

# MIGRATION AND THE FUNCTION OF THE EXTENSION PROGRAMME: A CASE STUDY OF TUVALU

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## A. EDUCATIONAL CONDITION OF TUVALU

Tuvalu is one of the world's smallest independent nations. The total land area is only 26 sq km and the population is nine thousand. Funafuti, the main island and location of the national capital, has less than three thousand inhabitants and there are no large buildings or factories. The territory was just one rural district of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands colony until fifteen years ago, and British colonial government had produced little industrial development. The nine islands comprising the country are all low coral atolls unsuitable for efficient agriculture. Consequently not only fuel, machinery and other manufactured goods but even staple foodstuffs such as vegetables and rice must be imported. By the same token there are no exports except small quantities of copra, whose annual output is only 100 to 500 tons. The islands are also extremely isolated in geographical terms. These geographical and historical peculiarities have created an unusual state of affairs in Tuvalu.

Before describing the USP Extension Centre, let us examine the general educational situation in Tuvalu.

Because of the small population, there are only two secondary schools in Tuvalu, one of which was established as late as 1991 by the church. Though most children go to primary school, those who want to go to the next stage have to leave their homes and attend the Government Secondary School at Vaitupu, or the Church School at Funafuti. After they finish secondary school, students take an examination, and if successful have the chance to go abroad to obtain higher education by government scholarship. There is no higher education organization within the country itself except for the USP Extension Centre and a single Maritime (vocational) Training School. Accordingly, the USP Centre is the only institution capable of providing higher education to Tuvalu citizens in their home country.

## B. FUNCTIONS OF THE USP TUVALU EXTENSION CENTRE

How successful has the USP Extension Centre been?

The USP centre in Tuvalu is situated beside the main shopping area of Funafuti: a few small stores. The distance to the USP Centre from this area is only about 50m. Next door is the hospital and across the road is the main primary school so the centre is located in the heart of Funafuti; still, however, in a peaceful and rural environment. As shown in Table 1, the age of our interviewees is comparatively high. This is not accidental but a general tendency in Tuvalu. According to the Centre Director, the normal peak of the current generation of students is between 25 and 35 years. Table 2 indicates that most students are employed. This statistic is related to the feasibility of

meeting school fees and, more importantly, related directly to the role of the USP Centre in Tuvalu.

TABLE 1 THE INTERVIEWEES' PROFILES

	age	category
A	32	USP Graduate
B	33	USP Extension Student
C	39	USP Extension complete
D	19	USP Extension Student
E	34	USP Extension Student
F	32	USP Extension Student
G	31	USP Graduate
H	33	USP Extension Student
I	31	USP Graduate
J	35	USP Extension Student
K	34	USP Extension Student

These students are mostly government workers or government-related organization workers. They pay their school fees from their own earnings and are studying part-time. In Tuvalu, where private companies are underdeveloped and too undercapitalized to develop much beyond family stores, only government workers enjoy stability of employment and sufficient income to consider part-time learning.

What is their motive in working through the USP Extension Centre? Several answers were conflated and synthesized: the main motive is strongly related to their job. That is to say, a certificate from USP gives an advantage for job promotion prospects. They--mainly minor officials--believe this to be so, and in fact it will probably be true.

TABLE 2 JOB SITUATION OF USP-EX STUDENTS, 2ND SEMESTER '92

Employed :	58 persons (95%)
Unemployed:	3 persons( 5%)

[Note: this table excludes students who are currently taking continuing education courses. They are all kindergarten teachers and number 28. If we were to include them, those with jobs would constitute about 97% of respondents.]

After graduation from secondary school, they got a job and now, a few years later, they are trying to gain more specialized knowledge and qualifications to help their promotion prospects through a USP course. In Tuvalu, where already the traditional chiefly hierarchy has broken down

and where relatively little nepotism exists, promotion in rank is closely and mainly concerned with the qualifications of the candidate.

The Government of Tuvalu has tended to suffer from a lack of local talent since independence. Consequently they have given education high priority. They also perhaps tend to favour USP graduates and USP certificate-holders in selections for posts. This explains the function of USP in Tuvalu so far.

Next we will consider the influence on migration by the USP University Extension. In fact, this research visit on September 1992 was our second attempt to come to Tuvalu. We had hoped to visit one year before but, unfortunately, we could not because of airline flight interruptions. At that time, we asked the Centre staff to fill in the headings and make preliminary entries on the fact sheet of our data-gathering questionnaire. On the second occasion we planned to interview these people to get more detailed information. When we arrived however, three of the previous informants were already overseas. We therefore tried to discover the present addresses of USP students of the second semester of 1988. 23% of them were out of the country either temporarily or permanently. [Findings are shown in Table 3].

TABLE 3 LOCATION OF '88 SECOND SEMESTER STUDENTS (as of September '92)

Tuvalu:	74 persons
Overseas:	23*
Unknown:	3

(\* Australia 5, Fiji 5, New Zealand 4, Western Samoa 2, United Kingdom 1, Seaman 4, Unknown 2; total 23.)

### C. IMMIGRATION AND DISTANCE EDUCATION

From the colonial period onwards many Tuvaluans have gone overseas because of limited job possibilities on the islands. Nowadays, in addition to the attractions of employment, there are such opportunities as schooling, workshops/seminars or visiting relatives relatively cheaply to give extra encouragement; people seem to leave more frequently, as the above unexpected statistic shows. However, some answered that they want to go abroad only for a limited time; even if they have a chance to go, they are sure to be back home a couple of years or so later. Generally speaking, respondents in Tuvalu currently attending or who have attended the USP have little urge to migrate. Our three interviewees who went overseas were not going because they sought jobs. One went to take advantage of a government scholarship, another went to visit relatives and the third went with her foreigner husband.

Availability of USP courses in Tuvalu --and the certificates that can be gained from them--in the country itself seems to encourage such a situation. That is, students who want to get special knowledge and qualifications can study locally; they can then qualify for--and get--a suitable job in the country. And the fact that main Tuvaluan settlements overseas are Nauru or Kiribati, neither of

which is a technologically advanced country, may be another basic reason.

What will the future hold?

This trend described above still continues; however, a turning point is soon expected. The number of government workers has now reached 499, more than 5% of the population, and consuming a large amount of the GNP. As profits from the Tuvalu Trust Fund (an operation of low growth) play a large part in the national budget, it is not easy to continue recruiting government workers and establishing new posts. Accordingly, there is likely to be great discontent among those well-educated Tuvaluans who will not be able to get suitable and satisfying posts in the country. Symptoms have already been seen; two USP graduates were nominated and competed for one post. Those who can't get a good job in the country (which means the government) naturally think of working overseas. Tuvalu is a member of the Commonwealth so that it is not too difficult to work in Australia and New Zealand, for which the people feel an affinity.

What extensions of its services can USP provide? As far as lifelong education education is concerned, a programme of post-Form 5 education is urgently required, lack of which is already causing people to lose job opportunities. The Tuvalu Centre has, however, started a new continuing education programme for kindergarten teachers from the '92 second semester.

Once the migration boom happens, countries like Tuvalu are not able to stop it easily. We can see these examples in some other Polynesian countries. The USP Centre, as the only higher education organization in the country, has to collaborate with the Education Department of the Government closely, and also has to cooperate with the general policy of employment and the industrial development plan.