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[What if Hawaiians had Control Over the Assets They are Entitled to?](#)

By Keli'i Akina PhD @ 6:51 PM :: 697 Views :: [Akaka Bill](#), [OHA](#)

What if Hawaiians had Control Over the Assets They are Entitled to?

by Keli'i Akina, [Ka Wai Ola, July 1, 2021](#)

Sometimes, it's good to dream about different futures. That's one way we can find new solutions to today's problems. So, I'd like to explore a possibility and ask the question: "what if?"

What if Hawaiians had exclusive control over the lands and assets to which we are entitled? What if that could ensure a better future for everyone, both Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians?

An analysis of the present situation tells us that Hawaiians are not in exclusive control of assets to which they are entitled.

For example, Hawaiians are entitled to 20% of Public Land Trust revenues, frequently referred to as ceded land revenues. Hawai'i state legislators, at the time, estimated that \$15.1 million dollars per year roughly equated to 20%, but that figure was always meant to be an interim amount until an accurate accounting could be done. Despite OHA's efforts to increase Native Hawaiians' pro-rata share of public lands trust revenues, only \$15.1 million annually goes into the Native Hawaiian Trust Fund administered by the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA).

So in reality, much of the control over public land trust revenues owed to Hawaiians belongs to the state of Hawai'i. And despite its semi-autonomy, even OHA is a state government agency, and that fact results in OHA having certain accountabilities to all state residents, whether Hawaiian or non-Hawaiian.

Another example of Native Hawaiian assets which are not under the control of native Hawaiians are the Hawaiian Homelands, made up of over 200,000 acres across six islands. The reality is that these lands are also not under the exclusive control of Hawaiians, but are administered by another state agency with federal obligations – the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands (DHHL).

Interestingly, the problem of Hawaiians not having control over Hawaiian assets really isn't a question of whether Hawaiians have the right to these assets. That question has largely been settled. Nevertheless, two serious problems arise out of this circumstance.

First, Hawaiians are not in control of assets they are entitled to that could materially improve their lives in terms of housing, jobs, education, and healthcare. Even though OHA is committed to increasing its capital contributions to the Hawaiian community to 100% of the \$15.1 million allocated to OHA annually, this is still not the full amount Hawaiians are entitled to.

Secondly, the government agencies tasked with distribution and allocation of resources to Hawaiians must deny those resources to non-Hawaiians in order to carry out their mandates. As a result, these agencies may be seen as discriminating against non-Hawaiians, and that can raise constitutional questions.

While these problems have historical roots and seem intractable, what if there were a solution that could solve both? One idea to consider might be to establish a private Hawaiian sovereign land trust, by transferring the government-held assets to which Hawaiians are entitled into a private trust-owned exclusively by Hawaiians.

Individual Hawaiians would be the shareholders of this trust corporation, and it would be devoted to the betterment of the conditions of native Hawaiians. And by not being a state agency, this corporation would make it possible for the government to move out of a potentially discriminatory role.

Again, we are merely brainstorming here, putting on our thinking caps. Many questions must be answered first, and laws would have to be changed. But examples have emerged elsewhere, such as in Alaska where Alaskan Native people individually own shares of their corporation's stock.

The main thing is that we look to the future and step out of the box to find solutions. Let me know your thoughts!