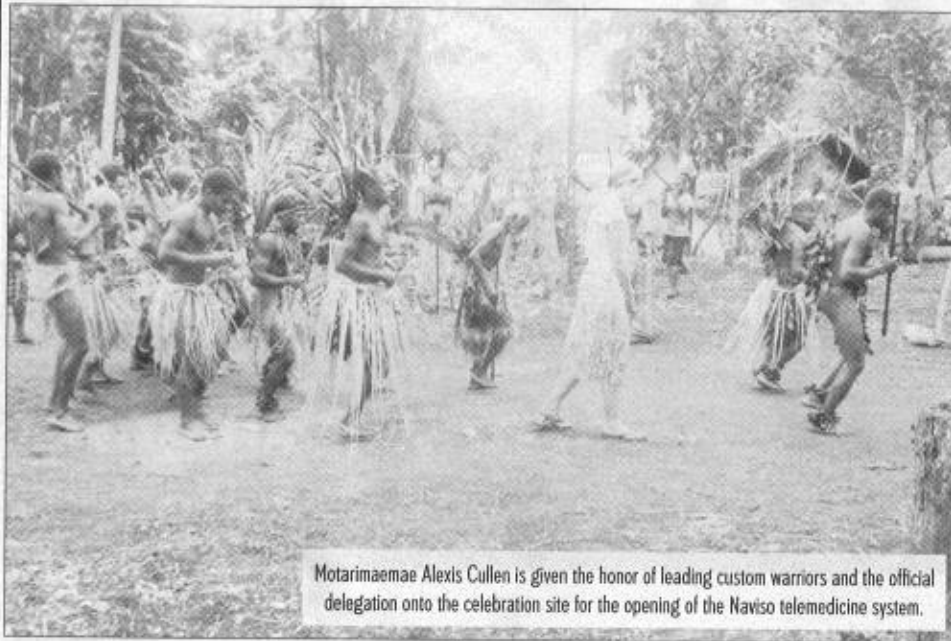


# PM Salwai and Alexis Cullen bestowed Maewo custom names



Motarimaemae Alexis Cullen is given the honor of leading custom warriors and the official delegation onto the celebration site for the opening of the Naviso telemedicine system.

By Jonas Cullwick

**PRIME MINISTER CHARLOT** Salwai was received into a Maewo family at Naviso village on the east of the island Thursday soon after arrival to open the Vanuatu Interisland Telemedicine and Learning Network in the village.

As part of his welcome to the occasion, the Prime Minister was given a respected

member of the community of Naviso, Reynold Aru, as his “father” announced by one of the island’s high chiefs, Rasaulmanu.

A pig was given to Prime Minister Salwai as a sign of his welcome into the community of Naviso to kill following which he was bestowed the name Tambe Leo, to reflect the fact that the PM respected their need for assistance

resulting in the establishment of the telemedicine system and accepting their invitation to visit the community and open the system.

The community also bestowed a traditional name on Alexis Cullen, the former Peace Corp volunteer at Naviso whose hard work achieved the installation of the telemedicine system at the village. She also was given a pig to kill with the

assistance of her local father to unite her with the community of Naviso and was given the name Motarimaemae. The name means speech is also communicated through the air, in recognition of her work in the introduction of internet service to the village.

Chief Francis Boe of Naviso said it was through her work that the Government of Vanuatu recognized the communication challenges faced by the community and to help with establish the telemedicine network.

Alexis Cullen and her husband Steve served for two years at Naviso before and they faced the situation of no telecommunication access. With her background on medical imaging and telecommunications she found that during the two years they were at the village no nurse could take up the post at the village clinic because of the lack of telecommunication.

“There were no trucks, no boats, and we saw how people suffered such as people who died when they should not or they used sacks as stretchers to

carry sick patients up the hill and across the island to seek medical help. At we needed was a good hub and a good network,” Alexis Cullen said.

“Then we started asking around how we could get a good network. We went and talked to all telecommunications provider and other people,” she added. “Then after one year of searching around we received an idea that was possible.”

Cullen said the idea came from India where they already have a telemedicine network. But they still had to fundraise for Vt1 million. At the same time they found Kacific, a company that provides internet service that is affordable. Kacific agreed to become a part in this pilot project with their partners Telsat Pacific. The result is now we have the first pilot service of the telemedicine network.

The telemedicine uses a high speed internet broadband through satellite. Cullen explains that for the first six months the network will use teleconferencing only using one tablet and a laptop located

in the village clinic to speak with the doctor on Santo. The doctor in Santo can hear from the nurse or health worker concerning a sick patient and the doctor can give advice on how to treat the patient. But for serious cases a patient will still need to go to the Northern District Hospital on Santo or the Vial Central Hospital in Port Vila.

“After six months additional equipment such as special cameras will be installed on the system. But the idea is to get users to have experience with using teleconferencing facilities before more tools are installed to aid the doctors give advice or treat patients in remote rural communities who are very sick.”

The telemedicine system at Naviso uses a satellite dish, a wifi router, a satellite modem, one Samsung tablet, one laptop and solar power. The doctor at Santo because he already has access, they make sure he has video conferencing application that is secure in his mobile phone so he can be reached whenever there is an emergency at Naviso.