Governmental Foresight? Of Course!!

Building Resilience in Small Island Developing States through Foresight

Monday, 1 September 2014, 11 am – 12.30 pm
SIDS Conference Venue (Faleata Sports Complex, Apia, Samoa)

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All governments, even those created very recently, are based on cosmologies, principles, and technologies more than two hundred years old.
The first modern democratic governments were formed in the late 18\textsuperscript{th} century.
The best way to look forward was to look backwards.
The pace of social and environmental change was, or was perceived to be, very, very slow.
Basing decisions on the past made perfect sense and was often successful.
By the middle of the 19th century, the world, led by the West, was on the road to industrialism, development, and perpetual progress.
Suddenly the West was awash with change.
To keep up with the dizzying pace of change, governments began adding new functions and institutions to the old structure as fast as they could.
They all were created as *responses* to *immediate* pressure.
But no one came up with a fundamentally new structure for governance after the 1780s.
We are still governed by pre-industrial cosmologies within pre-industrial structures.
None was structured to have a systematic and consistent foresight capability.
But why should they?
There was absolutely no doubt what the future of America, or Japan, or Germany, or Korea or any other nation 
should be from the mid 1860s onward.
The entire purpose of government, education, the media, the family, and all other modern institutions is to produce people and processes that will keep the nation and the economy growing,
So why have a Ministry of Foresight when the future is so clearly known?
It is not easy to develop.

But it is not rocket science either, and it does not require any particular foresight --just very acute sensitivity to the ever-changing present.
This was the condition of governance design ideas at the time governments were created for most of your islands, and for mine.
In the 1960s, a few scholars first became aware that the pace of social change was accelerating, and permanently so.
Governments need to establish “look outs” or “institutions of foresight” in order to make policies on the basis of the future and not just the past or present.
Institutions of foresight were created in many countries during the 1970s in legislatures administrative offices, and, most interestingly, in judiciaries.
Anticipatory Democracy

Futures Research — Decision Makers
And yet most governments—not only those of islands—are still profoundly unfutures-oriented:

constantly reacting to what others do to them.
At the present time the most futures-oriented governance systems in the world may be Singapore and Finland.
Though Korea is rapidly catching up and may already be ahead.
Governmental foresight must focus on broad social, cultural, and environmental issues,
and not only on economics, science, technology, or military security
Futures studies is growing.

Academic programs in futures studies are springing up everywhere.
Many countries are no longer "industrial" but have become "information societies".
Some futurists now say that technology is pushing the world beyond an "information society".
A "Dream society" with transhumans and new nature lies ahead, they say.
Others retort that to the contrary growth must be slowed --and will be slowed either by choice, or by collapse.
This is a future **without** cheap and abundant energy;
A future with unstable climate, sea-level rise, insufficient food and water, severe environmental pollution;
A future with challenging **global** population growth and **local** population decline;
A future without a sustainable economy that distributes wealth fairly;

**Uneven Prosperity**

In the U.S., incomes of the top earners have grown at a faster rate than incomes of rest of the population.

Average family income, excluding capital gains, adjusted for inflation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change between 2000 and 2006:</th>
<th>Bottom 90%</th>
<th>Top 10% to 5%</th>
<th>Top 5% to 1%</th>
<th>Top 1% to 0.5%</th>
<th>Top 0.5% to 0.1%</th>
<th>Top 0.1% to 0.01%</th>
<th>Top 0.01%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of families:</td>
<td>133,525,000</td>
<td>7,418,050</td>
<td>5,934,440</td>
<td>741,805</td>
<td>593,444</td>
<td>133,525</td>
<td>14,836</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Thomas Piketty and Emmanuel Saez
and a future
with governments
that have lost
the ability to govern.
Modern Arab saying:
“My grandfather drove a camel,
my father drove a Ford,
I fly a jet,
my son will drive a camel.”
The once-monolithic view of the future has shattered into a kaleidoscope of wildly different views.
Suddenly no one can be quite sure what is coming next.
The need for futures studies and forecasting becomes more urgent every day.
To be useful foresight must become institutionalized on a continuous, well-funded basis.
All governments must incorporate serious alternative futures forecasting and preferred futures design into all of their institutions of governance.
Foresight is your obligation to future generations whose lives you influence by your decisions and actions today.
Future generations:

they are our conscience.
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