Waiwai – Hawaiian Perspective of Wealth

The Native Hawaiian concept of wealth – waiwai or literally, “water water.” In old Hawai‘i, it was everyone’s kuleana or “responsibility” to malama i ka wai or “to take care of the water,” because it affected the livelihood of the entire village. Viewing wealth as a collective environmental asset challenges traditional western notions and links the initiative’s wealth creation agenda to strategies that build upon, preserve or advance not only Hawai‘i’s financial capital but its human, natural, cultural and social capitals as well.

*Wai,* or fresh water, was an extremely important resource in earlier times as it is today. The importance of it was well understood by *ka po‘e kahiko* (the people of old) in that the term for rich or wealthy is *waiwai*. In this context, a person's wealth is determined by how much water he has access too. The reason being is that *wai* provided the people with the ability to grow crops, mainly *kalo*. It in essence provided life. Without *wai,* kalo could not have been produced in mass amounts nor would it have been able to sustain a growing population.

    Like today, *wai* is a valuable and necessary resource for survival. *Ka po‘e kahiko* knew of this and established ways in which *wai* would be used for the benefit of all the people and not just one person. Every *lo‘i* farmer that lived along the same stream had equal access to the water the flowed in it. No one farmer had more claims to the water than the next. Farmers devised ways to divert just enough water from the stream for their *lo‘i*. The *‘auwai* (irrigation) system, which was implemented traditionally and still practiced today, diverted just enough water from the stream to provide for the *lo‘i*. Since *kalo* needed a continuous flow of fresh cold water, the *‘auwai* took the water back to the stream after it flowed through each *lo‘i*. Thus, farmers did not keep the water for themselves. They ensured that whatever water was not taken for their *lo‘i* was returned to the stream for the next farmer. Additionally, the water returning to the stream after it had gone through the *lo‘i* would do so with added nutrients, which is beneficial to fishponds that were usually built along the shorelines.

**HOMEWORK:**

On binder paper, write a paragraph describing **your definition of wealth**. In other words, what does it mean to be wealthy (rich) to you? Your paragraph must contain 1) a topic or lead sentence, 2) a conclusion or closing sentence, 3) at least 5 details that describe your meaning of wealth (waiwai), 4) at least 8 sentences.