

Kia rauka I te turanga memeitaki no te katoatoa: Towards defining and improving turanga memeitaki (wellbeing) for all through our 'Akapapa'anga (genealogical world view).

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This paper is localised to the Cook Islands and looks at the progress and challenges of attaining sustainable development and beyond through Cook Islands Maori knowledge and visions towards turanga memeitaki (wellbeing) from a research and policy/ planning perspective. The Cook Islands National Sustainable Development Plan 2016-2020¹ came to an end in 2020 and the country has since developed Te Ara Akapapa'anga Nui – National Sustainable Development Agenda (NSDA 2020+) which is the next iteration of its sustainable development future towards a 100 year vision of turanga memeitaki or holistic wellbeing- a shift that has been brought about in part by COVID-19 and the realisation that the focus on economic aspects of growth alone does not mean sustainable development and meeting the aspirations of a Nations people².

The formulation of Te Ara Akapapa'anga Nui- National Sustainable Development Agenda (NSDA) 2020+ takes an extended outlook over 100 years and prioritises a generational scale, the period is interspersed with short to medium-term plans that are adjusted as the Nation and its people continue to evolve. This has been planned at 5 years through a scorecard with 75 indicators and a 25 year generational outcomes document with targets. These planning periods align with the philosophy and practice of 'Akapapa'anga- the use and importance of genealogical legacies to and for the Cook Islands and its people.³

In order to progress sustainable development or any National vision there must be an anchor to bind everyone and everything together towards that vision. A sort of centrally understood concept that is shared by everyone. In the Cook Islands case that anchor has been 'Akapapa'anga Ara tangata, which is a cornerstone of not only Māori society but also many other societies around the world. It informs the way our society is built and the collective innovation of our people. For example, it underpins our connection, rights and management of lands, records the interrelation of our various islands over many generations, and informs the relationships we have with our people and kin in the Ipukarea⁴ and further abroad.⁵ It is the relationships inherent in akapapa'anga (genealogies) that drives our preparations, an impetus to build a strong future for our society, our 'enua and the descendants to come. Emma Powell in her Ph.D. thesis posits that it is very difficult to deconstruct Akapapa'anga into clear separate parts and that it

¹ Cook Islands Government, Office of the Prime Minister (2019). <https://www.pmooffice.gov.ck/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/NSDP-2016-2020.pdf>.

² Cook Islands Government. (2021, December 9). *NSDA Documents*. Retrieved from Office of the Prime Minister- Koutu mana tutara o te ipukarea: <https://www.pmooffice.gov.ck/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Turanga-Meitaki-100-mataiti-Digital.pdf>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ipukarea is homeland in Cook Islands Maori.

⁵ Powell, Emma. "Akapapa'anga Ara Tangata: Genealogising the (Cook Islands) Māori imaginary." PhD diss., Open Access Te Herenga Waka-Victoria University of Wellington, (2021).

would detract from its effectiveness to make it more linear.⁶ Instead, Powell explains Akapapa'anga as a cultural paradigm, a cultural practice and a research methodology.⁷ Mahuika⁸ explains whakapapa in Aotearoa (the semantic equivalent of Akapapa'anga in the Cook Islands) as a concept of genealogy⁹ and it is literally a process of laying one thing over another.¹⁰ According to Cleve Barlow whakapapa is the genealogical descent of all living things from the gods to the present time.¹¹ There is a whakapapa for everything that exists and it is seen by Maori as a skeletal structure of Maori knowledge or an organising framework for Maori history.¹² Whakapapa is one of the most prized forms of knowledge and great efforts are made to preserve it.¹³ While akapapa'anga of the Cook Islands Maori is the semantic equivalent to whakapapa in Aotearoa and the terms are cognates of each other, recent histories and lived realities of these siblings have been different due to colonialism and different historical forces and so the stories are somewhat different. Nonetheless, the underlying values and cultural impetus remains. Within Akapapa'anga the Maori of Aotearoa are the teina (younger sibling) of the Cook Islands Maori who are the Tuakana (elder sibling) such is the relationship which is founded and validated through akapapa'anga and the oral traditions which verify this.¹⁴ This is also seen with relationships with the Maohi of modern day French Polynesia, Maoli of Hawaii and Mao'i of Samoa all of whom are bound by shared historical genealogies or Akapapa'anga.

Powell¹⁵ rejects 'Akapapa'anga as being a singular conflation of the term genealogy and explores the significance of 'akapapa'anga beyond the exclusivity of human genetics as the only relations that matter in the Māori worldview.¹⁶ This conflation of genealogies with other indigenous concepts has also been supported by others.¹⁷ In the Maori world view, Mahuika explains that genealogies sometimes coalesce with the supernatural and spiritual planes.¹⁸ Such are the nuances which Powell goes on to explain through three different narrative centers (different stories told through a Akapapa'anga perspective) shaping the temporal and spatial scales of 'akapapa'anga in order to illustrate epistemology and Māori reality with key cultural practices of 'Akapapa'anga being defined and used to demonstrate how these practices form a cultural paradigm and how such practices implicate enquiry, the nature of relationality, and the subsequent generation of subjectivity, perspective and new knowledges.¹⁹ Akapapa'anga importantly provides insight into the

⁶ Powell, Emma. "Akapapa'anga Ara Tangata: Genealogising the (Cook Islands) Māori imaginary." PhD diss., Open Access Te Herenga Waka-Victoria University of Wellington, (2021); 75-76.

⁷ Ibid., 67, 71-73.

⁸ Mahuika, Nēpia. "A brief history of whakapapa: Māori approaches to genealogy." *Genealogy* 3, no. 2 (2019): 32.

⁹ Ibid., 1.

¹⁰ Ngata, Sir Apirana, and Te Kapunga Dewes. *The Porourangi Māori Cultural School: Opening Night at the Pavilion, Whakarua Park, Ruatoria, 8 Pm Tuesday, April 4th, 1944: Introductory Address; Lecture 2: Raurū-nui-a-Toi Wānanga; Lecture 3: Raurū-nui-a-Toi Wānanga*. Victoria University of Wellington, Department of Anthropology, 1971; 6.

¹¹ Barlow, Cleve. "Tikanga whakaaro: Key concepts in Māori culture." (*No Title*) (1991). (pg. 173)

¹² Roberts, Mere. "Ways of seeing: Whakapapa." *Sites: a journal of social anthropology and cultural studies* 10, no. 1 (2013): 93-120; Tau, Te Maire. "Matauranga Maori as an epistemology." (1999).

¹³ Graham, James. "Nā Rangi tāua, nā Tūānuku e takoto nei: Research methodology framed by whakapapa." *Mai Review* 1, no. 3 (2009): 1.

¹⁴ Mahuika, Nēpia. "A brief history of whakapapa: Māori approaches to genealogy." *Genealogy* 3, no. 2 (2019): 6.

¹⁵ Powell, Emma. "Akapapa'anga Ara Tangata: Genealogising the (Cook Islands) Māori imaginary." PhD diss., Open Access Te Herenga Waka-Victoria University of Wellington, 2021.

¹⁶ Powell, Emma. "Akapapa'anga Ara Tangata: Genealogising the (Cook Islands) Māori imaginary." PhD diss., Open Access Te Herenga Waka-Victoria University of Wellington, (2021): 42

¹⁷ Teaiwa, Teresia. "The ancestors we get to choose: White influences I won't deny." *Theorizing native studies* (2014): 43-55; Royal, Te Ahukaramu Charles. "Te ao marama-a research paradigm." *He Pukenga Korero* 4, no. 1 (2013).

¹⁸ Mahuika, Nēpia. "A brief history of whakapapa: Māori approaches to genealogy." *Genealogy* 3, no. 2 (2019): 3.

¹⁹ Powell, Emma. "Akapapa'anga Ara Tangata: Genealogising the (Cook Islands) Māori imaginary." PhD diss., Open Access Te Herenga Waka-Victoria University of Wellington, (2021); 24.

cultural, social, and political context of a community. It helps in understanding how individuals, entities and groups interact with each other, and how they understand their place within society. It can also provide insight into the transmission of cultural knowledge and practices across generations and beyond.

The process of tracing genealogies involves researching and analyzing family trees, oral traditions, historical documents, and other sources of information to determine the relationships and connections between individuals, entities and groups.²⁰This information can then be used to identify patterns, trends, and cultural practices that are specific to a particular communities to apply for practical solutions. In order to use 'Akapapa'anga effectively, a researcher must be knowledgeable about the cultural practices and traditions of the community being studied.²¹They must also be able to navigate the complexities of cultural identity and the role that genealogy plays in shaping individual and group identities.²²However, anyone can apply it to their knowledge and find their own concepts which can be applied as appropriate.

I posit that it would detract from its effectiveness to make 'Akapapa'anga more linear and that it is hard to separate into different parts- however it is worth looking at key aspects of 'Akapapa'anga or the concept of genealogy as a research methodology. Below I will expand on these key aspects arguing that 'akapapa'anga offers a:

- I. *World view:* Akapapa'anga connects everything and genealogises the connections to the moana (sea), enua (land), mareva (air) and all living and non-living entities within the cosmos. It provides a more comprehensive and holistic perspective on the world and human existence. It 'genealogises' from the atua and beginnings of time to now and into the future and also coalesces with the supernatural and spiritual spheres to go beyond strictly being about genetic or genealogical pedigrees.
- II. *Cultural paradigm:* It includes shared set of beliefs, values, and practices that shape the way Cook Islands Maori perceive and interact with the world around them. It encompasses the dominant cultural assumptions and expectations that influence the way individuals and groups think, feel, and behave. This includes concepts of tapu or cultural taboos and ensuring that no one in the Matakeinanga (tribe) is left behind.
- III. *Community engagement:* As with many other aspects of Cook Islands culture, 'Akapapa'anga emphasizes the importance of community engagement and collaboration.
- IV. *Explanation of the relation between time, space and people:* It helps in explaining the concept of Ora (time), Va (space) and tangata (people) through genealogy and the relationship between the concepts.
- V. *Explanation of cultural roles and responsibilities:* It helps in designating cultural roles and responsibilities according to where you are born in the Papa'anga. First-born children are afforded entitlements but also responsibilities. Also, tribal and cultural titles are allocated according to genealogy.
- VI. *Respect for elders and ancestors:* 'Akapapa'anga places a strong emphasis on respecting and honouring the knowledge and experiences of elders and ancestors.

²⁰ Mahuika, Nēpia. "A brief history of whakapapa: Māori approaches to genealogy." *Genealogy* 3, no. 2 (2019); Powell, Emma. "'Akapapa'anga Ara Tangata: Genealogising the (Cook Islands) Māori imaginary." PhD diss., Open Access Te Herenga Waka-Victoria University of Wellington, (2021).

²¹ Ibid above at 18.

²² Mahuika, Nēpia. "A brief history of whakapapa: Māori approaches to genealogy." *Genealogy* 3, no. 2 (2019);9.

It is often through these individuals that the genealogical information is passed down.

- VII. *Family and community focus:* 'Akapapa'anga is centred on family and community relationships and history. It emphasizes the importance of understanding one's place in the community and the connections between different individuals and groups.
- VIII. *Cultural continuity and preservation:* 'Akapapa'anga is an important tool for preserving and transmitting cultural knowledge and practices from one generation to the next. It helps to maintain continuity and connection with cultural heritage and identity. It is often used in community events and celebrations and involves the participation of many individuals.
- IX. *Oral tradition:* 'Akapapa'anga is largely based on oral tradition and storytelling. It is often passed down through generations and can be performed through song, dance, and other forms of artistic expression.

These aspects of 'Akapapa'anga do not totally encapsulate all its nuances. However, it demonstrates its importance and place within the Cook Islands world view and explains it as a cultural paradigm, a cultural practice and by its own merits a research methodology.

Turanga Memeitaki in the Cook Islands was not defined as wellbeing or given much attention until the development of the Te Ara Akapapa'anga Nui 2020+ - National Sustainable Development Agenda 2020+. ²³The idea of understanding and wanting to incorporate Turanga Memeitaki from a uniquely Cook Islands cultural perspective into national policy planning in the Cook Islands was the result of increased concerns of economic growth brought about by increasing numbers of tourists and the effects that were being seen on the environment and the social fabric of the nation. ²⁴It was also a concept found and revitalised through the research done on Akapapa'anga which bound everyone together as guardians for future generations. The basic tenets of Turanga Memeitaki encapsulate individual aspects but emphasises the collective dynamics which are linked through Akapapa'anga. The outcome of research and consultations through the NSDA 2020+ emphasised the need to focus on a vision of Turanga memeitaki or holistic wellbeing over the next 100 years and has defined Turanga memeitaki as when a person and family are in a state of being (Turanga Maru) comfortable, (Ora'anga Matutu) healthy, and (Mataora) happy. All of which emphasize the importance of the relational and spiritual aspects and ensuring that the NSDA 2020+ is people centred and has shared understandings.

When looking at the concept of well-being it has been present in human history and philosophy for thousands of years. Ancient Greek philosophers such as Aristotle and Epicurus discussed the importance of well-being, ²⁵ and the concept has been studied and developed by many other cultures throughout history, with no universal definition accepted. ²⁶ Wellbeing is contested because it is multifaceted and can be defined and measured in different ways depending on the perspective, context, and values of the

²³ Cook Islands Government, (2021).

²⁴ Cook Islands Government evidence base, (2021).

²⁵ Kenny, Anthony. *The Aristotelian Ethics: A study of the relationship between the Eudemian and Nicomachean ethics of Aristotle*. Oxford University Press, 2016; Leddy, Neven, and Avi Lifschitz, eds. *Epicurus in the Enlightenment*. No. 12. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2009.

²⁶ Diener, Ed, and Eunkook Suh. "Measuring quality of life: Economic, social, and subjective indicators." *Social indicators research* 40 (1997): 189-216.

individuals or groups involved with different disciplines,²⁷ such as psychology, sociology, economics, and philosophy, approaching it from different angles. While there is no one-size-fits-all definition of wellbeing, there is a growing consensus that it is a multidimensional concept that encompasses multiple aspects of an individual's life, including their physical health, mental health, social relationships, and sense of purpose or meaning.²⁸ Additional to this are relational aspects and cultural embeddedness in wellbeing and ensuring that everything is contextualised.

Indigenous understandings of Wellbeing:

Wellbeing concepts in the Pacific include the Solomon Islands Kwara'ae philosophy of gwamauri'anga or the 'good life',²⁹ sautu and bula taucoko in Fiji³⁰ both from modern day Melanesia and which emphasise wellbeing with indigenous knowledge systems, communal obligations and prioritizing collective welfare³¹. Polynesian wellbeing models include the Tokelauan Te Vaka Atafaga³² and the Aotearoa Whare Tapa Wha health model.³³ These models have a strong emphasis on the collective, spiritual and environmental aspects which are lacking in western conceptions.

Richardson et al³⁴ explain that a 'good life' is locally realized as central to advancing the idea of meaningful development and note inconsistencies between development and wellbeing outcomes. Although wellbeing may mean different things for people it generally includes dimensions of happiness and other factors that enable a 'good life'.³⁵ Scheyvens et al³⁶ look at sustainable tourism and wellbeing and emphasise the importance of recognizing and respecting indigenous cultures, values, and rights, and avoiding cultural appropriation, commodification, and stereotyping. In western cultures attaining wellbeing is usually an individual pursuit but indigenous philosophies understand wellbeing to be a collective, communal and relational notion.³⁷

Spiritual well-being is indeed a vital aspect of Pacific models that is often overlooked in Western models.³⁸ In the Pacific context, spirituality is deeply entrenched in the way of life, and it is seen as an integral part of holistic health and well-being. The spiritual

²⁷ Kashdan, Todd B., Robert Biswas-Diener, and Laura A. King. "Reconsidering happiness: The costs of distinguishing between hedonics and eudaimonia." *The Journal of positive psychology* 3, no. 4 (2008): 219-233.

²⁸ Marks, Nic, and Hetan Shah. "A well-being manifesto for a flourishing society." *Journal of Public Mental Health* 3, no. 4 (2004): 9-15.

²⁹ Gegeo, David W. "Indigenous knowledge and empowerment: Rural development examined from within." *The contemporary pacific* (1998): 289-315.

³⁰ Nabobo-Baba, Unaisi. *Knowing and learning: An indigenous Fijian approach*. editorrips@ usp. ac. fj, 2006; Richardson, Emma, Emma Hughes, Sharon McLennan, and Litea Meo-Sewabu. "Indigenous Well-Being and Development." *the contemporary pacific* 31, no. 1 (2019): 1-34.

³¹ Meo-Sewabu, L. "Cultural constructs of health and wellbeing amongst indigenous Fijian women in Fiji and New Zealand." *Unpublished doctoral thesis*. Massey University, Palmerston North (2015); 4.

³² Kupa, Kupa. "Te Vaka Atafaga: A Tokelau assessment model for supporting holistic mental health practice with Tokelau people in Aotearoa, New Zealand." *Pacific health dialog* 15, no. 1 (2009): 156-163.

³³ Durie, Mason H. "A Maori perspective of health." *Social science & medicine* 20, no. 5 (1985): 483-486.

³⁴ Richardson, Emma, Emma Hughes, Sharon McLennan, and Litea Meo-Sewabu. "Indigenous Well-Being and Development." *the contemporary pacific* 31, no. 1 (2019): 1-34.

³⁵ Richardson, Emma, Emma Hughes, Sharon McLennan, and Litea Meo-Sewabu. "Indigenous Well-Being and Development." *the contemporary pacific* 31, no. 1 (2019): 3.

³⁶ Scheyvens, Regina, Anna Carr, Apisalome Movono, Emma Hughes, Freya Higgins-Desbiolles, and Jason Paul Mika. "Indigenous tourism and the sustainable development goals." *Annals of Tourism Research* 90 (2021): 103260.

³⁷ Richardson, Emma, Emma Hughes, Sharon McLennan, and Litea Meo-Sewabu. "Indigenous Well-Being and Development." *the contemporary pacific* 31, no. 1 (2019): 3.

³⁸ Scheyvens, Regina A., Apisalome Movono, and Sophie Auckram. "Pacific peoples and the pandemic: exploring multiple well-beings of people in tourism-dependent communities." *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 31, no. 1 (2023): 111-130.

dimension is viewed as an essential component of a person's health and well-being, and it is often seen as the foundation of physical, emotional, and mental health.³⁹ Spiritual well-being is not limited to religious practices but encompasses a broader sense of connection to the universe, including nature, ancestors, and spiritual beings. It is believed that maintaining a strong connection to these entities can bring balance and harmony to a person's life, leading to improved overall health and well-being.

Mainstream development discourse only began to prioritize "human well-being" in the 1990s. The significance of human well-being for development was first acknowledged in the United Nations Development Programme's - Human Development Report 1990.⁴⁰ The term human development in the report denotes both the process of widening people's choices and the level of their achieved wellbeing.⁴¹ This recognition sparked increased attention to human well-being as an essential aspect of development. By 2011, the United Nations had recognized the "pursuit of happiness" as a fundamental human goal, along with sustainable development, poverty reduction, and more inclusiveness.⁴² However the challenge has been the "how to" implement wellbeing and happiness at the National and local level and within communities where it is needed.

Some of the main criticisms in the literature of wellbeing include the fact that Wellbeing is subjective, meaning that what may be considered "wellbeing" for one person may not be the same for another⁴³ and that this subjectivity can make it difficult to measure or define wellbeing accurately. There is also a cultural bias in the way wellbeing is often defined, as many definitions come from Global North and Western, individualistic perspectives.⁴⁴ This bias can result in overlooking the importance of communal values and social connections in other cultures. Some critics argue that the current focus on measuring wellbeing through quantitative metrics oversimplifies the complex and multi-dimensional nature of wellbeing.⁴⁵ Diener et al⁴⁶ call for more holistic and nuanced approaches to measuring and promoting wellbeing that takes into account a wide range of factors, including social, environmental, and cultural factors.

Coming back to the Cook Islands it is clear that wellbeing had to be defined within a clear conceptual framework such as Akapapa'anga which ordered and made sense of everything. A cultural framework which took into account the group and the individual, the spiritual and the cultural and the objective/subjective aspects of wellbeing and most importantly gave meaning to sustainability with every person and entity being able to contribute as tiaki⁴⁷ for the future generations to come. It may not be perfect but it's a start in acknowledging and valuing our indigenous knowledge base as a solution for the future and towards the attainment of wellbeing for a sustainable future.

³⁹ Chirico, Francesco. "Spiritual well-being in the 21st century: It's time to review the current WHO's health definition." *Journal of Health and Social Sciences* 1, no. 1 (2016): 11-16.

⁴⁰ United Nations HDR, (1990).

⁴¹ United Nations HDR, (1990);10

⁴² UN General Assembly, (2011).

⁴³ Ryan, Richard M., and Edward L. Deci. "On happiness and human potentials: A review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being." *Annual review of psychology* 52, no. 1 (2001): 141-166.

⁴⁴ Ryff, Carol D., and Burton H. Singer. "Know thyself and become what you are: A eudaimonic approach to psychological well-being." *Journal of happiness studies* 9 (2008): 13-39; Helliwell, J. F., R. Layard, and J. D. Sachs. "World Happiness Report", The UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN)." (2018).

⁴⁵ Stiglitz, Joseph E., Amartya Sen, and Jean-Paul Fitoussi. *Mismeasuring our lives: Why GDP doesn't add up*. The New Press, 2010.

⁴⁶ Diener, Ed, Shigehiro Oishi, and Richard E. Lucas. "National accounts of subjective well-being." *American psychologist* 70, no. 3 (2015): 234.

⁴⁷ Tiaki means custodian or guardian in Cook Islands Maori.

Conclusion

This paper provides but one example of how indigenous concepts (Akapapa'anga and Turanga memeitaki) can empower our mindsets to one that places value on indigenous knowledge and constructs in helping towards practical sustainable development solutions. The solutions include providing a strong framework (people centred and shared understandings based) that can be adapted for transformational change in different settings as people feel connected to the concept and everything it stands for including the responsibility to act as guardians for future generations. Through the Cook Islands experience it has also provided a 100 year shared vision towards wellbeing for all which provides a shared cultural concept or anchor that binds everyone together and ultimately can help other Nations in awakening their local knowledge and using it towards pragmatic sustainable development solutions within their people's understandings.

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