining cleanliness also involves two additional qualities: hard work and readiness (both described in more detail below). As one 60-year-old man explained:

> Men should trim the grasses and bushes around their houses and women sweep their surroundings and regularly clean the houses to prevent insects and pests from breeding and spreading diseases, right? When people are lazy, the village will be dirty and full of mosquitoes and flies.

Tuu-maa also requires household management skills and access to soap and other cleaning equipment. Gutters need repair and cleaning to keep tank

water clean and tanks must be screened to stop mosquitoes breeding. Besides personal effort, financial and technical support are required to achieve and maintain cleanliness. Some major issues are beyond remedy by individual households or even by local communities. As a mother in her forties residing in a poorer neighbourhood on Funafuti explained,

> We live near the swamps[12] … full of dumped nappies and different types of waste. We want to do something about this waste problem, but we can't because we don't have any money or tools such as gloves, boots, shovels, right? So, we just live like this … each family tries to prevent its members from catching diseases from this pollution, right?

Extreme health challenges such as this are exacerbated by the urban density of Funafuti. For outer island residents, limited access to tools, building supplies and repair materials can also pose challenges.

Toka 'Readiness'

The word toka, which means readiness or being prepared, is often heard in Tuvalu. It is something that people must work at. In a group discussion on Vaitupu, one woman explained the relationship between toka and ola lei in this way:

> [O]la lei is having everything available. A woman has to have woman-like properties in her home ... her sink, her toilet, your oven to be available ... your beddings, eh? … When a woman's things are available to her, her time will not be wasted, as she has everything—the family will live well … eh? … Panapa said to me … : "La, ola lei is having things all ready at your side." … Since when I have all these things available at my side, I felt that my life is good, as I will not be worn out … . I also can have enough time to rest. Perhaps that is what I know about this word, ola lei.

Two aspects in this description stand out. First, the availability of materials is seen as crucial to achieving wellbeing. Second, toka is basic to effective management of household, family and community resources. Access to a toilet, running water, an oven, eating utensils, bedding, transport, money and food allow women to meet family and community responsibilities and to save time and energy. The challenge of toka is that people must plan ahead and work hard. Toka also requires money in addition to foresight, determination and endurance.

This Vaitupu woman went on to identify the source of her emphasis on preparedness as Tufoua's own father, Panapa, a remarkable village man whose initiatives had demonstrated toka and new productive possibilities to his community over the years. He effectively marshalled his household to

dig a fishpond[13] (Fig. 2), maintain productive plantations of coconut palms and vegetable gardens and raise both poultry and pigs. He also developed a cage for raising mud crabs, carved handicrafts and built a water cistern, toilet and concrete ovens for his household. In sum, he had made sure not only that his family's daily needs were met and that they had a buffer in case of drought or a tropical cyclone but also that he had a surplus available to help others through generous donations. Panapa's toka was esteemed because it contributed to the wellbeing of the whole community, and he had come to epitomise the ola lei approach on Vaitupu.

Tuvalu's environmental and economic limitations heighten the importance of preparedness. However, as is described in more detail below, toka requires considerable effort. Obtaining and storing necessities such as food, water, mats and sennit cord, fishing gear, cloth and clothing takes work, and people must plan ahead to ensure necessary reserves. This idea is captured in the proverb: "It's your walk, to and fro." Many Tuvaluans think that walking or jogging "just for exercise" misses the important contribution that the time could make to toka. An older interviewee offered this example:

Figure 2. Feeding time at the old man's fishpond. Photograph by Keith Chambers, 2010.

> Like, a woman … when she comes back from the sea, she brings with her some stones in her hands … . Well, during family functions, the stones would be ready for the *umu* [‘earth-oven’] … ola lei is developed from there!

While family needs are usually the central focus of toka, preparedness also reaches outwards to consider community needs too. As is described below, village festivities often involve competitions that encourage resource production and thereby contribute to toka and food abundance for the community as a whole.

Galue Malosi ‘Hard Work’

Hard physical labour—such as digging, paddling, lifting, cleaning, hand-washing clothes—involves endurance, energy and determination, especially given Tuvalu’s hot and humid climate. One young man in his twenties admiringly complained about his hardworking father to Tufoua:

> I am only astounded at how unfed up and tireless that man [his father] is! Sometimes I pretend not to hear [what he’s doing] … due to my tiredness. That man wakes up around at 5 am on a cold dawn and … takes off to the bush to gather local leaves for compost … and also does some kind of fishing. When he returns, we would still be asleep … he makes a lot of noise as he feeds his pigs and chickens. … If I am still not awake, he will go himself to cut our toddy … even though I constantly tell him to leave toddy-cutting to me, … after that, we can hear his motorbike on his way to his pulaka plantation. … I would go to him and work beside him. We would go back home when I forced him to go back to eat. When we get home, we eat, then he will continue on his motorbike to his other pulaka plantation … he will be gone for so long and return at dusk … he will then be heard working on his pigsty … ! He will only leave his work when we get angry at him to stop as it is dark! Sometimes, when he finishes eating dinner he would go fishing! As a result, I just have to follow him to help him with his work … very exhausting!

Scorching sun and mosquitoes add additional challenges, and hard work in these conditions easily drains good spirits as well. Thus, it is common for relatives to work together in everyday tasks, both to accomplish them more quickly and to make the work less onerous. Community events and festivities involve intensive preparations, too, requiring *galue malosi* ‘hard work’ from many people.

Not surprisingly, old and young alike identified galue malosi as essential for ola lei. As one elder in his sixties explained:

> Ola lei to me, one is working hard! …You are to do the work in your family that will bring wellbeing to the family … . If we sleep but do not work, we do not get ola lei, right? We will only catch sicknesses …. There used to be

> an old saying that goes like this: "How nice is it to be sleeping, but will the angel bring you food?"

A 17-year-old male student agreed:

> Ola lei is endurance and hard work … . That is ola lei.

Beyond being essential for family wellbeing, interviewees also viewed galue malosi as unlocking doors to many of the other practical dimensions of ola lei, including readiness, wealth and food abundance.

Galue malosi was also seen as a strategy that people who had not inherited a particular traditional skill (*logo*) could use to be more productive, even to the extent of matching outputs of those with inherited knowledge. For example, a 50-year-old man known for his big taro crops told Tufoua:

> Tufoua, I am telling the truth to your face: I don't have any traditional skills or knowledge in taro planting. This taro planting activity depends entirely on your endurance and how hardworking you are. Collecting and making compost, feeding your taro and regularly visiting your taro plantation … this does not apply only to taro planting, but it is also applicable to the concept of looking after your family in order to live well, as you may know from your research … you need to work hard. … People are saying that I have possessed some taro planting skills—none! I have only one traditional skill or knowledge [*logo*] that I know of: it is the galue malosi and regularly visiting my plantation … this is my way of rising up to the level of skilful and knowledgeable people [laughs].

Galue malosi can raise a family's standard of living and make them more respected in the community. It is also valued for enhancing community wellbeing. As the well-known saying states, "Your hard work is your wealth." As is described below, the "wealth" accessible to a village, community group or sports team is seen as dependent on the collective energy expended by its members.

Of course, galue malosi not only refers to working hard physically to produce necessities. It also refers to working hard mentally, as when students strive to learn and get good grades. While students themselves did not identify studying hard as important for ola lei, one man described how parents' hard work supports their children's educational success, which in turn provides the foundation for future family wellbeing. He stated:

> It [ola lei] is just the working hard together of the husband and wife with their children to develop knowledge so that the children may have better lives in the future.

Education is typically seen as offering a path towards future wellbeing, and children are encouraged to take school seriously and do well. For unwaged community people in particular, earning money for their children's school fees and uniforms requires hard work and sacrifice.

Maumea or Maukoloa 'Wealth'

The terms maumea and maukoloa are used interchangeably, though maumea is more commonly heard these days than maukoloa. They refer to having lots of money or local resources such as land, pulaka and taro plantations, chickens and pigs and water reservoirs. In short, maumea means abundance and wealth, the material cornerstone of ola lei. For example, access to resources facilitates both contentment and physical aspects of wellbeing. One man in his fifties explained:

> In those days, people were rich in terms of pigs, lands, pulaka plantations and woven items such as mats, fine mats … right? So, if someone is married to a member of such a rich family, there was only one phrase that people could say: "You are blessed—you will have a good life [ola lei]!" He or she will have ola lei because that family is rich—he or she will not have a poor life or have to ask others for help, right? Now, richness seems to refer mostly to people who have lots of money, aye? [laughs]

Like this interviewee, Tuvaluans today see traditional resources (animals, crops and mats) as similar to money in that both are now essential for meeting needs and desires.

Maumea is also important because it allows people to play valued roles in society. Access to abundant possessions makes it possible to share them in generous, compassionate and caring ways, behaviour associated with social influence and leadership. For example, when Tufoua visited Isalaelu, a man who lived outside the village and raised an abundance of livestock, he gave Tufoua a piglet to take home in a sack on his motorbike. As Isalaelu explained:

> Even though it is tiring, I feel the usefulness of this type of richness to our family, right? We are ready when the island community asks for contributions from families [pigs] … we also eat these animals. I am not worried because with these animals I can feed my family, though we don't have much money, right? … Tufoua, this type of richness in terms of animals and pulaka and taro crops doesn't just come to you by itself! You will get it [maumea] when you focus and work hard for it, right? Richness in terms of money is good, but it is better when you become rich in terms of these local animals and you will be happier and not worried in this life on this island.

Scarcity of employment and low wages limit most people's access to money. Even civil servants with regular incomes are enmeshed in the contributions and sharing obligations central to Tuvalu's communal culture and find it nearly impossible to save money. Generally, people neither aspire to be outstandingly wealthy nor see marked monetary wealth as essential for achieving ola lei. However, institutionalised levelling mechanisms make it desirable to amass what resources people can: relatives and neighbours can ask each other for help, more generous contributions are expected from people with more to give and gifts are the expected way to demonstrate alofa. When people with abundant food and other resources offer them to others, as Isalaelu did to Tufoua, they build a reputation for generosity that enhances their influence in community affairs. In addition, being able to make the contributions that are frequently needed for community and church festivities or fundraisers requires preparedness and hard work.

Poto Faka-Tuvalu or Logo 'Traditional Skills and Knowledge'

Traditional skills that people acquire from their ancestors and learn through life experience are termed poto faka-Tuvalu or logo. There are two types:

i. Subsistence skills widely used in daily life, such as weaving, fishing, planting crops and collecting palm sap, and
ii. Traditional ritualised practices known only to certain families or individuals, often connected to healing, fishing or gardening. These skills usually have a sacred, spiritual component derived from traditional religious beliefs, also giving them an uneasy relationship with Christian teachings.[14]

All community members are expected to learn how to perform basic daily activities appropriate to their gender, such as fishing, planting crops, collecting coconut sap, preparing and cooking food, making and maintaining clothing, climbing coconut trees and husking coconuts, house construction and repairs. Subsistence skills such as these are recognised as essential for wellbeing. As a man in his sixties explained:

> Another thing I know about ola lei is the know-how or traditional knowledge. It is about yourself and your traditional family skills. Such skills are very important to ola lei. The pulaka has its own special way of being cultivated in terms of both planting and fertilising.

While none of the students interviewed mentioned "accessing traditional knowledge" as an aspect of ola lei, children learn common subsistence skills by helping older relatives with daily tasks. For example, most can collect mud crabs, produce coconut sap, husk coconuts, do some weaving and cook local food.

However, secret traditional skills belong only to certain families and are the realm of adults, passed down from generation to generation. One elder said that the family logo passed down to him involved not just specific "skills" but also constituted the basis for his family's entire wellbeing:

> Our family's traditional knowledge is with me, such as in the traditional knowledge of how to make coconut palm trees bear plentiful and large coconuts or grow well and in healing through massage. These are skills that must be kept, as they are the ola lei of the family.

He strongly believed that his family's repertoire of traditional skills enabled his relatives to live well. These skills may focus on cultivating large root crops, producing plentiful coconut sap, catching abundant fish or a specific kind of fish, or healing complex illnesses.

Passing of logo to the next generation of family members is flexible. The masters of certain traditional skills, who are mainly the family's elders, decide who should receive it. As a traditional healer in his fifties explained:

> I am currently observing and deciding which child should receive this poto [traditional healing skill] … I shall not choose a child who is lazy or who drinks alcohol to excess, right? I identify a child who is strong and happy to do this job [healing massage] … as this job is unpaid, huh?

Though a family's traditional knowledge primarily benefits that group of relatives, it can also be used to enhance the wellbeing of the community as a whole, for example through healing, by sharing abundant food with relatives and neighbours or by contributing generously to community projects. Maintaining the secrecy of traditional skills and knowledge attests to their high cultural value. However, a family's logo are occasionally shared publicly at funerals, wedding celebrations or other important functions, as a gift to those contributing labour and resources to the event. One secondary teacher argued that wider sharing of traditional family skills and knowledge could enhance Tuvalu's economic wellbeing, as shown in his reply to this student's question:

> *Student:* Why is Tuvalu not as developed or as rich as Australia or the USA?
>
> *Teacher:* Tuvalu can never become like Australia or the USA because Tuvaluans don't share their traditional skills or knowledge to other fellow Tuvaluans. People with certain traditional skills are selfish and only keep their knowledge to themselves.

However, most people view the highly valued and sacred resonances of much traditional logo as inherently requiring secrecy. In this respect,

the western idea (articulated by this teacher) that skills and information should be transmitted impersonally is at odds with traditional patterns of knowledge sharing.

Talitonu e Fakatuanaki ki Te Atua 'Belief and Faith in God'

Many community members and church leaders linked belief in God (and the spiritual health this creates) with maintaining a healthy body, viewing them as reciprocal aspects of ola lei. As the leader of the largest church in Tuvalu explained:

> The gospel considers the holistic development of the person: the physical and spiritual aspects. We cannot separate these two. … the gospel would not become a gospel without the combination of humanity and spirituality. … So we need to be fed with normal food so that we live well physically … and on the other hand, we should be filled with spiritual food so that we can also live well, because believing in God is just as important as eating normal food.

This is the stance of Tuvalu's main church and other significant Christian denominations: faith in God and physical fitness are inseparable. All church elders as well as several older people (but no students) stressed this connection emphatically, and some described the health and wellbeing programmes organised by their churches as demonstrating the importance of this connection.

Interviewees who talked about the benefits of "believing in God" also shared some miraculous experiences they had during hardships. One devoted believer explained:

> I had a problem with this eye. I could not see clearly. So, I prayed and prayed. … Then, last week, an eye team from Australia came, and I was very lucky to be on the list because that list had been full. … I believe that it is God's assistance that enabled me to be operated on. … and now my eye is recovered, and it is very clear … . Those are the ways, Tufoua, which God gives us when we rely on and believe in Him. He gives us life and health.

Teo, an elderly church leader, maintained that belief in God was sufficient in itself to ensure health.

> Ola lei refers to knowing and believing in God. Health cannot be achieved by someone … no one can achieve a peaceful life unless he or she knows God. … Good living is only found in Christ. Therefore, ola lei is only a matter of having faith in Christ. … In this life … just have God and believe in Him. That's health!

While many others viewed holding firmly to belief in God as essential for ola lei, most viewed faith and efforts to maintain physical wellbeing as linked in a complementary way.

Lei a te Masaki 'Recovery from Illness or Disease'

For traditional healers especially, recovery from illness or disease was the defining quality of ola lei. One Funafuti healer stated:

> In the language of local healers, ola lei refers to recovery, or [when] the sick person survives as a result of the treatment given by the traditional healer.

A traditional healer in Vaitupu agreed:

> Ola lei, to me as a traditional healer, refers to the recovery of the patient as a result of my healing. Someone came for help and he was saved by my healing hands … that person is saved and lived. That's ola lei to me.

Ordinary community people and students did not mention recovery, probably because they were not so focused on healing practices. However, they recognised that recovery demonstrates health and acknowledged the importance of healing practices for the community.

As Chambers and Chambers (1985: 37) found in Nanumea, trying to heal someone's sickness is a moral imperative for a traditional healer. Though they may receive a small gift for their efforts, their real reward is their patient's recovery. All the traditional healers interviewed by Tufoua believed in working together with medical personnel to heal patients' sicknesses, and healers also collaborated amongst themselves. For example, if a traditional healer was not able to resolve someone's sickness, he or she would refer that patient to another traditional healer or to government health services.

Recovery is also thought to have a more general applicability for wellbeing. Recovery from a life challenge or period of hardship (such as debt, an argument with relatives or other types of setback) are seen as crucial steps towards restoring ola lei. In stressful times, the goal of recovery sustains people as they strategise and work to overcome the problem, and thereby to return to a condition of fiafia and filemuu.

OLA LEI AS TE FEKE

While interviewees each emphasised the aspects of ola lei most resonant with their own experience, the Ola Lei conceptual framework is a synthesis of the values and practices they described. As was originally suggested by an older man, the octopus provides an effective representation of the holistic interconnections among the various components of ola lei. As illustrated in Figure 1, the head of the octopus represents the four main qualities of ola lei: peacefulness/harmoniousness, happiness/contentment, physical fitness/

lack of illness and longevity. The tentacles represent the practices through which ola lei can be achieved: food abundance and quality, cleanliness, readiness/preparedness, hard work, wealth/abundance, traditional skills and knowledge, belief and faith in God and recovery from disease and illness. The tentacles physically move the octopus to safety and to food, thereby continuously sustaining ola lei qualities. The intertwining tentacles form the octopus into different shapes, moving and interlacing in different directions. Taken together, these qualities and practices symbolise the complexity and interrelatedness that Tuvaluans ascribe to the concept of ola lei.

PUTTING THE OLA LEI CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK INTO POLICY AND PRACTICE

Local models of health and wellbeing can serve as a guide for identifying, developing and evaluating practices and policies to ensure that they are meaningful and consistent with local values (Durie 1994; Kupa 2009). We suggest four ways in which the Ola Lei Framework could be so used. Other possibilities certainly exist as well.

One of these involves how health and wellbeing are defined and measured. While the Ola Lei Framework shares a holistic perspective with the World Health Organization's 1946 definition of health (WHO 1948), foundational in Tuvalu's current health policy, it also differs significantly in orientation. Ola Lei certainly embraces the physical, mental, spiritual and social wellbeing of individuals, as does the WHO definition, and it views family, community, environmental and national wellbeing as integral as well. The collective orientation of Tuvaluan society encourages group responsibility, which is recognised and supported by the Ola Lei Framework. This sense of collective responsibility and interrelatedness could be integrated into Tuvalu's health policy in accord with more recent WHO charters, namely those of Ottawa (1986) and Bangkok (2005).

Second, features of Ola Lei could be used explicitly to assess Tuvaluan wellbeing, similar to Bhutan's Gross National Happiness Index (Zuzanek 2013: 796) or New Zealand's Living Standards Framework (New Zealand Treasury 2019). The qualities and practices described above provide a useful checklist for goal-setting when strategic plans are being developed by an organisation, government department or community group. In addition, many traditional activities deserve recognition for the contribution they make to wellbeing. For example, access to reserves of food, mats and cloth, which can be drawn on during ceremonies or in adversity, is enhanced by institutionalised production and resource displays, as when leaders of a women's group go house to house viewing members' newly woven mats. As development agencies recognise, preparedness at all levels is crucial in fostering the resilience needed to cope with increasing environmental challenges due to climate change (Gaillard 2010). Sharing expectations,

which are still strong despite inroads of capitalism, and development programmes that encourage entrepreneurial ambition, provide another example. These practices help to maintain social cohesion and equalise access to necessities, mitigating wealth disparities and thus making an important contribution to community health and wellbeing.

Third, the Ola Lei Framework can also be linked with traditional social institutions to empower health promotion and development initiatives. For example, the structured competition between two rival sides, fundamental to the organisation of Tuvaluan communities, could provide an appealing template for efforts to promote ola lei. Throughout Tuvalu, competition between two sides (*feitu*) underlies virtually all community festivities, work projects and sports. This mechanism of structured competition also involves many of the specific practices described above as supports for ola lei.

In Vaitupu, for example, the community competition called Nafa occurs every year. For this event, the two village sides are each subdivided into two units, and in each grouping, pairs of households compete to display their biggest or heaviest pigs, chickens, taro and pulaka roots. At stake is honour as well as fun. Each man taking part in Nafa raises prescribed numbers of each item, for example, at least five taro plants and three chickens. For months, family members also help by feeding livestock and gathering leaves

Figure 3. Rivals' taro crops, weighed on a wooden balance. Photograph by Filipepe Taumafai, 2020.

Figure 4. Chicken weighing time! Photograph by Filipepe Taumafai, 2020.

Figure 5. Celebrating victory. Photograph by Filipepe Taumafai, 2020.

for compost. At the end of the competition, the winners celebrate. Emotions run high as women from the winning household dance and tease the losers, who have been painted with black charcoal and are made to parade around the village before being sent to swim in the sea. Finally, the rival partners each exchange the produce they have displayed and take it home.

As Figures 3, 4 and 5 show, Nafa involves humour, fun and competition. Competitive festivities similar to Nafa take place in every Tuvalu community, strengthening existing social organisation, nurturing relationships and promoting production of local foods. While the competition requires hard work for months, the foods that are displayed ultimately spill over into family consumption. Competitive festivities like these celebrate preparedness, hard work and know-how. In the same way, community health and wellbeing programmes could incorporate both Tuvalu's traditional competitive organising structure and highlight the specific ola lei components that already make sense to participants. For example, vaccination programmes could be a focus.

Lastly, Ola Lei is valuable for planning because it helps to identify areas where gaps exist between values, policy and practice. For example, as several people pointed out, the quality of filemuu is jeopardised by alcohol-induced rowdy behaviour and fighting, despite laws that restrict access to alcoholic beverages. Community discussions regarding the importance of filemuu for wellbeing could increase awareness of the support provided by local rules. Similarly, malosi and fiafia, both key qualities for ola lei, are diminished by importing food of limited nutritional value or doubtful safety (i.e., expired or poorly stored stock). The Health Department might help to develop new import guidelines to increase food quality and programmes that encourage consumers to maximise nutritional quality and portion control.

In the educational system, disparities between situational realities and qualities recognised as contributing to ola lei abound. For example, teachers and students at the national boarding high school noted that the food served often does not accord with what they are taught is "good food". Students could apply their knowledge by designing improved menus. And while the health science curriculum seems effective in teaching the importance of cleanliness and hygiene, having a good diet and being physically fit, it omits components of ola lei involving social, spiritual, emotional and collective dimensions. More holistic curricula could be developed.

More broadly, the Ola Lei Framework can serve as guidance in developing policies, activities and strategic plans of organisations and the nation. For example, the recent Regional Rights Resource Team (RRRT) project, which was focused on remedying bullying, social exclusion, gender inequity and violence against women and girls, perfectly incorporates the central qualities of the Ola Lei Framework.[15] Other examples of how the Ola Lei

Framework could be implemented in strategic planning are evident in two recent Government of Tuvalu documents, namely the *Health Reform Strategy 2016–2019* and the *Tuvalu Education Sector Plan III (2016–2020)*.[16] Many of the values, principles and goals identified in these planning documents connect directly with the Ola Lei Framework.

Figure 6 offers some examples of these parallels. Attributes identified in the education plan, such as "respect for one another", "sharing and caring", "participating in community and decisions", "humility" and "tolerance" map directly to Ola Lei's value of filemuu, as does the attribute of "hard work" to galue malosi and tuu-maa. "Spiritual values" equates with talitonu e faka tuanaki i te Atua, while "sharing and caring" connect with maumea and with communitas-creating expressions of fiafia. Similarly, the three general goals specified in the Health Reform Strategy connect directly with the values of ola leva, fiafia and malosi of the Ola Lei Framework and with the supporting practices of lei a te masaki, toka, ola leva, meakai e lava e lei and malosi.

Links that are missing or not fully articulated can be especially instructive for effective policy development. For example, the value of "environmental preservation" identified as a mission objective in the education plan is supported by many specific Ola Lei practices (toka, tuu-maa and poto faka-Tuvalu) even though this was not a connection made by our interviewees themselves. This discrepancy could indicate an area needing further public education and outreach. Similarly, the Health Reform Strategy does not reference poto faka-Tuvalu/logo, even though traditional healers have long worked supportively with their western medical colleagues in Tuvalu. Fiafia as a goal (or as a helpful incentive to achieving goals) is mentioned in neither strategic document, though its saliency for interviewees suggests that it could be foregrounded in health promotion efforts and in education planning alike. As these examples show, the Ola Lei Framework can be used as an effective way to link government strategic planning endeavours to the assumptions, concepts and practices that resonate with local people.

Finally, critical reflection on the extent to which each component of ola lei is adequately realised in daily life can also provide guidelines for extending local regulations and motivating public engagement with them. For example, although homes and yards are kept very tidy, the concept of tuu-maa might also be extended to encourage more active care for the wider land and marine environments. The recent restriction of plastic bags is a good example of a successful policy change with positive environmental impact. The Department of Environment and local village councils, which both play crucial roles in minimising and managing waste in Tuvalu, struggle to access the funds, infrastructure and expertise needed to effectively engage with environmental issues. Many of these issues have public health implications that government departments, development organisations and community

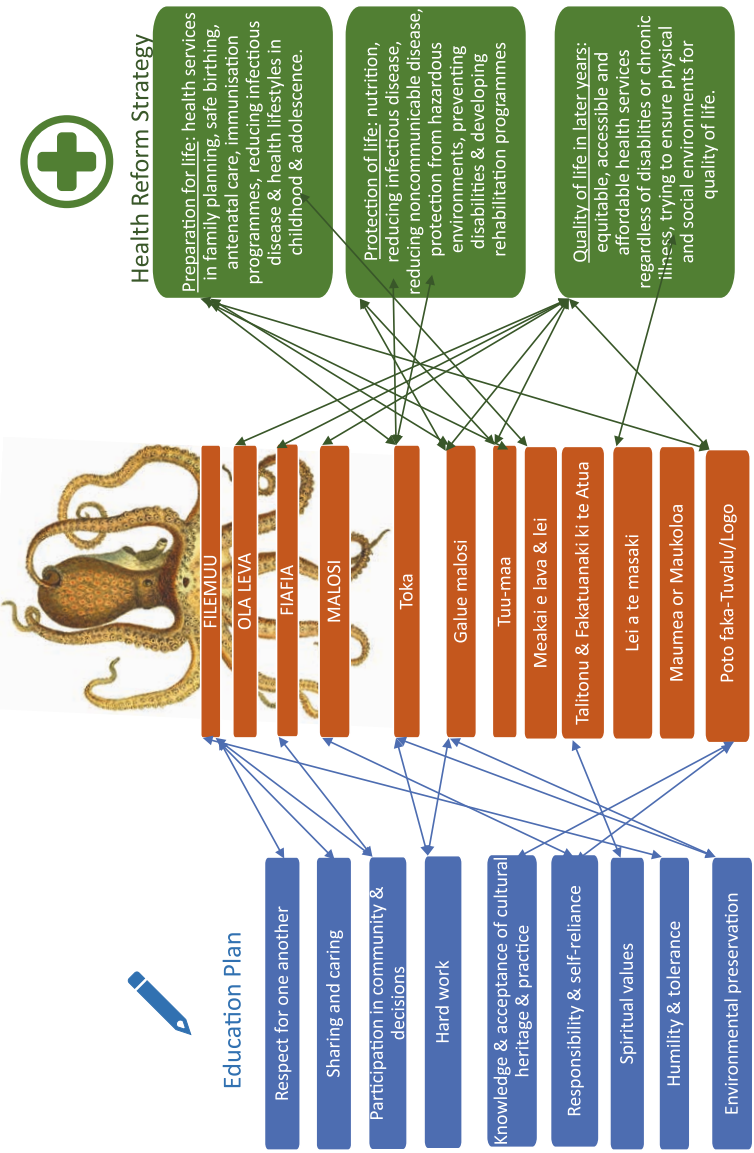

Figure 6. Mapping of attributes from the *Tuvalu Education Sector Plan III (2016–2020)* and the *Health Reform Strategy 2016–2019* against the principles and practices of Ola Lei.

groups might creatively address using aspects of the feke metaphor. Similarly, the concept of logo could be used as a model and extended beyond traditional knowledge to include skills such as budgeting, wise water use and child-rearing practices focused on living well in the contemporary world.

The Ola Lei Framework can also facilitate collaboration between formal and informal health sectors in ways that use and reinforce local values. For example, while traditional healers often refer people to doctors and clinics, these referrals are seldom reciprocated. Instead, biomedical health endeavours operate quite separately. Interviews with community people, traditional healers and Department of Health staff indicated considerable support for nurturing more cooperation between traditional healers and biomedical practitioners at both policy and practical levels. Developing a complementary relationship between these sectors could certainly enlarge the resources available for ola lei. Especially given the holistic orientation that already characterises Tuvalu's health policy, integrating traditional healing skills and knowledge into the formal health infrastructure might also result in beneficial creative synergies. For example, tuu-maa ideology could be put into practice by engaging communities or community groups in competitions to clear villages of breeding places for mosquitoes or in other mosquito abatement efforts.

* * *

In February 2014 our research group presented the Ola Lei Framework to elders, government and political figures, health workers and interested community members at a well-attended meeting in Funafuti. The representation of ola lei as te feke was especially well received, and many people told us that the Framework helped them organise their thoughts about wellbeing. They also offered additional ideas. One person pointed out that the octopus lives in deep water but puts its head above water occasionally to breathe, an apt metaphor for Tuvaluans surviving in Tuvalu and elsewhere in the face of climate emergencies. Someone else suggested that the suckers on the tentacles could indicate that Tuvaluans can get "stuck", meaning that it is hard to escape some practices not conducive to ola lei. The flexibility of te feke, its capacity to change and move, was also noted, making it, like ola lei, hard to "capture".

Later, in Auckland, we saw Tuvaluans wearing the feke image on T-shirts on festive occasions. It seems that the Ola Lei Framework, in its embodiment of the octopus, provides a powerful visual metaphor resonant with Tuvaluans anywhere. Similarly, the qualities and practices comprising this local theory of health and wellbeing have the potential to provide culturally meaningful support for numerous Tuvaluan endeavours.

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NOTES

1. Discussions were mainly in Tuvaluan and have been translated into English by Tufoua. Tuvaluan originals can be found in Panapa (2014). Regrettably, they are not included here for space reasons.
2. We thank the late Briar Sefton for her drawing of te feke (Fig. 1) and honour her life. As we discuss below, Rose Pere (1988) and, following her, Mason Durie (1994) have also used the octopus metaphor in relation to Māori health. However, Tufoua did not find these writings until after he had independently developed te feke based on his own ethnographic interviews. The octopus metaphor may well hold relevance in many other Pacific societies too.
3. At the most recent census in 2017 (Government of Tuvalu 2017), Tuvalu's resident population was just under 11,000, of whom nearly 7,000 lived on Funafuti, with the remainder residing on outer islands. Significant Tuvaluan populations are also located in New Zealand, Fiji and Australia.
4. Nui is a partial exception: in this community, people spoke a distinctive Kiribati-based Micronesian language; in modern times most also speak Tuvaluan as well. Dialect differences distinguish the Tuvaluan spoken throughout the archipelago.
5. As Chambers and Chambers (1985: 44) found for Nanumea, "[this] implicit connection between strength and health also finds reflection in the Nanumean attitude that being a 'man' is incongruous with being a 'sick person'… . Men take conspicuous pride in their ability to perform strenuous male activities."
6. Coconut sap ("toddy"), locally known as *kaleve*, is collected from the bound flower shoot of a coconut palm. "Cutting toddy" entails removing a thin sliver from the tip of the shoot, allowing sap to continue to flow into the collection receptacle. This is normally a young man's job, done at dawn and dusk, high in the crown of a palm tree.
7. The joy of feeling "alive" as a team resonates emotionally with fiafia and the experience of communitas.
8. Pulaka is similar to taro, though it is larger and more salt-tolerant (it has been called "atoll taro"). An iconic and high-status food, pulaka is grown in carefully composted pits dug down to the water table.
9. A rich baked pudding made from grated pulaka roots, coconut cream and coconut sap molasses.
10. After the feast, this platform of food was taken to the pastor's house. His guardians would decide what to do with the food, usually redistributing some to other households and keeping some to feed his own family and visitors.

11. Murai, Pen and Miller (1958) provide detailed descriptions of atoll foods, including the wide variety of coconut palm products, plus their preparation techniques and nutritive values.
12. These swamps formed in excavations made during World War II by United States forces to provide fill materials for the military runway. They were finally filled back in with New Zealand assistance in 2016, expanding the usable land area of Funafuti by 8 percent (Allen + Clarke 2017). Thus, this family's situation today differs from that described in 2011. However, although the pits were filled, densely populated Funafuti still has a significant solid waste disposal and sanitary issue.
13. This was the first private fishpond on the island. In the 1980s, he was one of the few people on the island who had vegetable gardens. Relatives, friends and sick people often came to him for produce, which he generously shared. He constructed the first concrete crab cages in the community. People continued to use these until recently, when they started to use wire cages to keep live crabs.
14. See Kennedy (1931) and Chambers and Chambers (1985) for descriptions of traditional medicine and healing on Vaitupu and Nanumea respectively.
15. This project was funded by the Social Citizenship Education Programme of the South Pacific Community (see rrrt.spc.int). It began in Tuvalu in 2019 and is ongoing at the time of writing, implemented by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport.
16. Specific lists of the values, principles and goals specified in these documents can be found on p. 20 of the Health Reform document and p. 12 of the education plan. Intersections with the Ola Lei Framework could be especially useful in making local understandings available for more effective government planning and policy development efforts, especially insofar as the Government of Tuvalu spends more on health and education than on other sectors.

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APPENDIX

Team Research Process

Tufoua's PhD research, on which much of this article is based, was part of a larger project on transnational Pacific health involving the Cook Islands, Tuvalu and people of those heritages in New Zealand. It was funded by the Health Research Council of New Zealand and the University of Auckland. Judith Littleton and Julie Park were the principal investigators, and drew together a supporting multidisciplinary team that included Linda Bryder, Anne Chambers, Keith Chambers, Ward Friesen, Jennifer Hand, Phyllis Herda, Robin Kearns, Pat Neuwelt and Yvonne Underhill-Sem. In addition to the substantive health knowledge we were seeking, one of the project's goals was to fund, foster and support six Tuvalu and Cook Islands scholars earning a higher degree. Ethics approval was granted by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, with further approvals from the Governments of Tuvalu and the Cook Islands. Here we focus on the Tuvalu process.

Except for the student colleagues and one member of the academic team of Cook Islands heritage, we were a group of academics of diverse, but non-Pacific, ancestry engaged in a project concerned with Pacific health and society. We were, of course, highly aware of the myriad issues that such a structure raises. Many of us have had long involvement in working in partnership with Pacific scholars and communities and had learned lessons of what might be called "cultural humility". We knew about our disciplines and subject areas, about how to write successful grant proposals and how to manage research processes, but in relation to Tuvalu and the Cook Islands we were the perpetual students and the students were the teachers—although they were learning too, to understand their societies through alternate lenses. Our process was one of learning together and exchanging expertise.

Early in 2008 Keith Chambers and Julie Park visited Tuvalu to discuss the research idea with relevant people in Funafuti and to learn what local people and government would be most interested in, should the study be funded. They

sought and received official approval and discussed the three postgraduate scholarships for Tuvaluans which were part of the funding application. For Keith, this was one of several earlier return visits. He and Anne Chambers had first been to Tuvalu, then the Ellice Islands, in 1973, before independence, to conduct their doctoral research. They were both fluent in the language, with a Nanumea accent, and well known in Tuvalu through their previous research. It was Julie's first visit and she did not know the language.

Once the project was successfully funded, the search for graduate scholars began. Setapu Resture, whom Keith and Julie had met in Funafuti, gained a master's scholarship and conducted a historical study of health in Tuvalu (2010). Sagaa Malua (2014), based in Auckland, conducted and published community research in New Zealand as a research associate, and subsequently, as an honours student in anthropology. They were eventually joined by Tufoua Panapa, who had been teaching high school in Tuvalu, who enrolled in Development Studies for his PhD, under the supervision of Yvonne Underhill-Sem and the co-authors of this article. Like the other students, Tufoua was able to define the focus of his project. He chose to link health, education and development via an ethnographic study in Funafuti, Vaitupu and locations in New Zealand where there were Tuvalu people living.

Key to this transnational project of learning together was a weekly reading and writing group for academic staff and the students. Theory, methodology, Pacific scholarship and comparative studies were discussed, with participation by all comers. These exchanges were the heart of the project. Less frequent team meetings reviewed progress, participated in planning and shared expertise. Each graduate student also had his or her own supervisory arrangement with members of the research group with the relevant expertise. Staff members conducted discrete pieces of research to feed into the larger project (e.g., Dunsford *et al*. 2011; and see the project website: http://www.arts.auckland.ac.nz/en/about/schools-in-the-faculty-of-arts/school-of-social-sciences/anthropology/staff-research/social-research-on-tb-and-health/transnational-health-in-the-pacific-through-the-lens-of-tb.html).

Tufoua returned to Tuvalu from his Auckland doctoral preparation for a preliminary field consultation period from November 2010 until February 2011, accompanied for several weeks by Anne and Keith Chambers, and he returned from Auckland for his main ethnographic fieldwork in Tuvalu from June 2011 to January 2012. This Tuvalu-based work he complemented with fieldwork in Auckland, Wellington, Whāngārei, Porirua and Rotorua. Shortly before his thesis was ready for submission in 2014, Tufoua and the co-authors travelled to Funafuti to present his findings, receive feedback, collect the final set of health statistics and thank the many people who had supported and facilitated our work.

We authors were in three different locations when we wrote this article: Tuvalu (Vaitupu or Funafuti), United States (Oregon) and New Zealand (Auckland). We discussed it several times in person and via email before beginning writing. By this time Tufoua was fully engaged with his new role in the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport in Tuvalu. The first step Julie and Judith carried out in Auckland, namely cutting and pasting the relevant sections of Tufoua's thesis into a single document and editing it to fit into an academic article, being very mindful of retaining Tufoua's narrative voice. That accomplished, we authors worked through the key arguments of the Ola Lei Framework itself, its basis in research and its status as a Tuvaluan theory, and more generally, the issue of treating indigenous theory as theory—an issue we had canvassed in an earlier paper using Māori theory to consider New Zealand immigration policy as it related to Tuvalu (Park *et al*. 2011). Because the thesis was submitted in 2014 and we began work on the paper in 2019, some updating was also required. This reading and writing was done iteratively via email, Dropbox and several internet voice calls over many months.

Once the article had been submitted in 2020 and accepted, subject to taking into account several excellent suggestions (thank you to our reviewers), much the same writing process took place. One reviewer had suggested that it would be useful to read about Pacific scholarship in the context of a multicultural team, and this appendix is the result.

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