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**The influence of the Fijian way of life
(*bula vakavanua*)
on community-based marine conservation (CBMC)
in Fiji,
with a focus on social capital and traditional ecological
knowledge (TEK)**

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Abstract

This doctoral research explores the role of *bula vakavanua* (traditional Fijian way of life) in implementing community-based marine conservation (CBMC) in Fiji, with a focus on indigenous Fijian social capital and traditional ecological knowledge (TEK).

A combination of western and indigenous methodologies was utilised with a particular focus on CBMC experiences at three case study sites, namely Navakavu (Rewa); Kubulau (Bua) and Verata (Tailevu). The Vanua Research Framework (VRF) developed by Nabobo-Baba (2007) was adapted to elicit stories from these communities based on indigenous practices of *talanoa*, which literally means ‘to tell a story’. I am an indigenous Fijian female researcher, and consequently needed to respect and follow traditional protocols pertinent to females and indigenous Fijians with regards to gender issues and tribal and kinship links.

The three key findings of my research are: the interconnectedness of all things in the *bula vakavanua*; *talanoa* as dialogue and negotiation to facilitate adaptation of the *bula vakavanua* to external factors; and kinship (*veiwekani*) as the hub through which TEK and social capital actions and behaviour are lived out. First, to indigenous Fijians, all creation is interconnected. The common Fiji mud crab¹ (*qari*) is used as a metaphor to illustrate interconnection between all aspects of the *bula vakavanua* in an indigenous Fijian world. There is a ‘crab’ saying in Fijian society that is translated “I’ll walk how you walked, mother”. In CBMC initiatives, *bula vakavanua* (the crab) lives in an environment influenced by other factors, including political, social and economic factors. These factors have to be continually and appropriately integrated into the *bula vakavanua* so that the crab adapts and flourishes.

Second, this integration can be facilitated by *talanoa* as dialogue and negotiation so that community members and CBMC partners can share, reflect upon and reframe their worldviews, perceptions and ultimately practices. *Talanoa* is facilitated by developing listening and communication skills that enable participants to clarify, critique and re-

¹ *Brachyura species*.

align their perceptions. This re-alignment may require the change in norms, behaviour and practices in prevailing Fijian culture in order to adapt to the changing environment. I use examples from my case studies to show where *talanoa* as dialogue and negotiations have worked and, where *talanoa* is still ongoing to develop shared understanding and resolve conflicts.

Third, kinship (*veiwekani*) is the basis upon which most aspects of the *bula vakavanua* are lived out. Kinship may be based on blood links, Vanua links or through marriage. In Fiji both TEK and social capital are embedded within the kinship system of the *bula vakavanua*. For instance in TEK, skills and knowledge are inherited through birth and reinforced by oral transmission and training throughout the generations, emphasising the embeddedness of TEK in families and kinship systems.

The impacts of this research are centred round the three key findings. Indigenous Fijians must appreciate that, just like the metaphorical crab, the *bula vakavanua* has to continually adapt to a changing environment through *talanoa*, or it will not survive. These adaptations will require different degrees of change in cultural behaviour and norms in order to make it suitable and relevant for the current times. The *bula vakavanua* (or other indigenous way of life) must be appreciated and how it plays out in the CBMC work must be understood, and appropriately facilitated, to help ensure the sustainability and success of the work. NGOs can play a more prominent role in facilitating *talanoa* sessions for unresolved issues in CBMC work, while indigenous Fijian individuals in the partner organisations can provide a crucial link between the organisation and the community. The government also needs to exercise the political will to resolve some issues such as legal recognition of community-appointed *qoliqoli* wardens, MPAs and the issue of *qoliqoli* ownership by the Vanua.

This research is not only relevant to Fiji, but to other Pacific Island sites, or any CBMC sites where indigenous knowledge and way of life exist.

Dedication

This paper is dedicated to two people who have greatly influenced my life;

My late mother: Adi Eceli Bonacibau Vueti

and

My husband: Vivian Joave Guy Nainoca.

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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	I
DEDICATION	III
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	IV
TABLE OF CONTENTS	VI
FIGURES	X
TABLES	XII
ACRONYMS	XIII
CHAPTER 1 GENERAL INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 PREAMBLE.....	1
1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT	5
1.3 <i>BULA VAKAVANUA</i> , SOCIAL CAPITAL, TEK AND CO-MANAGEMENT.....	8
1.3.1 <i>Bula vakavanua</i>	8
1.3.2 <i>Social Capital</i>	10
1.3.3 <i>Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)</i>	11
1.3.4 <i>Co-management</i>	11
1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WORK	13
1.4.1 <i>Indigenous Fijian woman fisher tribe member voice</i>	20
1.5 KEY QUESTION AND IDEAS – MAIN AIM AND OBJECTIVES.....	21
1.6 GENERAL COMMENT ON STUDY APPROACH.....	22
1.7 STRUCTURE OF THESIS	22
CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY	25
2.1 INTRODUCTION: RESEARCH APPROACH	25
2.1.1 <i>Thematic areas of Inquiry</i>	26
2.2. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD	27
2.2.1 <i>Case Studies</i>	29
2.2.2 <i>Indigenous Research and Methodologies</i>	32
2.2.3 <i>Talanoa</i>	35
2.4. INDIGENOUS RESEARCH PROCESS AND ETHICS	36
2.4.1 <i>The indigenous Fijian research process</i>	36
2.4.2 <i>Ethical considerations</i>	45
2.5 FIELD WORK	47
2.5.1 <i>Forms of Data Collection</i>	51
2.5.1.1 <i>Qualitative interviewing</i>	51

2.5.1.2. <i>Talanoa and Focus groups</i>	52
2.5.1.3. <i>Analysis of texts and documents</i>	53
2.5.2. <i>Triangulation</i>	53
2.6. METHODS	54
2.6.1. <i>Content Analysis</i>	54
2.7. CONCLUDING REMARKS	55
CHAPTER 3 CONTEXT.....	57
3.1 INTRODUCTION.....	57
3.2 FIJI CONTEXT	57
3.2.1. <i>Biophysical</i>	57
3.2.3. <i>Personal and Vanua Context</i>	59
3.2.4. <i>The Fijian Administration structure</i>	62
3.2.5. <i>Legal Context</i>	64
3.3. ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT IN FIJI	65
3.4. CASE STUDIES SITES	72
3.4.1. <i>Kubulau, Bua</i>	73
3.4.2. <i>Navakavu, Rewa</i>	76
3.4.3. <i>Verata, Tailevu</i>	77
3.5. SUMMARY	79
CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS ONE: SOCIAL CAPITAL AND COMMUNITY-BASED MARINE CONSERVATION IN FIJI	80
4.1 INTRODUCTION	80
4.1.1. <i>Social capital – brief background</i>	82
4.2. THE PRESENCE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL	86
4.2.1. <i>Trust</i>	88
4.2.2. <i>Reciprocation</i>	91
4.2.3. <i>Networks and connectedness</i>	94
4.2.4. <i>Norms and Rules</i>	97
4.3. SYNTHESIS AND ANALYSIS.....	109
4.3.1. <i>Social capital in CBMC</i>	109
4.3.2. <i>Obstacles to forming and sustaining social capital and recommendations</i>	112
4.4. CONCLUDING REMARKS	115
CHAPTER 5 FINDINGS TWO: TEK AND COMMUNITY-BASED MARINE CONSERVATION (CBMC) IN FIJI.....	117
5.1 INTRODUCTION.....	117
5.1.1 <i>A review of the concept of TEK</i>	123
5.2 THE PRESENCE OF TEK.....	125
5.2.1 <i>Fijian TEK values and beliefs</i>	125

5.2.2	<i>Practices</i>	131
5.2.3	<i>Skills</i>	132
5.2.4	<i>Knowledge</i>	136
5.2.5	<i>Vector for cultural identity and transmission modes</i>	140
5.3.	INTEGRATION OF TEK AND NON-INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE	143
5.4.	CONCLUDING REMARKS	146
CHAPTER 6 NOMU I QAIQAI GA QEI, NOQU I QAIQAI.....		148
(I’LL WALK HOW YOU WALK, MOTHER).....		148
6.1.	INTRODUCTION	148
6.2.	THE CRAB: NOMU I QAIQAI GA QEI, NOQU I QAIQAI	151
6.2.1.	<i>Church (Lotu)</i>	154
6.2.2.	<i>Vanua Worldview</i>	157
6.2.3.	<i>Social Capital and TEK in CBMC</i>	159
6.2.5.	<i>Western knowledge systems/science</i>	166
6.2.6.	<i>Kinship (veiwekani)</i>	167
6.2.7.	<i>Some hindering aspects of Fijian Culture in CBMC</i>	169
6.2.8.	<i>Traditional Governance</i>	176
6.2.9.	<i>Westernisation and other cultures in Fiji</i>	180
6.2.10.	<i>Western governance system</i>	186
6.3.	SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION.....	191
6.3.1	SUMMARY.....	192
CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION		194
7.1	INTRODUCTION.....	194
7.2	THE CRAB – SOCIAL CAPITAL AND TEK INTERCONNECTED IN CBMC.....	195
7.2.1	<i>Social capital influence on CBMC</i>	196
7.2.2	<i>TEK influence on CBMC</i>	197
7.2.3	<i>Social capital and TEK interconnected in CBMC</i>	198
7.3.	OTHER FACTORS IN THE ENVIRONMENT OF THE CRAB	198
7.4	THE CRAB – SURVIVING AND WALKING BY ADAPTING	201
7.5	THE INDIGENOUS FIJIAN WOMAN FROM THE FISHER TRIBES’ VOICE.....	202
7.5.1	<i>Indigenous voice</i>	202
7.5.2	<i>Womens’ voice</i>	203
7.5.3	<i>Fisher tribes voice</i>	204
7.6	LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY AND AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH.....	204
7.7	CONCLUSION	205
7.8	PARTING REMARK	209
REFERENCE		210
GLOSSARY & PRONUNCIATION		217

APPENDICES	220
APPENDIX 1	221
APPENDIX 2	227
APPENDIX 3	228
APPENDIX 4	229
APPENDIX 5	231
APPENDIX 6	234
APPENDIX 7	242
APPENDIX 8	243

Figures

FIGURE 1.1: Qoliqoli And Kanakana	6
FIGURE 1.2: The Crab: Interconnectedness In The <i>Bula Vakavanua</i>	15
FIGURE 1.3: <i>Talanoa</i> As A Dialogue For Reaching New Outcomes.....	18
FIGURE 1.4: Kinship As Hub Through Which Social Capital And Tek Are Carried Out.....	19
FIGURE 1.5: Thesis Outline And Key Theoretical Concepts ... ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.	
FIGURE 2.1: Diagram To Illustrate Different Cousins	39
FIGURE 3.1: Fiji In The Pacific.....	58
FIGURE: 3.2: Traditional Indigenous Fijian Organisation Structure	59
FIGURE 3.3: Wini’s Family Tree Indicating Fisher Tribe Ancestry.....	60
FIGURE 3.4: Fijian Administration Structure	63
FIGURE 3.5: A Locally Managed Marine Area And Tools Used.....	69
FIGURE 3.6: The FLMMA Approach	70
FIGURE 3.7: FLMMA Sites.....	72
FIGURE 3.8: Locations Of The Three Case Study Sites.	73
FIGURE 3.9: Kubulau Management Resource Committee Logo.....	74
FIGURE 3.10: Kubulau Marine Network.....	75
FIGURE 3.11: Navakavu Marine Protected Area.....	77
FIGURE 3.12: Measuring <i>Kaikoso</i> During Monitoring.....	78
FIGURE 4.1: Summary Of Chapter 4.....	82
FIGURE 4.2: Main Influences On The Traditional Fijian Way Of Life (<i>Bula Vakavanua</i>).....	88
FIGURE 4.3: Reciprocation Between NGO And Village.....	92
FIGURE 4.4: My ‘ <i>Naita</i> ’ Is Part Of A <i>Yavirau</i>	98
FIGURE 4.5: <i>Veiwekani</i> Is The Hub Of Social Capital In The Fijian Community	111
FIGURE 5.1: Summary Of Chapter 5.....	123
FIGURE 5.2: Components Of TEK In The Traditional Fijian Way Of Life.	125
FIGURE 5.3: Fish Fence In Fiji.....	135
FIGURE 5.4: Integration Between Non-indigenous Knowledge And TEK Using Negotiation.....	144
FIGURE 6.1: Summary Of Chapter 6.....	154

FIGURE 6.2: <i>Qoligoli</i> Committee And The Councils	179
FIGURE 7.1: Summary Of Chapter 7.....	195

Tables

TABLE 2.1: Qualitative Research Orientations Adopted For The Thesis	28
TABLE 2.2: Case Study Sites Provinces And Confederacy	30
TABLE 3.1: Traditional Roles And Responsibilities In A Village	61
TABLE 3.2: LMMA & FLMMA Statistics.....	71
TABLE 3.3: Kubulau Population And Household Numbers.	73
TABLE 3.4: Navakavu Population And Household Numbers.	76
TABLE 3.5: Verata Population And Household Numbers.	78
TABLE 4.1: Some Relationship Titles.....	95
TABLE 4.3: Some Fijian Culture Specific Behaviours And Values Of Social Capital	102
TABLE 5.1: Verata Traditional Calender	138
TABLE 5.2: Fijian Traditional Calendar.....	139
TABLE 6.1: The Metaphorical Crab And <i>Bula Vakavanua</i> In CBMC.....	153

Acronyms

BLV	<i>Bose Levu Vakaturaga</i>
CBMC	Community-Based Marine Conservation
CFG	Customary Fishing Ground
CI	Conservation International
CORAL	Coral Reef Alliance
DOE	Department of Environment
EBM	Ecosystem Based Management
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EMA	Environmental management Act
FAB	Fijian Affairs Board
FIT	Fiji Institute of Technology
FLMMA	Fiji Locally Managed Marine Area
FNU	Fiji National University
FSPI	Foundation for the Peoples of the South Pacific
GCC	Great Council of Chiefs
IAS	Institute of Applied Science
ICM	Integrated Catchment Management
LMMA	Locally Managed Marine Areas
MES	Mamanuca Environment Society
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
PCDF	Pacific Community Development of Fiji
TEK	Traditional Ecological Knowledge
TIK	Traditional Indigenous Knowledge
USP	University of the South Pacific
WCS	Wildlife Conservation Society
WI-O	Wetlands International (Oceania)
WWF	World-WideFund for Nature