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“E vaka e vakatukakaso na sasalu ni veitiritiri”:

Exploring Indigenous perspectives on socio-economic change and development: A case study of Draubuta and Nabudrau villages in the Rewa Delta

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the**

Master of International Development

in

School of People, Environment and Planning

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Apisaki Bania Naivaluvou

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Preface

O au saka!

As an Indigenous researcher, it is culturally appropriate to introduce myself in my language and formally express my gratitude and acknowledgement to my *vanua* connections (parents' and husband's).

Ni bula vinaka! Na yacaqu o Apisaki Bania Naivaluvou. Na turaga tamaqu ko Ratu Mitieli Kubunavanua Naivaluvou, ena nodra itikotiko na Vunisa levu na Ratu na Tui Noco, ena itokatoka ko Batiqa, na mataqali ko Batiqa ena loma ni yavusa na Ratu na Tui Noco, ena koro o Nabudrau, tikina o Noco ena yasana vakaturaga o Rewa.

Na marama tinaqu ko Lite Raisili Rawalai, ena nodra itikotiko na turaga na Roko Tui Vaturua, ena itokatoka ko Natekedrau, mataqali o Nailagowai ena loma ni yavusa o Nailagowai, ena koro ko Vaturua, ena tikina ko Nakelo ena yasana vakaturaga o Tailevu.

[Greetings! My name is Apisaki (Avisake) Bania Naivaluvou .My father's name is Ratu Mitieli Kubunavanua Naivaluvou, home of the Vunisa levu na Ratu na Tui Noco. We belong to the Batiqa sub-clan, within the Batiqa clan and within Ratu na Tui Noco tribe. Our village is Nabudrau, in the district of Noco and in the province of Rewa.

My mother's name is Lite Raisili Rawalai, home of the Roko Tui Vaturua. She belongs to the Natekedrau sub-clan, Natekedrau clan and The Nailagowai tribe and her village is Vaturua, in the district of Nakelo and in the province of Tailevu.]

E bibi tale ga meu wasea na nodrau koro na noqu veitamani. Na koro ko Nalidi, ena tikina o Nakorotubu ena yasana vakaturaga o Ra, ena itokatoka ko Nasigasiga, na mataqali o Nasau kei na yavusa o Nasau.

[It is also crucial to acknowledge the *vanua* where my husband comes from. He hails from the village of Nalidi, in district of Nakorotubu and in the province of Ra. He belongs to the Nasigasiga sub-clan, within the Nasau clan and within the Nasau tribe.]

Na vakavinavinaka levu kina vanua, na Vunisa levu na Ratu na Tui Noco, na wai ni sucu vinaka drodro mai Nailagowai kei na veitokoni vinaka ena nodra itikotiko na Vunivalu e Nasau.

[Appreciating my *vanua* connections -Ratu na Tui Noco, Nailagowai and Nasau]

I embrace a special place in my heart for the *vanua* system which organised my childhood and occasionally shaped me with guidance and advice from the sizable kinship community that my parents and my extended family belong to. In addition to being unique, these connections are impervious to being or disconnected.

Vinaka saka !

Abstract

This study looks at how local communities in Fiji are affected by long-term socioeconomic developments. It delves into the role of climate change as a primary driver of change, but it also pays particular attention to the ways local people see the effects of colonialism, globalization, and westernization, all of which have a significant role in the shifts and swift transformation of a local community.

With the Vanua Framework serving as the underlying paradigm, the study is qualitative in nature. To capture the impact of these changes, semi-structured interviews, '*talanoa*' and photovoice were used. The results show the value of Indigenous knowledge and wisdom as it guides their actions and response to change and development. By prioritizing the Indigenous ways of knowing, there are sustainable practices that promote interconnectedness and relational knowledge. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of how local people navigate and respond to the complexities of modernity, climate change and development. It calls for sustainable development that is aligned to Indigenous knowledge, perceptions and values.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my late parents

Ratu Mitieli Kubunavanua Naivaluvou and Lite Raisili Rawalai Naivaluvou

Vinaka vakalevu Ratu vata iQei !

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First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge the work of the Almighty God as the source of wisdom, strength and blessings throughout this research journey and for this, I give back honour and glory to be His alone.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the *vanua* of Naibatisuli (Draubuta village) and the *vanua of Burenoco* (Nabudrau).

Na vakavinavinaka levu kina na vanua vakaturaga o Naibatisuli na nodra itikotiko na turaga na Vunivalu, na Roko Tui Tokatoka, kei na vanua vakaturaga o Burenoco, na nodra itikotiko na Vunisa Levu na Ratu na Tui Noco, ena kena mai vakadonui meu vakadidike ka vakasokumuni itukutuku. Vinaka saka vakalevu na kena tokoni na noqu vuli ena vica na macawa kau tiko kina ena nomuni delaniyavu vakaturaga. Sa itekitekivu ni dua na isema tawa yalani eda sa mai sema kina dina ga ni tu na isema vakavanua, vakadra ka vakavuvale tale ga.

My deepest appreciation goes to my supervisors, Professor John Overton and Professor Glenn Banks for their invaluable guidance, insightful feedback and unwavering support throughout the research. Your words of encouragement were instrumental in the successful completion of this study. *Vinaka saka vakalevu.*

The research would not have been possible without the funding from the Marsden Fund for the project, titled, *Samting i narakain: Understanding Change in the Pacific from the Inside*. *Vinaka vakalevu* to the team (principal investigators, associate investigators and fellow colleagues) for having that trust in me to be part of this project.

The Massey University Institute of Development Studies (IDS) is a community of enthusiastic and motivating academics and colleagues, and I am extremely grateful to be part of the team during my studies.

To Dr Suliasi Vunibola and Mr Ruveni Tuimavana, *vinaka vakalevu sara na veitokoni vinaka*, thank you for your untiring support, consistent presence and willingness to work with me throughout this journey.

I also wish to express my deepest gratitude to my family: my parents whom I am deeply indebted to. *Ratu vata iQei, Vinaka vakalevu na nomudrau veisusu lagilagi kei na igu ni kena qaravi na neitou vuli.* Your unconditional love and support have been the bedrock of this accomplishment.

To my siblings, Jnr and family, Di Sala and family, Tu Vuki and family, your unwavering belief in me and endless encouragement spurred me on even the most challenging moments of this research. *Vinaka na veitokoni ena vuli me vaka na veisusu a caka vei kedatou.*

To my family in New Zealand; Nei Roko Vula (Vinaka Nei!), Ratu Peni Naivaluvou (Pi-boy) and family, Ratu Avukama and family. *Vinaka vakalevu na veitokoni vinaka*

ena noqu vuli vakabibi ena gauna dredre au a mai tekivu kina. Ke warai ni du vukei au tiko mai, ke dredre vakalevu na noqu sasaga.

To my family and friends in Fiji; *Vinaka vakalevu na veitokoni kei na masu kei na vakanuinui vinaka ena veigauna taucoko ga. Sa warai niu cavuta e dua na yaca ka o ni sa wili taucoko kina na isema kina na nirau vuvale. Vinaka saka vakalevu.*

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Last but certainly not the least, I thank my husband, Saelia Moceica and son, Mesake Moceica, for their unwavering love, patience and support. You stood by me every step of the way and your presence made all the difference. *Vinaka vakalevu kemudrau na noqu veitamani.* Together we did it!

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Glossary

- bula vakavanua* – traditional Fijian way of life
- bula vakoro* – traditional life in a Fijian village
- bulutaki* – to cover plants with leaves as manure
- bulubulu* – traditional apology
- cara* – cleaning and clearing of burial sites
- dina* - truth
- kai* - mussel
- kabuleka* – mussel (in Draubuta, this is a special name)
- loloma* -love
- mate* - die
- matanitu* - government
- meke* – traditional dance
- matanikatuba* – doorway to a village (Fijian context)
- mate vaka sauri* – die suddenly
- qoliqoli* – traditional Fijian ground
- sasalu* – delicacy
- sevusevu* – acknowledging entrance to the *vanua*
- talanoa* – sharing of conversation
- tutu vakavanua* – tradition role (Fijian context)
- tavi vakavanua* – traditional responsibility
- turaganikoro* – village headman
- turaga* – chief or males
- umavosa* – words (in plural form)
- umaqele* – land (in plural form)
- umatamata* – people (in plural form)
- vanua* -traditional Fijian governance system
- vakatukakaso* – shedding its shell (crab or lobster-moulting process)
- veitiritiri* - mangroves

vakarokoroko - respect

veilomani – love for one another

veiwasei – share

veiwekani – connections established or build between two people

vakaturaga – proper chiefly manner

vakamarama – proper chiefly manner (women)

veinanumi - care

veitabei kakana – share food (cooked and not cooked)

veika raraba – general matters

vulagi – newcomer

vakavinavinaka – thank you

veidokai - respect

via – giant taro

veisolisoli – share and care

Chapter 1 Introduction

“E vaka e vakatukakaso na sasalu ni veitiritiri!”

[It is like the moulting process of a crab or mud-lobster in the mangroves]

1.0 Preamble

Fiji is changing dramatically in many ways. These changes encompass alterations in the environment, economy, politics, and society. Understanding these developments from a Fijian perspective requires considering the many viewpoints and experiences that exist within and constitute particular communities. This will encompass local customs, Indigenous knowledge, and the hope for a sustainable future. Historical, cultural, and economic viewpoints and experiences exist side by side. These all can reveal special insights and information from the local communities that might aid in our comprehension of how a community is changing.

The Rewa Delta area in Fiji is particularly of interest regarding local experiences and responses to change. Being low-lying and flood prone, it appears to be susceptible to climate change-related hazards such as sea level rise and increased storm and flood events. However, it is also a region that has experienced many different forms of substantial change in the past centuries. In pre-contact times, it had a high population density based on the intensive cultivation of giant swamp taro (Hunt, 1981; Nayacakalou, 1978; Overton & Chung, 1988; Parry, 1977). It was a point of contact and occasional conflict between competing Indigenous units (*matanitu*). It saw the substantial impacts of the introduction to Christianity and colonial rule, the plantation economy and the introduction of a new population of indentured workers occurred nearby; and capitalism and the extension of marketing networks spread especially with the proximity of the Suva and Nausori urban areas (Nayacakalou, 1978). In recent decades, the region has seen local impacts of national political upheavals and global economic fluctuations. So, the people and communities of the Rewa Delta have had to confront and respond to a myriad of imposed and profound processes of change overtime.

Given that the region has been studied by Fijian and other scholars over the past 40 years and more, there is an opportunity to explore the ways Indigenous *iTaukei* communities here have experienced, understood and adapted to change overtime. This should allow us both to shed light on how local knowledges of change have developed and better understand how present types of change, particularly climate change, might be faced and responded to. Specifically, this research will address the following questions:

1. What are the major processes and factors that have contributed to change within the community?

2. What are the key aspects of the Indigenous perspectives of change and response?
3. How can cultural practices and traditional knowledge be used to increase resilience and response to contemporary forms of change?

1.1 Background /context of the study

The phrase “*E vaka e vakatukakaso na sasalu ni veitiritiri*” (*it is like the moulting process of a mud crab or mud lobster*) was used by one of the participants when asked to convey his perspective of socio-economic change in the Rewa Delta. He used a figurative description of change in trying to explain that although there were changes and loss to the traditional ways of life of Fijians, over the years they have adjusted and adapted to these changes.

It has been a dynamic process and not a static structure of adjustment. It is a process of leaving an old shell and other important parts of its body, and for the real crab, it is the oesophagus, the stomach lining and half of its intestine. It grows a new shell, and the new parts are grown back yet are soft initially. This softness represents their state of vulnerability. As (Ratu) explained, they did not focus on being soft and vulnerable but knew that they developed new and harder protections in time.

The process led them to that stage where they learned how to cope with the changes over the years. According to Ratu, the new shell gave them opportunities and possibilities to adapt. Yet, one thing he emphasized too was the internal structure of these crabs. The structure remained the same and this to him represented their Indigenous system or what he likes to refer to as ‘*vanua*’: -

“Na bula vakavanua ena warai ni rawa ni leca vakadua baleta qoka na isolisoli mai vua na Kalou vei keda na kawa iTaukei. Na vanua e warai ni ka ni gunu yaqona ko so dau kanaka se ka ni bula vakoro, na vanua e dua na ka taucoko ka umana na bula vaka-Viti ka qai bula vakaitovo ka vakaivakarau”

(The *vanua* or *bula vakavanua* can never perish because this is the gift of God to Indigenous Fijians. It is not about drinking kava as some usually refer to or living in a village, it is a system that exists and encompasses everything about Fijians and a system that has a structure in place)

With this crab metaphor of change in mind, this thesis mainly focuses on the epistemological shift of the necessity of incorporating relationality more into understandings of the ways Indigenous contexts and settings, such as the Rewa Delta, undergo transformations and how they have evolved their response to change. Relationality is a fundamental element of Fijian culture and social connections in kinship (*veiwekani*) which determines the values that guide their way of living such as sharing and caring (*veiwasei kei na veilomani*) and respect (*vakarokoroko*). The *vanua* as discussed by Ravuvu (1971) is an extension of self and is an essential Fijian worldview that people have a relationship with the natural environment and spiritual realms.

The focus is on the new shell as described by the metaphor of the mud crab. While most research use and focus on vulnerability or the old shell that represents the societies' loss, this thesis will focus on the new shell, which represents how they have responded and adapted over the years, with or without funds from internal or external sources. It seeks to illuminate continuity, rather than a singular focus on change. It also emphasizes the bottom-up approach of development to inform the nature of sustainable approaches needed to assist these Indigenous people. This metaphor of the moulting crab will be revisited later in this thesis in chapters 4 and 5 when themes such as resilience and *vanua* are discussed in greater detail.

1.2 Rationale

This study is part of a Marsden research project titled, “*Samting i narikin: Understanding Change in the Pacific from the inside*”. It is a project within the Institute of Development Studies, having two principal investigators from Massey University in Palmerston North, New Zealand and two other associate investigators who are from the University of the South Pacific in Fiji and the Pacific Adventist University in Papua New Guinea (2022-2024). With a specific goal of promoting Indigenous Pacific narratives and relational knowledge of change and to limit disempowering discourse, the project seeks to better understand these complexities over time.

This thesis is part of this undertaking by exploring the Indigenous Fijians' perspectives of socio-economic change in Fiji. It seeks to explore knowledge of change from the perspectives of Fijians specifically in the Rewa Delta.

Barnett and Campbell (2010) explained that it is easier to comprehend how a community or society reacts to changes when one is aware of its social structures and values. With much previous research and work of previous anthropologists and other social scientists, small island countries like Fiji have been labelled as ‘vulnerable’ and this perception in turn has informed development and policies (Barnett & Waters, 2016). However, these misconceptions frequently ignored how people create fulfilling lives for themselves, and they may have thus exacerbated the difficulties and challenges experienced by Indigenous people.

1.3 Aim

The aim of this study is to explore how Indigenous Fijians worldviews, particularly those of people in the Rewa Delta, navigate and respond to change with their strong social connections and relational knowledge of change.

1.4 Objectives

1. To identify and analyse changes and factors contributing to change
2. Explore and discuss adaptative measures and resilient strategies
3. Advocate for recognition of Indigenous knowledge systems

1.5 Study sites

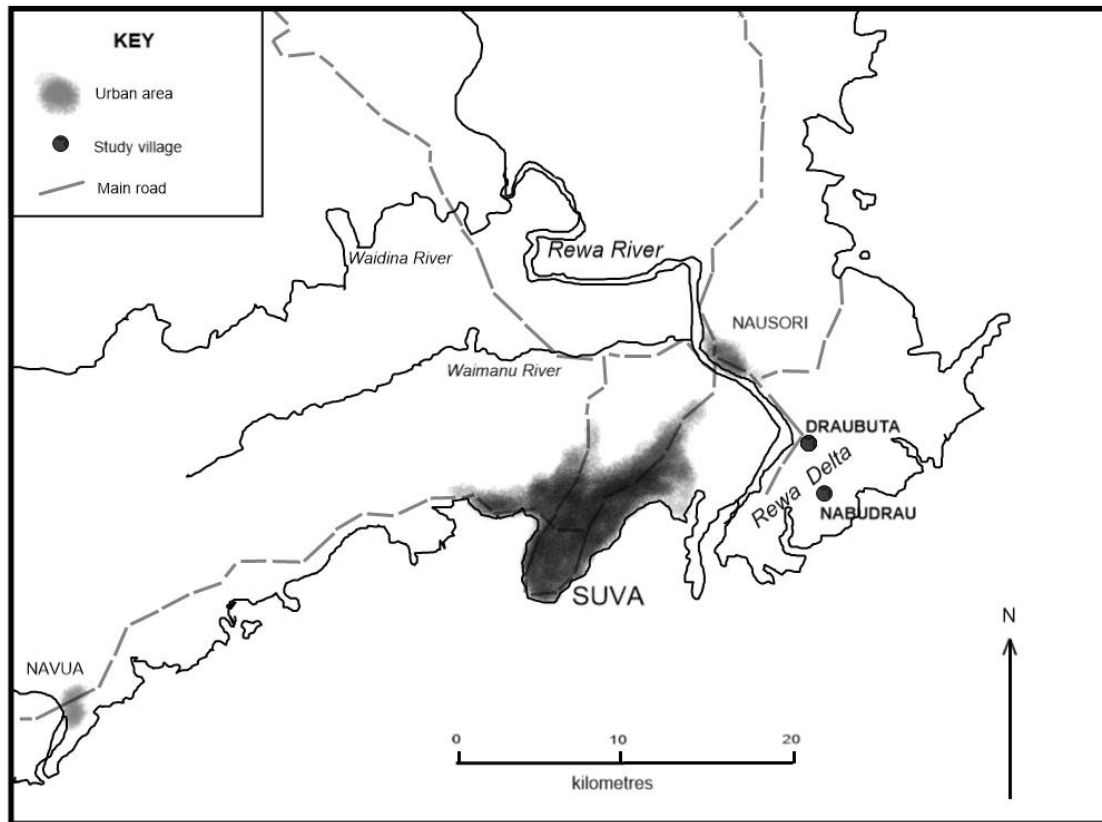


Figure 1: Southeast part of Viti Levu

[Map credit: John Overton]

The study undertook research in two villages in the same geographical area of the Rewa Delta in Fiji: Draubuta and Nabudrau which are situated at the Southeast part of Viti Levu Island (Figure 1).

Draubuta lies on the southern bank of the Wainibokasi river and is one of the six villages in the district of Tokatoka which is included in the province of Tailevu. For Draubuta village, there have been a number of researchers who conducted field research over the past 60 years (Lasaqa, 1984; Nayacakalou, 1978; Overton & Chung, 1988), and this thesis will explore the changes that have taken place since then. On the other hand, Nabudrau village acts as a contrasting village to the findings.

Table 1 Population data of the two sites for 2024

Draubuta is a village with 115 houses with a population structure as follows:

Gender	Age							
	0-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61 +	
Female	22	20	18	30	20	25	37	172
Male	16	25	19	36	27	21	40	184
Total	38	45	37	66	47	46	77	356

Nabudrau village has 40 houses and a rather smaller population

Gender	Age							
	0-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61 +	
Female	8	8	15	20	10	5	6	72
Male	5	10	18	15	15	8	7	78
Total	13	18	33	35	25	13	13	150

[Source: village headman for Nabudrau village and Draubuta village]

Draubuta is a much bigger village than Nabudrau and studies show that the village population has increased year by year (Nayacakalou's data revealed a population of 160 people in the late 1950s and, Overton recorded an estimate of 275 people for the late 1980s) (Nayacakalou, 1978; Overton, 1993).

Both villages are relatively close to Suva/Nausori and there are opportunities for commuting to wage work (and access to things such as schools and other services are good). This helps explain the increase in population in the villages over the years.

The Rewa Delta is prone to flooding as it is a low-lying region yet, the soil is fertile and close to mangroves and (especially Nabudrau) has ready access to sea and marine resources.

1.6 Research Overview

This study focuses on the long-term transformations within local communities in Fiji. It does not only focus on climate change but pays more attention to other forms of changes and explores the consequences of these changes such as globalisation, westernisation and urbanisation.

This study was qualitative research and the Vanua Framework (Baba, 2008) was the overarching research methodology. It used a combination of western and Indigenous way of interacting such as *talanoa*, observing, use of semi-structured interviews and photovoice. These strategies were used to capture the effects of these changes and in total, 24 participants were from Draubuta while 12 participants were from Nabudrau.

1.7 Thesis framework

Chapter 1 is the introduction, and it justifies this research and introduces the aims, objectives and research sites. The background of the study is given and the motivation

to contribute to Fijian epistemology in the academic world. An overview of the study is also given in this chapter which includes the motivation for the study, a synopsis of the framework for the methodology approach that was used to capture the changes within the Rewa Delta communities.

Chapter 2 is the literature review of existing studies on change and development in Fiji. It also discusses the conceptual framework of this study, which is relational ontology which considers nature, people and *vanua* connections crucial in their daily lives and have been overlooked in many studies but have remained their source of identity and form of adaptation strategies in this evolving society.

Chapter 3 focuses on methodology. It explains the Vanua Framework being the overarching framework for this study and uses semi-structured interview and *talanoa* to interact and dialogue with the research participants. Photovoice was also used to stir discussions among the participants in a group discussion.

Chapter 4 presents and discusses the findings of the study after fieldwork. These were organized in chapters and discussed to answer the research questions and achieve the objectives of the study too.

Chapter 5 is the discussion chapter of the findings where it is linked to literature. It discusses the special relationship between *vanua* and people emphasizing this interconnectedness. It then discusses the nature of change and the nature of vulnerability which will point to how they have adapted and less on their state of vulnerability as research have proved to be used as a reason for development and funds. Lastly, Indigenous knowledge emphasizes the epistemological shift that Indigenous people have a close connection to nature and with each other and this informed much of their actions and knowledge about change and response.

Chapter 6 is the conclusion chapter of the thesis. It discusses the metaphor of the crab and draws from literature to emphasize the relationality knowledge that is embedded in Indigenous Fijian culture and way of life. It also tries to fill the gap whereby much research has focused on change and particularly the state of vulnerability that many Indigenous undergo yet, there is little study on the narratives of they lived with change which explains how they have been resilient over the years.

1.8 Contribution to Fijian epistemology

The thesis emphasizes Indigenous voices and Fijian worldviews, specifically Indigenous perceptions of change and development. It discusses narratives of change from their perspectives in which they highlight the significance of relationality thinking from the two case studies in the Rewa Delta. It underlines the significance of interconnectedness that is embedded in the Fijian Indigenous knowledge system. It is important that Fijians continue to voice their opinions of the transformations they experience and how they have responded to it as this describes their adaptive measures over the years.

1.9 Summary

In summary, a perspective on change that is centred on relational knowledge, as embedded in the *iTaukei* Indigenous knowledge system is the research gap that this

study addresses. It gives insights into and amplifies the need to recognise and incorporate Indigenous knowledge and perspectives in addressing change, development and adaptative measures that will surely recognise the resilience of Indigenous people.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This research is a part of a wider New Zealand Marsden-funded project, *Samting i Narakain*, diverse experiences of change and resilience across the Pacific. As such, it draws on and contributes to evolving ideas regarding the way change is understood in Oceania and the critical importance of ‘Indigenous ways of knowing’ (Gegeo, 1998). In addition, it aims to feed into recent literature regarding the potentially severe impacts of climate change in the Pacific and how communities are adapting (Tokalau, 2018).

The review begins with a discussion of previous work done in the Rewa Delta specifically in Draubuta village as this gives a clear picture of how societies were organised then. It will then identify and discuss how climate change has contributed to the changes and discuss other factors of change too. It will then discuss the Fijian *vanua* system and what other scholars have said about how this can be used for adaptation and resilient purposes. It will conclude with a conceptual framework to describe the relationships between change, society, Indigenous systems and continuity.

With my primary interest in the way Fijian villages have experienced change, the work of Fijian scholars on the subject is of particular interest. Starting with the work of Nayacakalou (1975) and Lasaqa (1984) and following through the work of Ravuvu (1983), and to (2018), we have a solid understanding of the way *iTaukei* communities’ function and have been organized, particularly because of the deep understanding these researchers had of Fijian protocols and world views. This work has been complemented by the research of foreign researchers, many of whom undertook detailed field surveys (Overton, 1989, 1993, 1999). However, despite this volume of work in Fijian villages, there has been little recent research that has utilized a more longitudinal and holistic approach, looking at the diverse processes of change over long periods of time. Such an approach is particularly important given the present dominance of climate- change related work and the tendency to ignore or undervalue the agency and knowledges of *iTaukei* in rural Fiji.

The Rewa Delta is currently the subject of concern because of climate change. Studies show that there is evidence of rise in sea level and likely severe impacts of extreme weather conditions in the Rewa Delta. Shalini (2011) projected in her research that by 2030, sea level will have increased between 0.4cm and 10cm. This would and has already brought about changes in these communities and it is crucial to understand these changes and the resilient methods the local communities are using.

With a focus on the Rewa Delta, this proposed research has the opportunity to draw upon a body of previous research. Rusiate Nayacakalou, one of the first Fijians to gain a PhD degree, hailed from Draubuta village and undertook anthropological research there in the 1960s as part of his doctorate (eventually published in Nayacakalou 1978). His field surveys in the village were added to in the 1970s by Lasaqa (1984), who also worked in Draubuta, as did (Overton, 1989) in the late 1980s. Together, these studies give us a detailed picture of land holding, land use, economic activity and local leadership. Although there are clear signs of continuity over these decades of study,

there have also been some significant changes (such as the construction of roads and bridges). Draubuta will provide the opportunity to conduct some longitudinal reflections on change (for example of population and land use) to see how the situation has changed or not from the evidence of previous work. By contrast, because of my own close ties to Noco, detailed interviews aimed to illuminate some of the underlying responses and understandings that people hold in relation to the decades of change they have experienced.

2.1 Responses to climate change

This section will discuss climate change in terms of addressing response to climate change which will highlight that although this is a very real threat to the Pacific and Fiji, Indigenous people have had a way to respond to the changes that happened in the past. In the end, it will also point out that there are other changes which may not be as dramatic as compared to climate change, but which regardless have had effects in these communities.

Firstly, the repercussions of climate change are alarming in the Pacific and its inhabitants. It is identified as one of the most crucial challenges (Igbal, 2022). The majority of the Pacific region's nations are tiny, and some are immediately in the path of tropical cyclones (Dodson, 2010). Fiji was exposed to many different hazards like flooding, cyclones and many more and was hit by most powerful cyclone recorded history in the South Pacific, Cyclone Winston in 2016 (Neef et al., 2018). This explains the high levels of vulnerability the climatic conditions render and as most countries rely on natural resources for their source of livelihood (Kim et al., 2017), it is interesting to note that many Indigenous people including Fijians in the Rewa Delta still adapted and are responding to changes such as climate change.

Meanwhile, there are also many discussions of how to respond to these climatic changes (Lata & Nunn, 2011). In Fiji, Nand et al, (2024) discussed how climate change impacts on what people value and this in turn impacts on how they respond. As discussed by Marshall et al (2019), people's response to change are varied in their beliefs and associated with what they have lost too. The Indigenous *iTaukei ni vanua* value system determines how Fijians are responding and adapting to change. The most highly ranked values in Fiji are spirituality and family for instance as discussed by Nand et al (2024). Other values that were discussed by other scholars like Ravuvu (1983) were *vakaturaga* or the 'chiefly manner' and Ramacake (2010) included *vakamarama* and this included morals of love, care, respect, sympathy and support. "Some of the *vakaturaga* characteristics (which can be said the same of *vakamarama*) are *loloma* (loving), *veitاقomaki* (protector), *veivosoti* (forgiving), *vosota* (patience), *vakarokoroko* (humble), *vakarorogo* (attentive listener), *veidokai* (respectful), *veivukei* (helper), *veikawaitaki* (caring), *veinanumi* (considerate) and *yalo malua* (self-control) (Ramacake, 2010, p. 39). This implies how these values influence how they would respond to changes such as climate change because this is how they have lived over the years of experiencing climate change or socio-economic changes too.

While several tropical cyclones, along with the accompanying floods and other negative effects, have been among these climate events (Agrawala et al., 2003), Fijian local people still use their local knowledge and rely on subsistence farming as a means of

sustaining local their livelihoods, although the impacts of climate change are stressful (Alam et al., 2022). Similarly, Janif et al (2016) discussed that the value of oral narratives was significant to note when discussing the responses to climate change. These studies highlight the value of embedding Indigenous culture, way of life and existing traditional systems in responding to climate change issues.

On the other hand, people's perception of climate change has also been identified as a determinant factor of the nature and the degree of their response (Lata & Nunn, 2011). The experience and perception of people who have experienced change or a climatic condition will always influence their action. However, Lata (2010) explained that while this is a crucial need, it has been largely ignored. For the people in the Rewa Delta, an earlier study revealed that there was lack of awareness of climate change, yet, being vulnerable to the changes in weather, they viewed it some divine intervention (Lata & Nunn, 2011). This belief and knowledge would influence their response although the Rewa Delta is still being labelled as a vulnerable community to climate change. This ability to adapt gives recognition to how the meaning of climate change and its response is identified in social settings (Neef et al., 2018) while O'Brien & Wolf (2010) argued that what people perceive to be worth preserving and achieving will be used as adaptation strategies and considered effective.

Walshe et al (2018) noted that while the South Pacific is at risk from climate change, little is known about how various people are affected by it. Yet, *talanoa* has also been acknowledged as a good research methodology for Fiji's climate change (Cagivinaka et al., 2024). It has been observed that interacting with local experiences is a tactic that fosters comprehension of behaviour and reactions to the effects of climate change as well as other types of development and change within a community. Scholars assert that innovative methodologies are necessary for social research, and these transformative approaches play a significant role in advancing decolonization and sustainable development models (Cammock et al., 2021). Some academics, however, contend that despite the growing popularity of community-based adaptation, there are currently few procedures and conditions that allow for capacity adaptation (Warrick et al., 2016).

Furthermore, no single strategy can fulfil all demands and suit all capacities (Hay & Mimura, 2013). To fit the many communities, areas, and rural settings of Fiji and the Pacific, there is a need for a range of flexible responses. While there are universal principles pertaining to vulnerability and risks, different circumstances may require different techniques to adaptation (Hay & Mimura, 2013). An article from the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change explained this and used the quote, '*There is no one size fits all*' (United Nations, 2016, p. 6). Although this is a global challenge, countries are working towards a resilient economy that fits their context (Nations, 1992).

The values, narratives and perceptions of people about climate change or any change for that matter, highly determines how they respond to it as proved by literature.

2.2 Transformations in local societies

While there are many discussions on responses to change and climate change, it is also crucial to note how social and economic change in Fiji was viewed in previous studies

and research. This section will discuss topics such as westernisation, globalisation and development, as factors contributing to change and, at the same time, explore the views of literature.

2.2.1 Westernisation

Certain features of modernity need to be seen critically when the study of change and historical growth of a society is sensitively comprehended, discussed and analysed from the people's worldview because this would dictate how they were exploited (Ravuvu, 1988). This section will explain that modernisation led to the loss of Indigenous values and tradition while at the same time, they struggled hard to adapt.

Modernisation was one of the factors that influenced a lot of changes in Fiji society. As Naidu (2010) explained, modernisation is westernisation and meant the changing of values, attitudes and social orientation of a society. Despite climate change being a worldwide phenomenon, literature from the present day indicates that modernity or westernisation has a bigger effect on Indigenous Fijians and their way of life too (Ravuvu, 1988). In general terms, the process of a society transitioning from a primitive to a developed state is commonly referred to as modernization.

Furthermore, Overton's study of rural Fiji (1988) explained that modernisation in Fiji was explained by foreign scholars and academics using theoretical frameworks and this led to many different versions of modernisation in rural Fiji and this was poorly understood in many cases. The modernisation theory used by some scholars, focused on economic development as the main driver for social change and ignored or demeaned communal land tenure and social relations in its analysis (Overton, 1989). This was also supported by Ravuvu (1988) in explaining the effects of modernisation that through development, Fijians were becoming less self-sufficient and depending on external resources. In general, many studies were focused on the rapid changes in Fiji societies, Overton (1989) argued that there was a need to have local researchers write about the experience of people during the change and in his study, he saw that the old traditional way of doing things was not being swept away or aside but it was modified and mobilised to deal with the changes which led to these knowledge and skills being still valued.

Consequently, modernisation led to many challenges in Fiji. The government of Fiji policies were largely influenced and so this impacted local communities and one good example was given by Overton (1999) that individualism was promoted by the government in the 1960's. This contrasts with Indigenous Fijian culture of communal living. While some research has indicated that communal living hinders development, the long history of British colonization and postcolonial structures with Indo-Fijians have led Fijians to believe that their peaceful and fearless communal culture is essential to their survival as a nation and as members of the global community (Brison, 2007). Individualism exists in capitalist societies where traditional social systems have been replaced because it support an economic system that generates economic activities in societies (Buchholz, 2009). These traditional systems that have social interconnectedness embedded in them provide people a meaningful life which dictates their everyday existence. As Peterson (2009) argued that to enhance Fijian communities

capacity to adapt, the complexities of the tension between communalism and individualism needs recognition and discussion.

2.2.2 *Development*

Rural development' became the new catchphrase for modernisation after independence (Ravuvu, 1988). Development was mostly forced onto rural areas using concepts and strategies to reorganise social and production systems and through rural development institutions of both government and aid agencies (Overton, 1999). The term 'development' usually connotes westernization (Jowitt & Cain, 2010). This section further discusses modernisation in Fiji under the guise of "development" and will also highlight some of the impacts on *iTaukei* ways of life.

Development in Fiji was also recognised as a 'new banner' but it seemed to be modernisation acquiring a greater degree on Fijians (Ravuvu, 1988). Development involved the adoption of new largely market-oriented systems of production, particularly cash cropping and commercial agriculture. In addition, there was also much emphasis on developing transport infrastructure, linking rural Fijian villages with towns and markets, as well as the spread of government services to the countryside: schools, health centres, agricultural extension services and electricity. The new banner for all this was "progress" and not 'tradition', it was "modern" and not Indigenous'. The new notion and new ideas have slowly been adopted and in the process, as Nayacakalou labelled it, a "Fijian dilemma" (1978). Fijians were then torn between two philosophies, to continue living the traditional ways or to try out the new way of living and break away from tradition that development was emphasizing (Ravuvu, 1988). When people did not comply with the new standards of so-called 'progress', they were victimised as uncivilised, underdeveloped and so forth, and this led to more changes in societies (Ravuvu, 1983). "Development which started with pacification and education by the missionaries, has loosened the bonds of total moral commitment and social responsibility, producing new degrees of individualism and dependence" (Ravuvu, 1988, p. 22). The idea of development was largely imposed by the government as they were promoted to actively support rural development and thus abstracted the concepts of the Fijian communities.

Individualism and capitalism were integral to development. As progress was associated with economic development, land tenure in Fiji was seen and identified as a barrier for so many reasons. In Fiji, the government was the forefront of rural development and while it was perceived as defending land ownership, it was actually restructuring the social and economic ideas towards individualism (Overton, 1999). The plan and structure of the rural development was being globalised as it served international and national plans but as Ravuvu (1988) described, these led otherwise to local people. Studies (Brison, 2003; Nayacakalou, 1978) saw that it was not only the government, but most Fijians were also swayed and were inspired towards these interests.

People in Fiji became less self-sufficient as a result of their increased reliance on outside influences, ideas, and resources as their level of development increased. The opportunity to outside world was mainly in town areas and this implied a notion of 'underdeveloped' to people living in rural communities which encouraged them to move in order to improve their social status. "The mass media and other forms of

communication constantly remind the people of *Colo* that their ways of thinking, feeling and doing things are narrow, limited, localised and inefficient” (Ravuvu, 1988, p. 5). Similarly, Overton (1999) in his research argued that development was a concept that was used by politicians and academics and this also was one of the factors of change in rural settings in Fiji. Increasingly ‘development’ meant that people’s lives were linked to government policies and institutions and to markets, wage earning and urban influences and away from established village-based Indigenous protocols and relationships (Nayacakalou, 1978; Ravuvu, 1988).

Economic development was seen as growth and the communal system of ownership of land in Fiji was seen as a barrier (Ward, 2013). The notion of development in Fiji by foreign academics matched the ideas of capitalism which directly affects ownership specifically land tenure in Fiji (Overton, 1999). The difference between a development that involves local communities and development for the communities is clear. This idea encouraged individualistic activities which impacts the social ties and values of Fijian culture and tradition. Individualism was encouraged through wage earnings and cash cropping (where cash incomes were derived and mainly retained by households and individuals) and through urbanisation and education. In all perceptions and definitions, rural development was an external set of forces that determined and was responsible for significant change and its effects on Fijian villages and rural settings. One of which was the converting of farmers from subsistence to commercial production and this instilled a new norm of individualism slowly but surely.

As we move forward in time with development, through different phases such as neoliberalism in the 1980s and 1990s and poverty alleviation and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the early 2000s, development transformed again after 2015 with the global partnership for sustainable development and the creation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This strategy (and earlier ones) encouraged the exchange of knowledge and best practices across nations, and fixed and structured indicators were created as standards for accomplishing its objectives. “Regional participants explained that in the Pacific Island region, agenda setting in all policy fields is influenced by actor interests from global-regional (mainly conveyed by development partners), national-regional (PICs place their national agenda on the regional agenda) and bi-lateral directions (countries outside the Pacific Island region influence the regional agenda)” (Patay et al., 2024, p. 1266). Global priorities, perceptions of need and goals, such as economic growth, industrialisation and climate action, seemed to take precedence and guide the actions of government and civil society in their promotion of change in rural Fiji. Yet, the drive for economic growth and expansion frequently overlooked the long-term ramifications that could have a negative influence on local societies, the environment and the future (Ashraf et al., 2024).

In response, some scholars say that the SDG should be contextualised and other scholars state that even for Pacific countries, each country has unique capacities in dealing with change and climate change impacts. Some academic works have also maintained that Indigenous knowledge should be incorporated into Fiji's sustainable development as the indicators for sustainable development have however been seen as contradictory to local communities (Brugmann, 1997; Klaassen, 2020).

It is clear that development has been seen from the expatriate's worldview or modern eyes. This makes Indigenous knowledge and living and a modern society an apparent dichotomy (Jowitt & Cain, 2010). They are two totally different societies and are incompatible with one another. As they deal with the opportunities and challenges of modernity, globalization, and environmental change, local people in Fiji and in the Pacific too, are going through considerable changes in the areas of the economy, environment, and society (Curry et al., 2020). 'Development' when framed in terms of this dichotomy between modernity and tradition, seems to offer little agency for Indigenous peoples, beyond choosing one or the other. There is little room to understand or support ways people can survive and prosper in both worlds simultaneously and retain ways of life they consider vital to their identity and well-being.

Even while Indigenous Fijians are dealing with hitherto unseen problems like climate change, they are nonetheless under pressure to safeguard not just their resources and territory but also their 'Indigenous legacy' (Klaassen, 2020). Generation after generation carried on the teachings, morals, convictions, and aspirations of their ancestors and forefathers. Indigenous people value this as their own wisdom. Research indicates that oral traditions were re-examined as viable responses to climate change (Janif et al., 2016). Climate change impacts and lived experiences affect what people value and this will affect how they respond to it (Nand et al., 2024).

Outsiders have created and implemented the majority of adaptive tactics and strategies (Nunn et al., 2020). They have not been done by people who are familiar with the context of Fiji or their local community. There is a broader trend that the shift in policy and international development are considered as compatible, despite some research explaining how successful community-based adaptation is and the proper strategy to adaptation since it involves local disadvantaged people in policy decision and execution (Forsyth, 2013). It is imperative to use Indigenous knowledge as a sustainable development strategy in response to climate change in order to manage this (Klaassen, 2020).

Tradition, in addition to being characterized by some studies as "something that encodes a relation between the past and the present" (Jolly, 1992, p. 320), was further explained by Nayacakalou (1975) as resistance to change and permanence. He claimed that Fijians were reluctant to lose their traditions in the modern Fiji. To add to this, when the Fijian Administration was set up during the colonial era, it was rife with contradictions. It was the branch that dealt with Indigenous issues as well as modern development (Tomlinson, 2006).

Therefore, it is apparent that modernisation and development have been powerful shaping forces for Fijian *iTaukei*. They have influences perhaps over 70 years of government policies and interventions in Fijian villages. People have responded, sometimes embracing elements of the new world (education, wage incomes, new material possessions) but also many have attempted to retain parts of the traditional ways of life.

2.3 Traditional *iTaukei vanua* system

It is important here to understand what the literature says about traditional knowledge systems and ways of life. As the increase in the recognition of the importance of Indigenous knowledge and systems to adaptation and resilience, it is prudent to discuss the matters in terms of what scholars have written about it as this research intends to discuss the relationality system the traditional *iTaukei vanua* system has.

Ravuvu (1988) stated in his study that the Fijian village was a source of strength and warmth to Fijians. "It is noticeable that people who 'make it' in the big world fall back on tradition when they find life in the other world too trying and cumbersome" (Ravuvu, 1988, p. 6). This explains the meaning of *vanua* and its significance. Overton (1999) argued that the strong elements of the *vanua* system, which has accepted practices and protocols, beliefs and structures and is kinship based and involves a close relationship between land and people and people with one another. It is something that will always exist for Fijians. Its social and cultural components include security, confidence, belonging and identity. The *vanua* is always part of them and for this, they will always find comfort in every now and then.

There is also a spiritual dimension in the *vanua*. "It is where ancestors preceded them and watch over the affairs of those who follow them. The *vanua* contains the actualities of the people's past and present and the potentialities of the future. It is an extension of the concept of the individual self and group self" (Ravuvu, 1988, p. 6). Similarly, as argued by Lagi (2017), *vanua* spiritual dimensions include *mana* (power), *sautu* (peace and prosperity), *sau* (authority and dominance), *yalo* (spirits) and *vanua tabu* (sacred places) which includes *sau tabu* (burial sites for chiefs and many more).

On the other hand, "*Bula vakavanua*" was the way of life in an Indigenous Fijian community space and area. The people were separated into roles and functions under a primarily structure, and each of these had duties to the *vanua*. This is what Varanava Tiko (2016) referred to as the Indigenous *Matanitu Vanua* governance system in his blog. Moreover, *vakaturaga* served as *bula vakavanua's* central idea. The colonial authority referred to this mode of life as the "chiefly system," which was sacrosanct and exclusive to Fijian culture. Values of respect and trust were embedded in this system. In contrast, British established a 'contemporary chiefly system' where chiefs were given a fixed position of privilege" as a result (Tomlinson, 2006).

Moreover, the land has constantly been a fundamental part of Fijian identity, offering sustenance, cultural customs, and a structure for social organization (Ravuvu, 1983). Communal tenure is deeply rooted in Fijian culture. In the nineteenth century, the arrival of European colonists caused significant changes in land use and ownership. Colonial rulers' policies, which mostly prioritized the interests of settlers and commercial farmers, weakened the rights of Indigenous peoples to their land (Murray, 2001). While there has historically been community land ownership, some scholars argue that the British Colonial Administration's move to transfer land ownership to clans or *mataqali* was purely political in nature (Scheyvens & Russell, 2012). On the other hand, other academics contended that the push to move toward private land ownership or leasing would transfer land sovereignty to the state or government. Their opposition to land leases was not a result of their dislike of commercial agriculture;

rather, it was due to the low returns on land leases and the resulting loss of sovereignty (Rutz, 1978).

In the meantime, it is important to note that the Fijians were primarily subsistence farmers though with a high degree of exchange of production with others. In this kind of economy, sharing and caring for one another was highly valued (Ravuvu, 1988). Since they inherit a cultural, social, and 'vanua' obligation, this is referred to in Fijian as "veivukei" [extending assistance] and "veinanumi." [to be considerate of others]. For both basic needs and wants, people rely on one another. They share not just commodities but also resources like the sea and land. This is ideal in a Fijian economy. People share food, 'veitabei kakana' and practice the traditional sharing of land whereby it is available for others even though it owned by a particular 'mataqali' or tribe or family. 'Kana vata' [eat together] 'yalo vata' [of same spirit] and 'cakacaka vata' [work together] is the underlying value in any Fijian context.

This is reiterated by Rusiate Nayacakalou in his research that the Fijian economy began as subsistence farming, fishing, hunting, and gathering; however, because of contact with European civilization, it changed and is now somewhat structured around money (Nayacakalou, 1978). There are factors that have influenced this change, such as commercialisation of land, labour and agriculture (Overton, 1993). These have been government initiatives in trying to commercialise farming in Fijian villages. With the village being the core and heart of any Fijian, these policies affect how a village is perceived. It is thus important to investigate local peoples' perceptions on this as the current literature shows that Fijian villages are either seen as retirement homes or low-cost suburbs as communal life seem not to be practised (Overton, 1993).

Research has shown that using Indigenous customary land can help to lessen the social issues that rural Fijian cultures face. Some studies found a 'new growth from the buried stump that brings life' and identified that utilizing the iTaukei way of life, or *bula vakavanua* such as *solesolevaki*, had demonstrated the effectiveness of the idea of *iTaukei* knowledge as a sustainable development strategy (Vunibola & Scheyvens, 2019, p. 62). *Solesolevaki* as embedded in *bula vakavanua* is used as a vehicle for development (Sewabu, 2015).

Nonetheless, the ideas of *solesolevaki* are highly pertinent when it comes to emphasizing concerns of well-being, resilience, and efficient application of good governance (Vunibola & Scheyvens, 2019). 'One is too small to achieve greatness' is a well-known quote by John Maxwell which supports this notion (Maxwell, 2002). As Fijians regard land as the core of their heart, land use and tenure is crucial to development as this will bring out potentials and voices for development and resilient matters.

Thus, we can see that *iTaukei* concepts and values have been strongly emphasized by Fijian scholars, even if they have been marginalised and even silenced within dominant discourses of development.

2.4 Adaptation and resilience

Alongside the above concepts and debates within the development literature with regard to Fiji, recent studies have also indicated the need for rethinking Indigenous innovation

for climate resilience (Vunibola et al., 2024). Vunibola argued that Indigenous knowledge exists and has been used by Indigenous people for many years now. Recognizing this knowledge supports the strategies that are striving for collective well-being, Indigenous community well-being is defined as Indigenous development that is embedded with Indigenous values or their way of life (Vunibola & Scheyvens, 2019). For instance, many studies proved that for any development to make sense, they need to be involved in decision making (Vunibola & Scheyvens, 2019).

Numerous studies have also examined the challenges faced by Pacific Island nations and their efforts to adapt and build resilience in the face of a changing climate (Richmond & Sovacool, 2012). For instance, a study conducted by Martin et al (2018) focused on the specific case of Fiji and its vulnerability to climate change. The research highlighted the importance of understanding local perspectives and knowledge systems in designing effective adaptation strategies.

However, local perceptions of change need to be understood and explained. They are not universal because different people perceive change differently. Yet, there are gender difference in resilience. A local community is made up of social groups, and all the different contributions from its members to bolster climate change resilience is needed (Singh et al., 2022), while other studies showed that perceptions differ due to age difference (Pyhala et al., 2016).

Building resilience requires local action (Fiji One News, 2024). Enhancing local capacity and collaboration was viewed by the workshop organizers of Fiji Climate Change, as a critical next step in Fiji's efforts to build resilience. Furthermore, natural and spiritual realities are deeply ingrained in cultural norms throughout the South Pacific, particularly in Fiji. These different norms have different perspectives of change and development.

Some researchers focus more on resilient strategies and global adaptation, while others emphasize a deeper comprehension of the local population and their surroundings (Hansen & Cox, 2015). Understanding resilience in a local context is made easier by a unique relationship that is ingrained in the local culture. This clarifies the idea of self-sacrifice in many small communities for the good of others. Economic self-interest or individual well-being are inferior to overall well-being.

However, some people made the point that there are a variety of factors causing environmental change. Climate change is a significant cause of change, but it is also not the only major one. Deteriorating human-environment relations, for example, are also important and contribute to environmental issues (Hansen & Cox, 2015). Therefore, we need to appreciate more how local perceptions and experiences of change can feed into a deeper understanding of resilience and adaptation not only to climate change but to other pressures on daily life and well-being.

2.5 Conceptual framework: Promotion for relational ontology

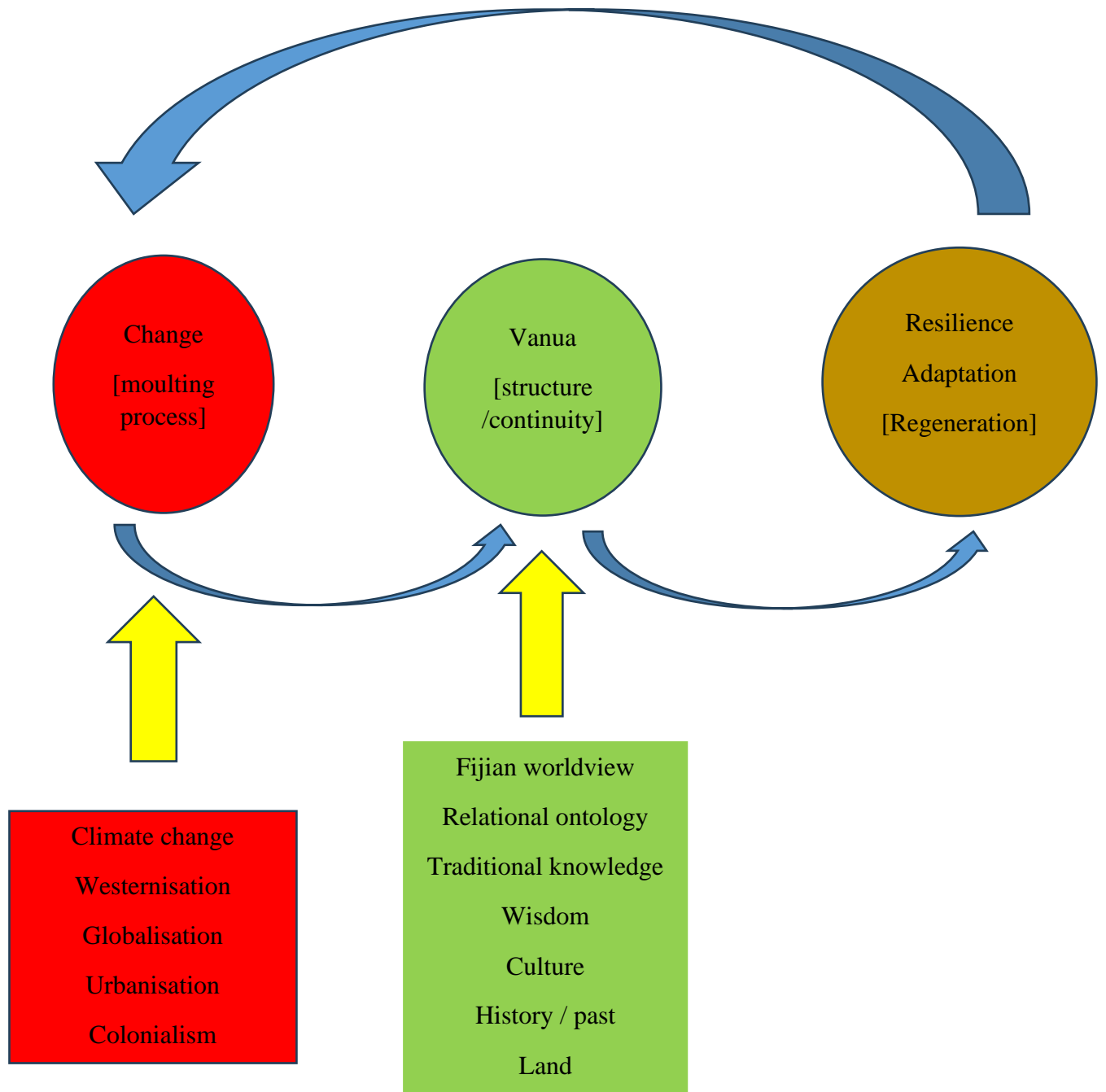
In order to investigate these complex aspects of change in Fiji, this research adopts a conceptual framework that sees knowledge about change in terms of Indigenous *iTaukei* worldviews/ontologies. The relational ontology perspective serves as this study's conceptual framework. To study the nature of reality or existence, it is critical

to note that entities (people, living things, environment, spiritual) are founded and formed by their relationships. “The basic contention of a relational ontology is simply that the relations between entities are ontologically more fundamental than the entities themselves” (Wildman, 2010, p. 1).

The metaphor of the crab that the study adopts is a way of understanding change in terms of such relationships. The mud crab analogy is cyclical in nature as the crab regenerates through growth through several cycles in time. Furthermore, this cycle of growth and regeneration is mediated through the way the crab relates both to its own internal structure and its wider environment. When change (climate change, westernisation, urbanisation, globalisation development, colonialism) affects the *vanua* (communities, villages), things shift but the structure of the *vanua* (the skeleton) remains and people and communities adapt (the new shell) and become more resilient.

The diagram below identifies the basic concepts and themes that the study highlights. It is primarily about how our views of the world and values are conditioned by our relationships (with others and the environment). Relationships (how they are managed and maintained) are highly valued and remain through change as do the systems and protocols that understand and look after them.

Figure 2: A relational ontology of the perceptions of change in Fiji



2.6 Summary

To sum up, the review has shown that dominant ideas of development and westernisation have informed the way change in Fiji has been understood and policies have been shaped accordingly. This has led to some major transformations such as increasing individualism and materialism and the undervaluing of traditional ways and collective living. However, a growing literature, mainly by Fijian scholars, have pointed to the need to appreciate and value these customary values and ways of life.

Indeed, it is now being appreciated that this is critical if we are to better understand how people will adapt to and be resilient in the face of climate change and other changes. Indigenous Fijians have adapted to various changes and transformations in the past and have adapted through longstanding strategies for dealing with change. And in this, relationships are absolutely critical, and this is why the conceptual framework of relational ontology is significant in addressing processes of change.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.0 Introduction

Addressing the aims and research questions for this study requires appropriate procedures. An outline of the approach used in collecting data is summarised in this chapter. While the research used a qualitative design, the overarching paradigm of this study is the Vanua Framework (Baba, 2008). This will be discussed considering other significant contextual research perspectives.

With the Vanua Framework serving as the underlying paradigm, the study is qualitative in nature. It incorporates research techniques and approaches from both western and Indigenous cultures. To capture the impact of these changes, semi-structured interviews, '*talanoa*' and photovoice were used.

Prior to delving into the Vanua Research Framework, the chapter commences with an examination of the qualitative paradigm and the philosophies that underpin the research methodologies and processes. The study uses a combination of western methodologies and Indigenous methodologies approaches. Finally, the methods of collecting data are discussed.

3.1 Qualitative methodology

Following from the conceptual framework of a relational ontology in the previous chapter, this research places relationships at the centre in the way this topic is conceptualised. In order to move from this basis to a discussion of methodology, I adopt a social constructivist epistemological approach (Scheyvens, 2014). Relationships are best understood when we examine how people make meanings and knowledge out of their experiences, perceptions and assessments (rather than through quantifiable 'facts' and a positivist approach). Their experiences of change over time are filtered through social relationships and 'social constructions'. "Knowledge' about change, therefore, is conditioned by people's social and cultural environment.

With this constructivist epistemological approach, a qualitative methodology has been selected for this study to fully examine Indigenous views and enable nuanced investigation and comprehension. The highly valuable output of qualitative research is data that is rich in context and cultural specificity (Mack et al., 2005). The purpose of this data is to comprehend the issue from the viewpoints of the local people that are affected by it. It will delve into their everyday lives and how they make meaning of it. It will seek specific information such as behaviour patterns, values, priorities, views, opinions, status, roles and social patterns in the context of the target population. This helps researchers comprehend how they perceive their surroundings and interpret their own experiences (Chinyere & Eze, 2023).

Furthermore, qualitative data usually takes precedence over data that can be broadly applied to different groups since it provides a rich and comprehensive understanding of a particular context or phenomena (Mack et al., 2005). It describes the experience of people or the reality on the ground rather than using some preconceived ideas to explain something. The nature of a phenomenon and the situations in which it appears are studied using qualitative methodologies (Busetto et al., 2020).

Also, qualitative data is flexible (Hadjistavropoulos & Smythe, 2001). Because of this, it has adaptability elements which allow the researcher and the participants to engage actively during the *talanoa* or semi-structured interview. Open-ended questions and probing questions help explore the participants' thoughts and ideas and the result is the deeper meaning of what one is trying to get out of the discussion. This discussion and *talanoa* has been argued by some studies that there is a need to decolonize research and use Pacific Indigenous research methods as a means of analysing data (Mafile'o et al., 2024).

This method has provided a means of exploring the perspectives of local people in the two contexts of Rewa, Draubuta and Nabudrau, on socio-economic changes that has occurred over the years of their lives. It gives a holistic view and an open mind to collection of data. By using this approach, the participants' voices, views, perceptions are told and understood.

3.2 Vanua research framework

The overarching paradigm of this study is the Vanua Framework. It follows a qualitative tactic that is culturally compatible with the guidelines for doing research in Pacific communities. It is motivated by the Vanua Research Framework (Baba, 2008). This methodology is an Indigenous approach of research that is not only widely accepted in Oceanic scholarship but is culturally appropriate as it considers the language, principles, protocols and Indigenous knowledge of *iTaukei* people. It is rooted in Indigenous perspectives and beliefs with a primary focus on the connection of people, land and their community. It emphasizes a holistic understanding and relationships in social, cultural and ecological context. Indigenous methods of knowing and being are reflected in the framework, which frequently involves an ontological shift and epistemological considerations.

Although Massey University has its guidelines for research as articulated in the Ethics of Research, the '*vanua*' that I belong to has its own set of rules and 'laid' protocols that I was expected to adhere to when doing research. This positioned me as an 'insider-outsider' in this research study. I had to consider the Fijian protocols when planning and executing the fieldwork in the two villages. This was significant as it was not only culturally ethical, but it would result in a life-long relationship that is based on trust [*veivakabauti*], honesty [*dina*] and integrity [*vakaitovo*].

Moreover, because it places so much emphasis on a relational ontology, the Vanua Framework frequently involves an ontological shift. Gopinath (2015) explained that the transition from a "top-down" strategy to a "bottom-up" strategy as being fundamental on societal concerns and challenges. According to Little (2016), the shift takes into account the complexity and size of mechanisms that have led to the profound, quick, and confusing societal transformations that have occurred throughout time.. The relationships between people (*veiwekani*), the land (*umaqele/kanakana*), nature [*yaubula*] and the environment (*veika raraba*) are the key concepts that define everything about Fijians.

A relational ontology is emphasized and stressed in this framework (Baba, 2006). It acknowledges that knowing existence, comprehending the outside world, and forming one's identity depend heavily on communal living, cultural heritage, traditional

knowledge, cultural practices, and cultural beliefs. People do not live in isolation and in the context of Fijian culture, they are interdependent on one another (Biturogoiwasia & Walker, 2001). Fijian people live on nature, surroundings, land, river, sea and refer to ancestral teachings and values too from now and then. It is a holistic understanding of relationships within a *vanua* in a Fijian context. Sol & Heng (2022) expressed this as reality that is only understood through understanding connections in societies and taking concepts, experiences, language as objects of study.

Moreover, the Vanua Framework considers epistemological approach as it prioritizes Indigenous knowledge system (Baba, 2008). It values oral traditions, past experiences, stories, traditional gatherings, traditional dances such as *meke* and knowledge that are passed down from generation to generation and customs as source of Indigenous *iTaukei* knowledge. This is unique to Indigenous people and specifically for Fijians, and this shapes their worldview (Teariki & Leau, 2024).

According to the Vanua Framework, relationships and context are critical to understanding life and knowledge (Baba, 2008). The significance of this paradigm in this study stems from the empowerment that it affords Indigenous people.

The Fijian Vanua Framework is also motivated by other Pacific frameworks such as the *Kaupapa* Maori and Tongan *Kakala* all of which has principles that were used for guidance when conducting the research (Baba, 2008). These principles include the following:

- the research must benefit the community (Fijians)
- it should focus on their needs and must take into account their knowledge, protocols, philosophies, ethics
- the researcher must be fluent in Fijian language
- there should be respect and reciprocity where the researcher respects the *Vanua* protocols and ensures that there is opportunity to show appreciation to the people
- can use local people as co-researchers for local capacity building
- Chiefs and elders at all levels know and give permission to all researchers done in the village.

This study ensured that these principles were incorporated before, during and after the field work in the two communities, Draubuta and Nabudrau.

In Fiji, the Vanua Framework has to embrace the concept of *bula vakavanua*. “*Bula vakavanua*’ is referred to as the Fijian way of life or Fijian living. It can be expressed as ‘*bula vaka ivakarau*’ which basically means that it has a set of structure or is structured in some sense that is known and understood only to a Fijian. *Vanua* is an *iTaukei* ontology that defines its knowledge systems and informs its way of life (Baba, 2008).

Vanua has been described in so many ways by researchers (Nainoca, 2011). In my perspective, *vanua* includes people and their language, people have certain traditional values, behaviours and protocols, live on land, sea and its surroundings.

In Fijian language it would be:

“Na vanua e wili kina na umtamata ka tiko na nona umavosa ka tiko na nona itovo kei na nona ivakarau, wili kina na umaqeleva, iyaubula kei na iqoligoli”

[The *vanua* includes the people, their language, set of rules, behaviour and protocols, living on and off land, sea and all the natural resources]

The "*bula vakavanua*" of the individuals participating permeates the research. As a result, researchers interact with the people (*umatamata*) on a daily basis in their own language (*umavosa*) observing their way of life (*itovo kei na kena ivakarau*) as they inhabit and use the land, the sea, and their surroundings (*umaqeleva, yaubula, qoligoli*), which is their source of existence.

Participants in talks such as interviews and *talanoa* actively participate when these norms are adhered to with decency, honesty, and integrity. Consequently, they have developed mutual confidence as collaborators in the production of knowledge grounded in the Indigenous traditional knowledge system. The presentation of *sevusevu* is the first step in this procedure.

The traditional welcome is often observed by the chiefs and elders of a community. Vunibola (2020) stated when this is done, you as a *vulagi* will be affiliated to a family which means you are no longer a *vulagi* but an *iTaukei* [local status]. The subjects and the researcher develop closer relationships. They would split meals together. Through social or kinship ties, participants reestablish connections [*veiwekani*].

A different setting is applied if you are from Rewa and visiting another village within the Rewa provinces. I had to seek traditional permission from my *veimataki* or traditional family before engaging with the participants of *Draubuta* village. In my case, because I was from *Noco*, I had to go through *Mataki Noco* then *Mataki Burebasaga* before I was even allowed to present my *sevusevu* to the chief in *Draubuta*. Since it would be improper and I would be neglecting my regular duties, I was unable to visit the chief right away. Trust again is earned in this process and closed information, which is not given to many people, can now be accessed.

3.3 Methods

This section also serves to justify the methods that were used in this study and are consistent with both the qualitative methodology and Vanua Framework. It will discuss existing theories and principles that are relevant to this study.

3.3.1 Semi-structured interviews

I chose semi-structured interviews based on *talanoa* to capture the experiences of these local people as much as possible. When the researcher's objective is to gain a deeper grasp of the participant's distinct viewpoint rather than a more broad comprehension of

a phenomenon like climate change or change, semi-structured interviews are the recommended strategy for gathering data (Olatunde et al., 2021).

A semi-structured interview is a qualitative research approach that combines a set of pre-determined questions derived from themes of the topic of research. The guiding questions are supplemented by probing questions that are derived from the interviewee's responses (Adams, 2015). This approach was appropriate to my research as I used long probing questions as a tool to start the interview. Nainoca (2011) claims that Fijians would not respond with a simple yes or no but rather would tell a story (*talanoa*) that included their thoughts and feelings in addition to capturing the event.

Although there isn't a rigid strategy for semi-structured interviews, the discussion can develop into a more thorough picture of their viewpoints. In addition to interviewees sharing fresh facts and knowledge, there is room to explore more pertinent concepts.

The semi-structured *talanoa* was conducted with a total of 36 participants: 24 in Draubuta and 12 in Nabudrau. These participants were not a representative sample of the whole village population but deliberately chosen to select older adults, both male and female to gain a deeper understanding of change over a longer time span. The participants are summarized as follows:

Table 2 Analysis of the semi-structured *talanoa* / interview participants

For Draubuta village:

GENDER	AGE GROUP	NO OF PEOPLE	VILLAGE
Female	40-59	6	Draubuta
Female	60-85	7	Draubuta
Male	40-59	5	Draubuta
Male	60-85	6	Draubuta

For Nabudrau village

GENDER	AGE GROUP	NO OF PEOPLE	VILLAGE
Female	40-59	3	Nabudrau
Female	60-85	3	Nabudrau
Male	40-59	3	Nabudrau
Male	60-85	3	Nabudrau

The above table analyses how the semi-structured interview was conducted. People between 40 to 80 years old were selected because the study wish to capture the views of people who had seen and lived with change and development in their societies. It also had a good mix of both genders views cannot be universalised as according to (Bertana & Blanton, 2023). It is important to gather perceptions from various angles in order to get a good understanding of their experience about change and development in societies.

These meetings typically lasted from 9am to 2pm in the afternoon, depending on their daily schedule. The village headman (*turaganikoro*) did the roster for this session but

the length each session ran was entirely up to the discussions made. According to the *turaganikoro*, the village meeting gave him authority to roster the participants but should always confirm with them in advance. He went to the individual houses and discussed their availability and ability to participate and also explain the aim and objectives of my research. This process made it easier for me and everyone. As soon as I come in the morning, I would first go to the *turaganikoro's* house, and he accompanied me to each individual participant. With the *turaganikoro's* presence in all the discussions (interviews), I believe it was both good and challenging too. He would stir up some discussions which made the interview a bit easier and at other times, I feel that some respondents were reluctant to discuss more.

Some were short while others were long enough. While I was taking notes, our *talanoa* was being recorded on a voice recorder. Most of the *talanoa* were in Fijian language and while this is so, most responses were narratives, often several minutes long, rather than straightforward short yes/no responses. For several participants, particularly those who had to reflect on the past while attempting to answer the questions, the sessions were a bit emotional and upsetting.

Daily entry into homes was made simple by the village man's participations in all conversations and *talanoa*. Most interviews began with probe and follow up questions in order for participants to delve deeper in what they were trying say. They were open-ended and thus, there were more narratives than short specific answers.

After the stories were transcribed, I was able to identify and carefully choose which themes underlie the responses. The themes were unpacked.

3.3.2 *Talanoa*

Cultural exchange of ideas, perceptions, sentiments, emotions, experiences, and opinions is known as *talanoa* and is practiced throughout the Pacific. According to Fa'avae et al (2016), researchers from the Pacific region are urged to employ Pacific research methods in context study conducted in the region since they better capture participants' lived realities than what are typically thought of as Western research techniques. Since most of our history and culture have been passed down orally, *talanoa* is highly revered in our tradition and culture as Indigenous people. A *talanoa* typically results in an enduring connection based on a reliable relationship of participation, notwithstanding our differences (Vaiotei, 2006).

Talanoa in the Fijian context is a daily activity where knowledge is passed on unconsciously. "Knowledge is seen as a gift by Fijians" (Baba, 2008, p. 146). This meant that any activity where knowledge of the *vanua* is extracted, it is best that it is extracted in the way it was created. It creates the space where authentic narratives and emotions are shared and expressed.

As defined by Vaiotei (2006), *talanoa* is "a personal encounter where people story their issues, their realities and aspirations", authentic relationships and knowledge are being shared (Fa'avae et al., 2016). *Talanoa* is a method which is directly linked to the appreciation of a relational ontology at the conceptual core of this thesis. It also requires the researcher to acknowledge their position and relationship to participants and this relationship is respected and hopefully strengthened by the *talanoa*.

For research, authentic and rich data will be collected because of using *talanoa* as a research method. It consistently reflects the lived realities of the research participants and is suitable for all cultural contexts (Fa'avae et al., 2016) while Ravono (2021) defined *talanoa* as an Indigenous orality while the Vanua Framework defined it in the Fijian context.

Baba (2008) articulated this well, as *talanoa* being more than an interview and embodies the Fijian protocols of sharing information. On the other hand, Nainoca (2011) defined *talanoa* in literal Fijian terms when the two words are separated as 'tala' or dispose and 'noa' as in yesterday and literally means to dispose of yesterday events or opinions. It is pliable as it gives space to probe questions which leads to clarification and re-aligning of responses (Vaioleti, 2006).

While using *talanoa* as a method of collecting data, the following philosophical issues are prudent to be considered in Indigenous research (Baba, 2008). They are;

- Appropriate ways to approach a participant.
- How to acquire knowledge?
- How to seek knowledge?
- Who can we consult as depositories of knowledge?
- Who has the authority to speak?
- Are there any boundaries and how does this influence the process?

Talanoa and semi-structured interviews were simultaneously used in the research and like Fa'avae et al (2016) stated that *talanoa* is more casual and comparable to interview. Sharing of stories through an informal conversation with these participants encouraged them to share their knowledge and experience of change and development.

During semi-structured interviews, *talanoa* took place between myself and the participants. It was not rigid but a flexible way of conversing and some had longer answers and narratives than others.

3.3.3 *Photo voice*

Wang and Burris (1997) stated that the use of certain photographic approach, people can identify, represent and improve their community through photovoice. It is used with underprivileged groups because participants utilize the photos to reflect on issues that are significant to the community, specifically to represent their culture and highlight social issues (Brown, 2014). For Indigenous groups such as Fijians, photovoice has the ability to amplify their voice and worldview about change in their societies.

Photovoice with *talanoa* was used in this study because it takes into account the following strengths (Wang & Burris, 1997),

- Participatory needs assessment - The participants received cameras and were instructed of how to use and take care of them. The result was they identified the changes that the community had gone through, and they were encouraged to discuss using their own perspectives.

- Enables people to describe their perception of change - The participants were divided into groups and were given opportunities to discuss and explain their viewpoints to each other and to the larger group too.
- Local participation enhanced - They were given the space to choose their spot or issue and taking photos enhanced their participation to the study. They took ownership of the study as well.
- Advantage to vulnerable populations - Because there was no reading and writing, local people find this activity fun and they were keen to do it. They discussed and learned from one another too.

These strengths are similar to other studies which included photovoice as culturally appropriate and fostered trust as participants were encouraged to participate (Vining & Finn, 2024).

Furthermore, photovoice suits studies for change when compared to other methods. Wang and Burris (1997) further verified that it pushes locals to promote their individual and community's well-being which is way above participatory needs assessment. Instead of identifying the problems and issues faced, participants are more specific with photovoice by photographing and sharing their experience of a challenge they face. Some studies argued that photovoice suits all levels such as individuals, homes or communities (Salinger et al., 2024).

In this study, I had two cameras with me to help with the photovoice strategy. With the help of the village headman, the research participants managed to come to the community hall as it serves as a common space for everyone in a village. They were organised in groups of 4 or 3 and instructions were given that they were expected to discuss with each other and also refer to their one-to-one *talanoa* with me. In Draubuta village, there were about 6 to 7 groups and in Nabudrau village, there were about 3 groups only.

They were given time to discuss these among themselves and this went on for 15mins. After this discussion, each group were to identify a particular change they feel was the one they agree on and to talk about more while given time to speak. They were asked to take photos using the cameras. While some were keen on using the cameras, others resisted, and they had to get volunteers (their children) to help. As Sewabu (2015) used in her studies, participants were encouraged to give justifications for their selections.

Interestingly, different groups came up with different ideas, but it was later concluded that all were the changes that took place in their society for some time. Despite constantly being informed that they should always feel free to disclose their replies, they prioritize their issues through photovoice and find ways to address them in group conversations.

3.3.4 Observation

Observation is a qualitative method of data collection where participants are observed in their natural settings (Lofland et al., 2022). This aids the researcher in comprehending how individuals perceive things when they are seen performing their regular tasks and in local contexts like Fiji and the Pacific, as well as the social spaces

and community responsibilities. This was explained to the community so that they do not feel that the researcher is shadowing them at any time.

In this study, this method was contextualised. Because I was to interview three people per day depending on the daily circumstances, the rest of the time was merely on this. These were the main gatherings and situations observed.

- communal gatherings such as *solu* (fundraising activities), *cakacaka vakoro* (village projects), *lotu* (going to church) and many more
- use of the river as source of food
- helping another village member
- farming
- work / paid jobs
- transport use
- electricity use
- village etiquettes
- meetings

These observations were recorded on a daily field note taking and most of the data coincided with the data from *talanoa* and semi-structures interviews.

3.4 Recruitment phase and participant selection

This section outlines the selection and recruitment phase of data collection. It will first discuss how this was done using *talanoa* and semi-structured interviews and then it will discuss how it was done with *talanoa* and photovoice. For both methods, almost the same people were recruited and selected.

3.4.1 *Talanoa / semi-structured interviews*

Talanoa is integrated in all areas of the data collection as it is culturally appropriate and is not structured. The number of participants was presented in Table 2 above.

Participants who took part in the study were selected from the village meeting for both case studies and were also consulted by the village headman. Their participation was voluntary, and they were clearly advised that they can withdraw at any time. They also know that their information is strictly confidential, and they know that this can be withdrawn too.

I led the semi-structured one-on-one *talanoa* sessions because many participants were over fifty years old. This session occurred in their individual homes and thankful to the participants, most of them were happy and eager to participate. As soon as I arrived at the doorstep, I felt that they were ready as most of them were seated and had already left a space for our *talanoa*.

To kick off, our discussion started out with an open-ended question, which then gave insights into the following subject, generating new information and discussions

(Appendix 1). With a framework in mind, the ‘*talanoa*’ was also flexible. There was rich data, and a lot of personal perceptions generated.

Reflecting on our Fijian culture, some participants had prepared tea, some gave bags of fruits while others offered lunch.

3.4.2 *Talanoa and photovoice*

The photovoice was an exciting event as the participants came together at the community hall. Participants were informed of this after the semi-structured interview (*talanoa*) and from this, I was able to get how many people was available for this. With the exception of three to four people, most participants agreed to be part of this.

During the one-to-one interview, they were informed that they had every right not to take part as this had to be done as a group. While this did not happen, only three to four people confirmed that they would not be able to come to the hall. This was when they were also asked to prioritize the changes and discuss their views and thoughts.

3.5 Data analysis

A thematic data analysis approach was used to analyse the qualitative data gathered from the semi-structured interviews, observations, *talanoa* and photo voice. Most of the data was in Fijian language and the most efficient way to capture the true and deep meanings of the information gathered, was to read the data a number of times and did a selective transcribing of the information gathered. Key concepts and emerging themes were identified and noted.

Data was interpreted by myself, and I identified and coded the patterns by underlining them as I read. Similar and related ideas were grouped to inform large themes and concepts. While this was happening, I kept reflecting on my research questions and the relationships of the themes that emerged while reading through the data.

I also used the quotes that I had noted down to support my themes and interpret the findings. The inductive coding approach supported this idea as I did not start with a pre-conceived idea being an ‘insider-outsider’ researcher or let my own perceptions of change and development influence the data. I used the narrative from my participants and raw data that I had collected for analysis.

Being involved in the interview, I was also emersed with these concepts during fieldwork. Being an ‘insider-outsider’ researcher, I needed to explain and discuss the participants’ perceptions with deep understanding and great interpretations.

3.6 Ethical considerations

The university and western ethics were considered in this study however, Indigenous *vanua* research steps informed how this study was ultimately conducted.

When dealing with people and communities, ethical consideration is very significant. Participants’ rights should be protected, and they need to feel safe to participate in any research. When it is unethical, participants and researchers too, are always left vulnerable and exposed adversely (Cacciattolo, 2015).

The ethical issues are well articulated in the Massey University in-house research conditions for approval. These code of ethical conduct in research were thoroughly

discussed and emphasized in an ‘in-house’ meeting with my supervisors and another staff member. When permission was granted, the study received a low-risk notification (see Appendix 2).

The Fiji government under the Ministry of *iTaukei* Affairs takes ownership of *iTaukei* villages. There was no special research visa, yet, although being citizen of Fiji, a copy of this notification was still forwarded to them for approval of visits and field work (see Appendix 4).

Relevant information about the research was given with the consent at an early stage to the research participants. This was in both, written English and verbal *iTaukei* language (Appendix 3). Upon discussing this, participants know the following information:

- Know the purpose of the fieldwork
- Information gathered would be very confidential
- Participants would remain anonymous and would be identified with pseudonyms
- Feel free to withdraw at any time
- They can access a copy of the research
- Researcher is available for assistance when appropriate

Moreover, the local communities and the researcher worked in collaboration. As common interests are shared, a life-long relationship is established and will be ongoing. There are cultural issues and gender issues over the course of data collection that I was aware of. To prevent this, the village headman participated as research assistant indirectly. The following values were maintained. They were respect (*vakarokoroko, veidokai*) in all aspects such as dress code, tone, use of words and appearance and patience (*vosota, wawa*) as the villages have their own timetables that I had to adhere to which at all times do not agree to what a researcher has planned to do. The other one was the practice of reciprocity (*cakacaka vata*). This is when the researcher was seen and identified by local people as someone who can assist with developments (*veivakatorocaketaki*), education (*vuli*) and other general matters or advise (*veika raraba*).

3.7 Indigenous research process

The steps of *vanua* research were articulated well in the Vanua Research Framework (Baba, 2008; Nainoca, 2011). The four steps explained below reflect Indigenous research done by an ‘insider-outsider’ specifically in the Rewan context.

1. Vakavakarau

This is the consultation process. Important people were consulted, and they are namely, the chiefs (*turaga na Vunivalu, turaga na Tui Noco*), headmans (*turaganikoro*), *vanua* doorway (*veimataki*) and family (*vuvale*).

Firstly, in my case, I had to consult my father on the traditional steps that I had to follow. Upon his advice, I know that in order to go to Draubuta village, I first must visit Nabitu village. I learnt in this process the significance of *veimataki*. This is our traditional doorway to Draubuta village. *Veimataki* or *matanikatuba* is literally the doorway in which one would enter a village (Nainoca, 2011).

Upon obtaining the traditional authorization from the *veimataki*, I was granted access to Draubuta village, which served as my primary field location. Draubuta village is part of the Tokatoka district, which is headed by Nabitu village.

As for Nabudrau village, I consulted the village headman first.

2. *Sevusevu*

The presentation of yaqona as *sevusevu* is customary when visiting a Fijian village. “*Sevusevu* is done on a continuous basis and at levels of the research exercise” (Baba, 2008). This demonstrates the importance of this exercise in a Fijian setting when entering a home, a village or a community. Presenting a *sevusevu* is more significant than donating money which is an assertion of tradition (Brison, 2001). The chief receives it as per customary etiquette in most situations.

As cited in Nainoca (2011), when *sevusevu* is presented, all the doors have been opened. Although I had prepared consent forms, in traditional settings, I was given the green light to move about, drink, eat and even sleep. The *veimataki* (mataki Noco/Burebasaga) presented my *sevusevu* to the chief and community during a Draubuta village meeting.

As for Nabudrau village, the village headman presented my *sevusevu* during the scheduled monthly meeting and explained the details of my research. This gave me the consent to do research although I was to seek the individual consent on paper too.

3. *Vakasoqoni itukutuku*

The village headman assisted me with identifying of the age groups that I had earlier discussed with him. He allocated me three houses per day and the rest of the hours were used in observing and taking part in village events such as village meetings, *solu* (giving money as fundraising) and other communal activities.

4. *Vakavinavinaka*

I was very grateful to the community for their invaluable support through my data collection journey. During the process of collecting data, I was thinking about a way that I can give back to the community. I was lucky to be invited to a *solu* for the Women’s Club green day for Draubuta.

In Nabudrau village, being an active member of my village is sufficient to maintaining that good relationship.

3.8 Conflict of roles

Being an ‘insider-outsider’ researcher, the different roles appear and can greatly affect data. This is because the researcher has personal links to the communities and the people. Integrity and transparency were always maintained to avoid any conflict of issues and roles especially when it dealt with sensitive cultural issues and relationships. While maintaining the principles of autonomy, the ethics were significant and worthwhile in navigating these issues in keeping data confidential as much as possible.

‘*These are the people who will bury me*’ is often a quote that would be used by a local Fijian person collecting data from her/ his own community (R.Tuimavana,

personal communication, May 10th,2024). Doing a research study on your own community gives you the space to be the ‘voice’ of your own community.

Transparency is the key to maintaining good relationships with the community and ‘your place’ in your own community. While the researcher tried their best to collect as much data as possible, having a close relationship and practicing reciprocity is also vital.

3.9 Summary

This chapter provided an outline of the methodology used for collecting data and analysing in order to address the objectives and research questions. The Vanua Framework was the main research design, and it made use of a qualitative methodology. Culturally appropriate methods and approach were employed to seek understanding of how local people from Rewa specifically in Draubuta village and Nabudrau village view change and development. This was integrated with the western notions of consent and confidentiality. Yet, embedded in these approaches are critical cultural issues of a life-long relationships, Fijian Indigenous culture and customs, Fijian knowledge systems and protocols and values of the *vanua* which makes an Indigenous researcher an ‘insider-outsider’ approach that must be balanced while conducting fieldwork.

The Indigenous research processes were exercised as the process of collecting data that begins with planning, preparation and conception to data analysis, discussing and later reporting or revisiting of sites. This is informed by the *bula vakavanua* which is the guiding methodology of the approaches. Moreover, the methods of data collection used greatly informed their perceptions and perspectives in how they see and view change and development.

Chapter 4 Results

4.0 Introduction

When asked during the research, the residents of the two villages, Draubuta and Nabudrau, identified several significant changes they have experienced during their lifetimes and their sentiments are discussed below. Since the world is always changing and evolving, change is unavoidable, especially in communities such as Draubuta and Nabudrau villages in the Rewa Delta. The primary modifications they have undergone will be covered in this chapter.

To begin, the chapter will discuss the social and economic changes highlighted by local research participants. These changes include changes in their livelihood, infrastructure, priorities, social changes, environmental adjustments, cultural changes, and changes in tradition and custom. It will also address the factors that they feel contributed to these shifts and changes. It will then discuss how local people have adjusted to these changes, how they have adapted overtime and carried on with their life.

4.1 Vulnerability, local perceptions and interpretations of change

The research participants believed that they were at first, vulnerable to the changes that their societies undertook. Being traditional and communal, these communities were faced with the challenge to accept and adapt the changes that were different from what they see as a value in a community.

This section will discuss their views and perceptions of these challenges or ‘vulnerabilities’. Although the big outside forces dictate some elements of vulnerabilities, Indigenous people are able to adapt and respond positively to the changes. The section discusses the deep connection of Fijians with the *vanua*, their traditional values and protocols, the sense of community and land use and land tenure system.

4.1.1 Relationships with the *vanua*

This section will discuss this fundamental concept, the *vanua* for which Fijians have a deep connection with. It will discuss what the elders of the society think of this special relationship especially when discussing change in terms of what and how they perceive it.

Firstly, participants identified significant changes in the way Rewa *iTaukei* were losing connections with the *vanua*. The traditional livelihood that their ancestors have developed and passed on from generations to generations have greatly shifted.

For most participants, the *vanua* has a deeper meaning. It is not just land, sea or the physical elements, for them, it is more. It includes the spiritual and unseen world, it includes the connection they have for one another, the values they should uphold and most importantly, a place where they would continually work as a community for the benefit of their ancestors, for themselves and for their future generations. As said by one participant,

“Na vanua e ka dei tiko, ke mani vakacava sara na nomu rawaka se na veika o rawata, mo bulataka tiko na bula vakavanua, vaka-Viti, e bula vakaitovo ka vakaivakarau, e maroroya na noda tiko ka vakakina o ira na muri tiko mai. Qo la na nodra bula na tukada”

[The *vanua* has a strong foundation, if you have achieved a lot of things, do not lose connection to the *vanua*, Fijian traditional living, its values and protocols because this will protect our future and this was how our ancestors lived]

Older generations were anxious about younger generations for they have quickly adapted to modern living. But as one participant explained, modern life is fine, it has reached our shores and what is important is how we control what we can still control, which is what is important, these are the values, etiquette and appropriate way of living.

Another participant articulated their sense of vulnerability and loss and responded by saying, “*Sa warai, Sa oti, Sa veimaroroi ga na vanua*”! [It is finished, the *vanua* is our protector now]. According to him, his response was short but meant a lot of things. He said that he spoke like a Rewan native, and this meant that although traditional Fijian life has shifted a lot, yet over the years they have learnt to adapt with these changes. In the process, we also keep the significant element of their identity which is the *vanua* system or *bula vakavanua* was what many participants referred to.

To the participants, the *vanua* system nurtured the interdependent relationship with one another. The kinship ties or *veiwekani* is crucial in continuously shaping their social cohesion, social relationships and social responsibilities. For this reason, their cultural lineage and groupings remain vital. The *yavusa*, *mataqali* and *tokatoka* still becomes a fundamental building block that determines their roles (*tutu vaka-vanua*) responsibilities (*tavi vakavanua*), and this is associated with their totems (*kau, manumanu, ika, manumanu vuka*) and land tenure or land ownership.

This relationship with one another was taught in their homes and passed down over generations. As one participant explained,

“Na vuvale e tiko kina na itavi bibi go oya na kena vakadewataki ka vakavulici tiko na veika bibi au kanaka tiko qo”

[The homes have a critical responsibility in passing down this Indigenous knowledge that I am talking about]

In this sense, these ties are reinforced during their rituals, social obligations and ceremonies, such as weddings, funerals and other communal matters.

Secondly, this section will also discuss the elements they perceive were affecting this special connection to the *vanua*. Commercialisation of goods and services have been identified by participants as one of the most important ways that have impacted Indigenous Fijian societies.

The traditional subsistence economy carried out by their ancestors was something they know about but most of them have lived in the era when money was introduced and widely used in Fiji. To them, economic activities have accelerated over the years where

materialistic things have reached their local communities rapidly. Most of the participants included the use of phones, internet, creative knowledge taught in schools, homes and its appliances, cars, roads with the knowledge and skills of using them when describing this change.

Other explanations of some participants were,

“Sa kele sa la matanivale qo na lori me mai kau tavioka, kumala, moli ka oti la. E liu, Vakaraubuka sara tu qai kau tu dua na ka va na makete me rawa ni dua mai na masima se suka. Qo rawa ni qai mai vakarua dua na macawa, ka oti sa la sa volitaki”

[Middlemen have come to our village now. They come twice a week. Before, people would go to towns for marketing purposes on Friday afternoon and would take just enough for salt and sugar. Now, we are literally selling everything].

“Na via mada ga tiko qori, sa rawa ni volitaki ni sa caka mai na kena vuli me vuki me valawa”

[Even the giant taro can be sold now, we have gone through workshops of how to turn them to flour].

Globalisation was seen by participants as an ongoing process where money and the use of money had determined a lot of things in their societies. In many instances in both case studies of this research study, commercialised farming, commercialised knowledge and skills would continue to be part of their daily life.

As one participant emotionally shared,

“Sa ra tagi tiko dai na noda qase, mai na ibulubulu ni da sa digitaka me da vakabibitaka na ilavo mai na noda bula vaka-Viti ka tu kina na vakacegu ka ra bulataka mai na noda qase”

[Our ancestors must be grieving from the grave that we choose to endanger our culture and custom which without globalization would have been the only element maintaining solidarity and peace within the community]

Commercialization in the Rewa Delta exploited traditional practices specifically the natural environment which sourced their livelihoods. On good example is shown in the photovoice picture below from Nabudrau village.

Figure 3: Cupcakes made from via flour and the via or giant taro leaves



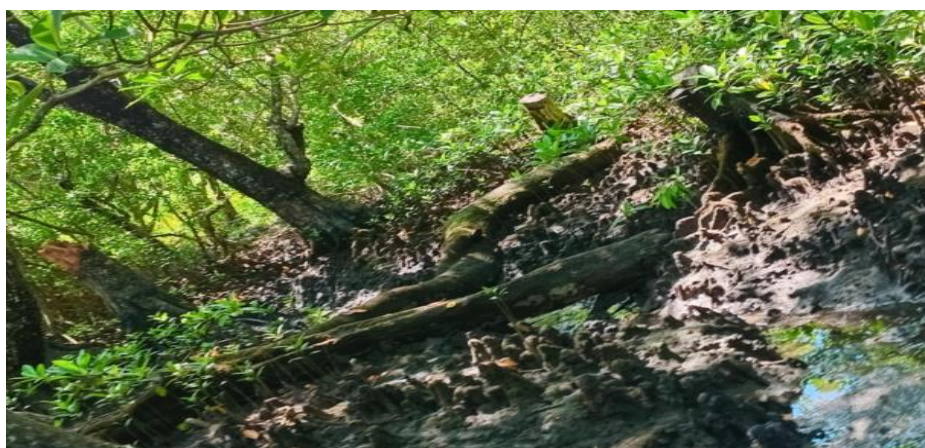
The *via* or giant taro is the traditional totem for people of Noco in the Rewa Delta. In precolonial times, it was widely planted in the Rewa Delta and it supported a high population density (Parry, 1977). Although not the main crop today, it is still prized as a ceremonial food crop and is very useful as a fall-back source of food in times of drought or flood as it keeps for a long time when planted. As identified to be one of the ways of helping ‘vulnerable people’ in the Rewa Delta (Gero et al., 2024), the participants saw the workshops on producing flour from the *via* as both beneficial and exploitive. This meant that *via* is something that they are identified with and something they have relied on, on everyday life but at the same time, can be transformed into economic activities and be helpful when money is the biggest source of survival. The interesting metaphor was used by one of the participants.

“Na via e rawa ni tukuni vua na vinaka vakavia baleta na ka taucoko e tiko vua. Ke qai volitaki eda sa na volia tale na kena isosomi, kena ibalebale vinaka me da vakasama vakavinaka”

[The *via* plant is like a coconut tree because all parts of this plant are used in our everyday life, and this is referred to as ‘*vinaka vakavia*’. If we commercialise it, we will need to buy things that replace it so we should think about these things seriously]

The other example of commercialisation used was the involvement of the mangrove vegetation that is a key part of the Rewa environment. Mangroves have been increasingly commodified due to their high value as firewood, and this had greatly impacted the habitats of mangrove lives that are a source of food to the local people. Previously according to participants, they harvested near villages but are now far out in the mangroves due to this. This is seen in the photo below (photovoice photo).

Figure 4: Mangrove Area in Nabudrau



As one participant said: -

“Na keda kakana e tiko ivitiri. Sa levu na kana kakana voli baleta ni sa da qaiva vakayawa sara iloma ni veitiri. Sa leca na kuka, na kurukoto. Dua na vuna levu na kena volitaki tiko baleta ni buka vinaka o koya”

[Our delicacy and food source are the mangrove. People eat food from the shops more often now because we go far out inside the mangroves to get food and one of the reasons is the cutting of mangroves as firewood]

The buying of food from shops in the participants’ perceptions also affected the strength of the relationship people have for one another. Buying or the use of money to get food have been seen as a value too in these rural societies which disturbed the connections of *veiwekani* [kinship ties] and the values of *loloma* [love] *veisolisoli* [sharing], *veiraiaraici* [caring] and *veitabei kakana* [sharing of food].

Similarly, some participants from both villages talked about change in food choices as seen in family meals, communal and church gatherings and other organized activities. The change in attitudes in many young people have also resulted from these food consumptions. As one participant said:

“Na kakana sa veisau. Qo ko vakavuna tiko na leqa. Iliu kimamu gunu rouoru, kana via, moci, kuka, kurukoto, na uvi iveikau, qo ira na qo era kania na kakana mai na sitoa, tiko qo sa noodle ga, tuna, raisi. Ira qo sa dredre na nodra vakavulici”

[The food choices have changed a lot. This caused most problems too. Before we were eating food from mangroves and plantations such as *rourou* leaves, giant taro, prawns, crabs, *uvi* and much more. These people are eating food from the shop, tuna, noodles and rice. It is hard to get them to change].

On the other hand, some participants thought commercialisation was fair as people now live in a world that unless there is money, survival of families is a challenge. It just needs to incorporate their thoughts, their views, their way of life and knowledge systems so that not everything about Fijian life is affected. One of the ways this was explained was the use of barter system which they feel still existed within their communities. Their notion of ‘*kerekere*’ [ask for help] still exists today and although was accelerating during and after Covid 19, people say that ‘*kerekere*’ and ‘*solesolevaki*’ would always be a part of their life as connections and relationships are more valued in the *vanua* system which is the solid foundation of their existence.

In summary, although they were vulnerable to change, the connection between the people and *vanua* and the connections between people was their support system to every now and then when needed during their experiences of change.

4.1.2 *Traditional values and protocols*

This section will discuss the value system of the *vanua*. Participants felt that the *vanua* cannot exist without upholding and nurturing of its protocols and priorities. The values embedded in the *vanua* were described by a participant.

“Na yavu ni noda bula na kawa iTaukei na loloma, na dina kei na vakarokoroko”

[Embedded in our *vanua* system are the three values namely love truth and respect]

Some participants believed that love and truth existed in their kinship ties or *veiwekani*. It is reflected in their notion of ‘*kerekere*’ and ‘*solesolevaki*’. People do undertake their duties of obligations to one another without expecting anything in return. The duty of taking care of one another, raising their children as communal obligations and other situations were discussed.

These activities are done with love that connects them even if they live together in the village or are far away overseas.

While this was so, respect was identified as one of the underlying values of their relationships in their communal setting. People have respect for one another, respect for their chief, respect for their village and the nearby villages, respect for their cultural beliefs and heritage; respect for many things. While most of the elders saw the need for these values to continue to be addressed in homes, others feel that modern life has taken its toll on Fijian communities.

Mereoni, an 84-year-old participant said,

“Sa leca na vakarokoroko ko tu vei keimami e liu. Gauna qo sa qai vakaveitalia na tamata, na gone sa ra biu tu ga. O au na marama ni Naibatisuli, au teri dau via galu niu sa raica ni dua e cakava e dua na ka e cala. Na vakaisala sa caka mai gaunisala qo, qo gona na ca ni cici mai na gaunisala iloma ni koro”

[Respect is not seen in some parts of our life like before. Kids are left to do things on their own without proper direction and instructions. I am from Draubuta and I will not keep quiet about these things, I address them when I need to. An example is the wearing of hats in the village because they think they are walking on the road. This is why having roads to run through the village is bad].

This quote emphasized the need for their continuity of passing values to generations which they felt is not being considered in some parts of their life. Three other participants compared the lives they had lived and their experiences to today.

One participant said: -

“Isa, na domo ni tama kei na voqa ni vosa tau vakamalua, tau vakamatau, tau ena dela ni vakarokoroko kei na veimaroroi teri tukuni rawa, sa tekivu leca yani sa kunekune dredre sara ga e dai”

[Emotionally thinking out aloud is saying Isa! the traditional call to announce one's presence outside, often done and spoken with great humility and deep respect that cannot be explained, is now slowly being lost and is rare to see nowadays]

Another said: -

“Isa! na bula ni vakalairoro, vakalakala ni vakarokoroko kei na veidokai sa tutu yadudua ni kunei edai”

[Emotionally thinking out loud is saying Isa! a life with humility and respect that our forefathers lived is rare to be seen again today]

One participant added: -

“Isa! na vosa vakaisulutaki vaqase ka veimaroroi ni dokai tu kina na isema ni bula vakavanua me tiko na bula vakaturaga mai na veiyavusa kei na veimataqali ka ra tu na kedra isema kei na nodra dui itavi ka ra sucu vata ka nodra ivota mate na qase era sa leca yani ena keda maliwa ka da vu mai vei ira”

[The words used were always figurative and kept the essence of respect that is embedded in the *bula vakavanua* from the different *yavusa*, different villages, different clans that there is a special relationship which determines their roles and responsibilities for which they are born with, and they have lived and did until they die]

The importance of the value system has been seen as affected by modernisation and globalisation but the ways they address them have also been noted. Mereoni is from that village and her traditional role of *sauturaga* was to keep track of these values. People's roles were still being respected although modernisation brought human rights to these communities. According to Mereoni, if she decided to keep quiet, these things get worse.

“Noqu itavi vakavanua ya, warai ni dua na taroga niu vakadodonutaka e dua e warai ni vakarokorokotaka na koro, na veiwekani raraba vakabibi na nodra itikotiko na turaga na Vunivalu”

[My traditional role is to keep things on track that people respect the village and others especially our chief and no one will ever question this responsibility]

These values as according to the participants are not only addressed in homes but at community levels too during community meetings, clan meetings, *yavusa* meetings and a one-to-one basis on significant days as explained by Mereoni.

In general, people still value their traditional roles and responsibilities, traditional protocols, values and etiquettes over time while modernity and globalisation continue to affect their identity and belonging system.

4.1.3 *Sense of community*

In this section of the chapter, Fijians communal sense of living would be discussed according to the participants' perspectives and views. They valued their sense of belonging to the community.

Firstly, their sense of community was explained to me in terms of the significance of the connections they have with one another, connection to their village or community, connection within their clans and *yavusa*.

As one participant said,

“Na bula e tiko ga ena bula vakoro kei na bula ni veirairai. O keda na kawa iTaukei ena dredre me da bula duadua baleta na ka baleti keda e ka rabailevu, e warai ni qiqo se baleta na tamata yadua’

[There is life in community living for us because our community living values caring and sharing with one another. We as Fijians cannot live and be alone because our life is an extended one and not narrow or individualistic]

There was always mutual support and a sense of belonging among local people. According to findings, these incorporated the principles and values of living as a community [*bula vakoro*] and believing in shared responsibilities, a sharing and caring system and a network of working together for a mutual goal.

Secondly, one participant mentioned that their sense of community was rooted in the values embedded in their culture and the *vanua* system.

“Na bula vakavanua na bula vakoro, vakayavusa, vakamataqali, vakaitokatoka. E bula ni solesolevaki, taukeni vata na ka taucoko ka seg ani dua e nona duadua ga”

[The life of *bula vakavanua* is life in the village, life within *yavusa*, within clans, and sub-clans were working together without asking for something in return existed, and possession whether of land and other things are communal and not individualistic]

While this was discussed and noted as a very significant element of the *vanua*, these individualistic ideas and attitudes have also surfaced in their discussion of vulnerability. They felt that the nature of vulnerability was something that they had gone through for a while when individual ideas start to clash with the communal living they love and belong to.

An example was given by Emele, a 68-year-old participant who recalled how her dad lived a life of sharing and caring in the past. He would come back with more than three sacks from his plantation: -

“E wase o ira na malumalumu, o ira na dawai, wase iValelevu, vale ni cakacaka”

[These would be delivered and shared to the chief and his family, the priest and his family, the elders in the village]

And even when they cooked the food, they would share it again with other family members. Nowadays, most people have struggled to live because of many individualistic ideas that surround people and their environment, but they often find themselves relying on the community, on kinship ties for support and assistance.

As one participant explained,

“Sa dredre na bula na gauna qo, ka taucoko sa ilavo. E vinaka ga ni da bula vakoro ka da solevaka na drake nib ula taucoko ga”

[Life can be hard because everything is money but its best that we have that sense of communal living and ‘solesolevaki’ or working together without expecting anything in return is rooted in all aspects of our life as a Fijian]

To sum up, the strong sense of community is vital in Fijians way of life and having these connections intact would always mean a place to be and always a place to connect to for many Fijians specifically in the Rewa Delta.

4.1.4 Land and land use

The concept of land and land use is prominent in Fijian culture and society. It is not, as most Fijians like to argue, a commodity; rather, its significance extends beyond the tangible objects we observe (Doviverata, 2014).

The Rotuman proverb articulates the deeper meaning of land and its use in that ‘land has eyes and teeth’ (Hereniko, 2000; Scheyvens et al., 2017), a sentiment which was also echoed by many participants. Similarly, some scholars argued that the land speaks (Leweniqila & Roskruge, 2023). Both philosophies confirmed and clarified that land was not just a commodity, it is sacred and is of great traditional and cultural significance to Fijians. Those who have used land otherwise, and perhaps abused it, know and understand the consequences of their actions such as early death [mate dole], sudden death [mate vakasauri], the end of a kinship lineage [kawa boko], sickness [tauvimate] and other negative consequences.

Historically, land as discussed by many participants were used for subsistence farming only. Land was a source of food security and remained to be the source of livelihoods for many Indigenous *iTaukei* people specifically in the Rewa Delta.

Due to changes in societies, in Draubuta, land was leased out to Indo-Fijians. Some participants especially the elders, talked about living with Indo-Fijians when they were small. This is because their land was given away for leases. While most talked about the memories and the good relationships they had with the tenants, they were happy that they had their land back. Now, many clans have taken their land back although some pieces of land are still on lease, but tenants are just some *Draubuta* families who had opted to live outside of the village boundaries some are still part of the village’s duties, responsibilities and obligations.

Some participants tried to describe land ownership and what that meant for them. Land is not an individual asset or owned individually but a God-given system that encompasses their sense of communal ownership and belonging.

“Na qele e taukeni vakamataqali, eso e taukeni vakaitokatoka, e kena ibalebale ya e warai ni dua e nona. E soli ga mai cake me keimami cakacakataka ka bula kina ia e mana tiko na qele. Ke o veibeci, ena kati iko”

[Land is owned by clans and for some, sub-clans, this meant that it is not owned by an individual person. It is God-given for us to work on, live by and live on as a source of livelihood, land has powers. If you ever cross the line, you will get it!]

An example of its sacredness was given by an anonymous participant, that when one of the chiefs in their village built his house on a *yavu* or a sacred traditional site that is not theirs, his daughter was diagnosed with mental problems, and he died immediately after their house was built.

He went on to say that: -

“E warai ni ka me volitaki se me vakaveitaliataki na qele. E ka tabu ni vakayagataki cala”

[Land is a commodity or for anyone to sell, it is to be respected and not be used without its rightful protocols]

Moreover, the traditional practice of land use where outsiders would seek land for both subsistence and commercial farming was something they still use in Draubuta while in Nabudrau village, there is a scarcity of land and many families either plant giant dalo or rely on markets in Nausori town. The outsiders here are referred to as people whose mothers or wives or even grandmothers are from Draubuta. The change is that there is more individual farming than before. Their ancestors were usually engaged in communal farming or assisting one another in their individual farms. The practice of *solesolevaki* was common. Today, you would rarely see people engaged to help others or others seeking help as commercial farming exists now.

When asked about farming techniques, most of those who use the land use both traditional and modern techniques which is *bulutaki*, which is after weeding and using the same grass as manure or the use of modern chemicals as fertilizer. While *solesolevaki* and *kerekere* system still exist in terms of planting and farming, most participants feel that there are more modern farming techniques known now but some traditional methods are always incorporated to suit the climatic change in weather patterns where the Rewa Delta often experience the drastic effects.

In summary, the above were responses from open-ended questions and while what I have seen were that the changes were weakening the social fabric-relationships of these communities, some positives were also noted above.

4.2 Influences on change within the Fijian perspectives

Whilst the participants in this research identified relationships with the land and with each other, as the most significant changes they had seen (as discussed above), they also saw important environmental changes taking place. In this section, these will be

examined, though it was interesting to note that people did not see these as separate from the social and cultural relationships they first emphasized.

4.2.1 *Climate change*

This section will discuss climate change in the Rewa Delta. It will first begin with personal choices which led to the effects of climate change and will describe the extent of how knowledge of climate change was communicated to these people or perceived through Fijian worldviews.

Firstly, climate change was perceived as a divine intervention to Indigenous people. They knew how to adapt to these changes even before the knowledge of climate was disseminated. Because they believed that the *vanua* system was God-given, this affirmed that this relationship was sacred. When this was disturbed because of certain matters such as individualism and economic activities, the punishment they got was believed to be from God alone. People were still convinced that environmental changes were the outcomes of shift in traditional behaviours and patterns.

When asked whether climate change has contributed to change, some participants have never heard of it and don't believe it as the main cause of environmental change. This group of people are mainly the older generations. One of the elders mentioned this when asked about climate change and if he thought the non-bearing fruits of the mandarins were associated with climate change. He responded and said,

“Warai, qo na totogi sa la mai cake, kemuni!”

[With respect, he said no and assumed that this was the punishment from God].

Alongside this high-level view of climate change, there were some specific observations about the environment seems to have changed and affected their daily lives.

For participants, the photovoice strategy of collecting data provided an opportunity to contribute their first-hand knowledge about change and share personal knowledge about change. One of the groups associated non-fruiting trees as one of the changes to the environment that surround them.

One participant said,

“*Sa warai na moli. Qo na moli madirini. O Draubuta e kilai tani ena moli, e gunu vinaka qai kamikamica. Sa leca, kemuni! Na maqo sa warai ni vua, iliu e warai ni taqei rawa!*”

[There are no more oranges. Especially mandarins. Draubuta is well known for sweet mandarins. It has finished, trees stopped producing fruits. There are no mangoes too, before, we used to get tired of eating mangoes]

Most participants linked this to the sale of this produce especially older generations. They felt and thought that because they used to sell this at the market, today people are only seeing the trees, and there is no fruit. The sale of these vegetables and fruits has also been recognized as one of the causes of its decline or change to the harvest. Below is a photovoice photo of mandarin trees that have no fruits for years now.

Figure 5: Mandarin trees in the village of Draubuta



Secondly, some people who knew what climate change was believed that it had caused a lot of changes in the Rewa Delta. There was constant flooding, and this was something they experienced more now than before. The area in the Rewa Delta is low and are prone to flooding. It was expressed that in the last 20 years, Draubuta has had more floods than in the previous years. The same is experienced with Nabudrau villages. This was a constant hazard and challenge for many people in the Rewa Delta.

Because of flooding, root crops, fruits and vegetables had all been affected. Sea water now seeps into their plantations, and it is hard to keep up with the impacts on root crops such as cassava and dalo. Buying cassava was a better option because growing them would always be a waste of time as they would never harvest especially in low lying areas.

4.2.2 *Westernisation and globalisation*

While climate was not fully comprehended as the cause or influence of environmental changes, people saw and identified that most societal changes were accompanied by western notions and the globalised world. This section will be discussed this in terms of the people's perspectives.

To the participants, westernisation and globalisation started a long time ago when Fiji began contact with the outside world. In the process, many outside knowledge, beliefs and practices have been reached local societies and had influenced things such as food, clothing, lifestyle, values, practice and even in relationships with one another. Westernisation and globalisation have been an ongoing feature of Fijian culture and tradition, have affected people at all levels but somehow people have adapted over the years.

While adaptative strategies can be informed by culture and tradition too, it was crucial to note that the new knowledge gave rise to their dependence on these new ideas and one of the examples given by some participants was the interest and value of phones in households.

“Sa vakaleqaleqa na taba talevoni sa caka tuqo. Dua ga tara dua na sede, voli na talevoni, na rajio lelevu, na idratadrata me da drata icake, na ka taucoko sa vakaleqa na nona tiko vaka kawa itaukei”

[Constantly use of phones is a problem now days. When one earns some money, it is either buying a phone, a big speaker, set of settees so they can sit on top, these things add to the loss of our culture]

The elders were the main participants of this study and were constantly worried about the younger generations because they were usually navigated towards Western ideas and new knowledge systems at the expense of the local knowledge systems and ideas. Imposition of new knowledge is what most participants say, have greatly affected their recognition or interest in learning from these elders. There were always new ways of doing things and new knowledge learnt over time and basically, have been unavoidable:

“Na vakasama vovou sa basika, qai sa vaka e nanumi ni cala na nimamu ivakamacala na qase. Sa dredre na veivakavulici vei ira na itaba qo”

[New ideas arise from time to time, and it seems that what we say, as elders of the society is wrong and these new generations of people, oh, it hard to teach them]

From time to time, people believed that although westernisation and globalisation affected their Indigenous societies, created dependence, people had managed to survive them by grabbing the opportunities that were presented with these challenges.

4.2.3 Development

Most participants talked about development. They defined development or ‘veivakatorocaketaki’ as ‘veivuke’ to the community. For them, this meant help or assistance to the village that came from outside their villages. Most of them saw this change from the positive angle that consistent development is a good sign for them. Consequently, most participants have also talked about how they thought and how things would have been better with their insights and recommendations. They discussed how the developments reach their communities and how they were implemented.

The construction of the road was a major shift in the early 1990s and were identified as a form of development by participants for which their opinions were noted. Below is a photo from photovoice from Draubuta village, a picture of the road that crosses the village. Cars are allowed to enter the village to make things easier for them while at the same time, ‘access’ meant breaking certain rules of the *vanua* as this car was a few steps away from *Valelevu* (Chief’s residence). While this opportunity is accommodated, the villagers were always reminded of proper etiquette.

Figure 6: Photo of a car on the road that crosses the village



(the photo is blurry because it was taken on instamatic camera)

One participant said that: -

“Na gaunisala e vinaka, sa rawarawa na veiqaiyaki ia sa warai ni rokovi na koro. Ira na vodo ena basi vata na lori, era kaila, vosa ca, vakasausataka na koro. Qo se vinaka cake na lele, e liu era takoso sa la ilomanikoro, era vakarokoroko na noda qase e liu”

[The construction of roads is good and accessible but people who use the road do not respect our village. Those who are either on the bus or riding in cars would shout, swear, make unnecessary noises, I think it was better before the construction of the roads, even though they had to walk through the village, they had so much respect for the village].

Another form of development was discussed in terms of bringing changes to the community hall. While many participants saw this as progress, others felt that these changes would bring challenges to enhancing of values embedded in the *vanua*.

One of the participants said: -

“Sa ra saga tiko qo na marama me vakalevutaki na valenisoqo. Me caka vakavinaka me dau hiretaki. Me biu kina na raijio, me biu kina na teveli. Au sa vaqo, kemudou ko na valenisoqo kau ko a toka e liu, e qaravi kina na oga lelevu taucoko la, rawa vakavinaka vakabibi dua na soqo levu a caka ike na nodra vakamau na turaga na Vunivalu la qo. Na veika qo ena kauta ga mai na leca ni noda itovo vakabibi ke s ana hiretaki. Ya ni ratou na vakailavotaka ratou biu mai vava, qai ra cakacaka kina na marama. Vavei me lai tara vakatikitiki se me tarogi na neimami nanuma na qase ni na valevakoro e tiko sa la ilomanikoro”

[The women are working to extend and restore the community hall so that it can be rented or hired for occasions. They intend to incorporate large speakers and a sound system. I mentioned that the smaller wooden community hall had previously hosted most key occasions, most notably our current chief's wedding. These developments would result in a loss of our culture and traditions, particularly if the hall is to be hired and rented. The women are following the requirements of the sponsors, but these sponsors are failing to solicit our opinions as community elders, and I believe it is better to leave the community hall alone because it is in the centre of the village and to build the recreation hall outside of the village].

Development was not only viewed as physical as constructing of roads and bridges, but it also meant human capital, and to participants, the Rewa Delta constantly received and hosted volunteers through NGOs who lived in the communities and took part in some form of development.

One of the participants mentioned that: -

“Sa qai mai vakavica na kai valagi inakoro, ra mai vuli ga, vulica noda vosa, noda itovo, so ra mai tara koronivuli, so ra mai veivakavulici ikoronivuli, sa totoka ia e vakavuna na veiqaravi ni so mada ga na vuvale qo era leqa tu vakailavo, na vuli e dua tu ga, sinai na gone inakoro. Ni ra tiko na vulagi, sa lewa ni vanua me da veiqaravi tiko, cava beka e rawa ni vakavinakataki me dau yaga na nodra qai mai, sa vinaka na tara koronivuli, ia e dua tu ga na bula o keda”

[We've had a lot of guests stay with us; some came to build schools; some came to teach in schools. It is great, but it appears to add obstacles for families, especially when the district council [*vanua*] says we must feed them, yet most families are still struggling with living here. Things appear to have remained unchanged after they go, with many school dropouts. It's the question I constantly ask: what can we do to change these repeating stories? It appears that even if we have new classrooms, things are still the same].

This was their response to how they analyse their visit in terms of how beneficial these types of programmes were.

One said: -

“Ni ra sa lesu tale, dina ni keimami sa veikilai, ia na ivola mata sa ra sema kina na gone ka ra vulica e levu na ka ena veiwekani qo. Eso na ka vinaka ia sa levu tale ga na vakasama vovou e basika. Na nodra tiko e vakavuna na voli ni sucu ena so na vuvale, na nodra biu me ra tucake tu ilomanivale. Gauna ra lesu kina, qo dua na dredre e sagai me veisautaki tale ni warai ni bula a bulataki tiko ya”

[When the guests who brought development returned, we established relationships via social media, which is acceptable social etiquette. They came and went with both positive and terrible outcomes. For example,

they were there, families were required to purchase milk every day and allow them to stand in their houses, and parents were willing to be flexible to accommodate them and make them feel at home. Children have swiftly adopted them, believing that they are the new norm, and it is difficult to return them to their previous way of life.]

Lastly while people were referring to development, one of the participants discussed about organised workshops that involve communities with their agendas and goals.

It was said that,

“Dua na vuli vinaka e yaco mai nakoro, qo na kena vakavulici me vuki na via me valawa. E kanaki ni sau levu ni volitaki ka vurevure vinaka ni ilavo. Ia, na nodatou isakisaki na via, kevaka sa na volitaki, sa na oti dai. Sa vinaka na vuli ia e vinaka la na via ni saqa me kena icoi rourou vakabibi ni leqa na tavioka vata na ba, na via ena tu ga, draki suasua se draki mamaca. Na tabana e vakayagataki me wa, vesu kina na ka taucoko la, na drauna e ituvi ni lovo, ubi ni kakana, iviu tale ga ni bisa na lagi, sa maumau ke sa na volitaki me valawa, sa na leca na kena inaki kei na kena ibalebale vei keda, ni o via e vaka la na niu, e yaga taucoko na tikina, raw ani da kanaka, vinaka vakavia”

[We had a good workshop about turning via to flour. They said it is very expensive and would generate money, yet this is our village and district totem, if we sell it, it will be finished. The workshop is good, but via is better eaten as a root crop with dalo leaves especially when cassava and dalo are hard to harvest now days. Via adapts well for both seasons, wet or dry. The stem can be used as strings, leaves are also used for lovo making, covering of foods and as umbrella too when it rains, so it will be wasted if we sell via flour, the meaning and purpose will be lost as one can say that via is like coconuts, in a Fijian idiom, as *vinaka vakavia* which means, all parts of the via plants is useful for an *iTaukei* person].

In summary, development was seen as assistance from outside of the villages came in many forms. Some were seen as positive but, in many cases, there were also doubts and potentially harmful side effects. The question remained as whether these forms of development benefit the communities or come with their own agendas as articulated above.

4.2.4 Leadership

Leadership was also identified by participants as something that influenced a lot of changes in the past and would continue to be a great motivator of change. In the past, according to the elders who took part in the field surveys, Dr Naycakalou, the first Fijian with a PhD, was from Draubuta and was one who was discriminated against as he was a commoner.

Many participants talked about leadership in terms of the requirements from the government that influenced what they do as a group of people in a village. They felt that leadership was not as sacred anymore where the blessings and ideas were born with leaders. They felt that this had been influenced a lot by the government and its plans.

“Esa tutu yadua me da raici ira na mataqali turaga e liu. Era dei ena nodra vakatulewa ena veika me baleta na noda vanua. Eso na noda turaga era sa tiko e dai, era sa matai na cakacakataka na lewa ni matanitu ka lailai na veika dina me baleta na noda tiko vakoro. Na kena vaqacotaki na teitei, na solesolevaki, na tali vei ira na marama, na vulici ni tovo vei ira na luveda, sa warai. Sa levu ga na soli, na bose, na reli ni lotu, na ka taucoko qo e warai ni vukei keda ena noda tiko vakavanua ia me caka vakacava, ni lewa tiko mai na matanitu na noda bose vakoro, bose ni tikina kei na bose ni yasana”

[It is now rare to see how leadership existed in the past. We had chiefs who were confident in decisions they make when it came to things about the *vanua*. Now, we have chiefs and leaders who work best with government’s initiatives and plans and what we have now is regular meetings, giving money, social gatherings, all of which are not beneficial to us as villagers or *vanua* stakeholders. There are less activities like *solesolevaki*, initiatives for planting, women learning how to weave, teaching of traditional knowledge, customs, tradition, basics like manners, expectations, etiquette, but what can we do? The government influences our meetings at all levels, village, district and provincial too with its agenda]

Moreover, human rights were associated with leadership because people have exercised these rights. Some participants discussed how human rights impacts the Fijian way of living. As human rights in Fiji have a zero tolerance on corporal punishment of children, most of the participants felt this had caused most problems in Fiji and should be changed although this is a global trend. Yet, they feel that Fijians learn better with some sort of physical discipline as it also aligned with the Bible. Children know their rights, youth know their rights, women know their rights and articulated by one of the participants, it does not align with the rights and responsibilities that already exists within the Fijian culture.

“Sa tu rawa tu na noda dodonu na iTaukei. E sala vata kei na noda itutu vaka-turaga kei na itavi me da colata. E matata ika na neimami dodonu, vanua me keimami yaco kina kei na vanua e rawa ni keimami vosa se vakaitavi kina”

[Fijians have an existing rights-based system. This was embedded in their traditional roles and responsibilities. The roles and responsibilities define your rights as Indigenous people, where or when one can speak or act and where or when one was not supposed to speak]

Entertaining those modern rights completely ignored the traditional rights and responsibilities one was born with. The effects were seen with the children as they do not seem to know and detect between what is right and what is wrong in terms of culture.

4.2.5 *Economic activities*

Furthermore, economic activities were associated with commodification of knowledge, skills and produce. It gave rise to less communally oriented thinking and priorities. People who work and those who did commercial farming had more individualistic ideas than those who were subsistence because money was not their intended goals.

Ultimately, this has made education and work a priority for many and increased village obligations for those who live in the village. There were fewer extended families now and people strive to live on their own and this has led to more houses and more people in the village than before. The extent of the village has also expanded with more houses built at the margins. Those who have resumed leadership over their land from lease land had built houses for themselves especially in Draubuta.

It was expressed that the harvests of commercial farmers have declined in comparison to their forebears. The sizes are getting smaller and smaller. They recalled dalo, and *uvi* and compared them to what they harvested now are totally different. They had attributed this more to the decline of their relations with land and its resources but more on commodities which have replaced this.

Some people corroborated this thinking by providing an example of their signature river mussel. The river mussel, or '*kai*', is known as "*kabuleka*". They believe that God gave them the mussel through his creation, and because it is not allowed to be sold, as per village rules, it has continued to serve its function of feeding them since then. Interestingly, they claimed that climate change had no effect on it at all. Even when only a few diggers were digging the riverbeds to build the river barriers, most of the mussels were removed. After this, they discovered that there were still more mussels available for them. It has never deteriorated in terms of quantity or taste.

Figure 7: The Draubuta River



(photo is blurry because it was taken on an Instamatic camera)

Above is the photovoice picture of the Wainibokasi river that runs beside Draubuta village and where *kabuleka* is found. The same river was used when the roads were not constructed. While many things have happened over the years, *kabuleka* still exists its function for Draubuta people today.

This mussel is also known as the chief's delicacy and so its meaning is deeply rooted to their culture and tradition. A few of the participants explained that the mussel, *kabuleka* would be seen on the edges of the river, showed to them that the chiefly family was going to have a baby. The last was seen in 1986. It has happened because the new generation have been females, and they are still waiting to observe this when the younger, male members of the family get married.

4.2.6 *Summary*

It can be summarised that there were many influences or factors of change within the communities on the Rewa Delta. Bound by relationality, they included economic environmental, social and cultural changes. The section proved the need for incorporating communal living and ideas with development for it to work and factors such as leadership and monetary activities that need to be re-examined.

4.3 **Adaptation, traditional wisdom and cultural resilience**

Although many changes have been identified, articulated and discussed by the research participants, they also considered their Indigenous knowledge system as means to adapt and be resilient.

This section will begin with identifying what continued to be stressed and valued in the *vanua* system although the societies have gone through many forms of change.

4.3.1 *Continuity*

This section will discuss the system that governs Indigenous people in Fiji. It is the *vanua* system or *bula vakavanua*, that even though there were significant changes in their society, elements of their *vanua* system are still practiced and upheld. According to some participants, this system is inherited generations over generations.

The *vanua* system was regarded as close to their heart and would always serve as their source of identity and inspiration. It was always a guide particularly the elders of the society, a system of government that existed from creation and still existed now.

Participants discussed how they acquired traditional roles and responsibilities from this system. Each clan in each *yavusa*, in each village have traditional roles [*tutu vakavanua*], traditional rights [*itovo kei na kena ivakarau*] and traditional obligations [*itavi*].

When each clan aligns to the expectations of the system, they believed that all would fall into place. This was something that they made sure they pass on even to their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren too. They taught their younger people their roles, their rights and their responsibilities which is '*nodra itutu vakavanua, kena itovo, kena ivakarau kei na kena itavi*' as Ratu, one of the participants said. He further said, this system worked, it worked well with our ancestors and still works now and will continue to work in the future. The *vanua* system was a form of sustainable

development as something they believe they are born with and to them this meant, it is God-given and sacred.

The people [*tauvei ni vanua*] were also born with titles to their *mataqali* land, sea or river and resources. This means that there was a special relationship that did not only start with them, but it also started from creation and have been passed down from generation to generation. Their life was embedded in these relationships.

One of the participants mentioned about their traditional totems which not only signifies their identity but also their sacred relationship with their environment: -

“Na vanua warai ni ka ni gunu yaqona ko so dau kanaka, warai ni ka ni caka oga, na vanua e duatani, na vanua oya na umatamata, na nona itovo kei na nona ivakarau, na umaqele, na iqoliqoli kei na iyaubula ka tekivu mai na maliwa lala me yaco sara kina boto ni sauloa mai ra”

[The *vanua* is not drinking kava as some people think so, it's not about doing communal obligations, its different, *vanua* is holistic, people, values, etiquettes, manners, with their land, their fishing sites, their resources that includes everything from the sky right down to the bottom of the ocean]

He further explained that the spiritual realm is embedded in the *vanua* system. The *vanua* was unseen but could exist physically in human actions, behavior, language used and way of living. It is sacred and unique and was part of their belief system.

“Kena ibalebale, o keda eda dua na umatamata ka tiko na noda itovo kei na ivakarau, e da taukena ka bula tiko ena qele, na qoliqoli kei na iyaubula”

[This means that we are a group of people with its own set of rules, laws, etiquette, values, system who acquire and live on land, sea, river and its resources].

He went on to say that this will never change despite the numerous changes that they have experienced. Thus, he noted that people who stress this in their families, in their clans, *yavusa*, will always reap its blessings. And in terms of changes in the society and environment, this system structured how they have adapted.

An example of this is the taboo (*tabu*) system that is one of the ways Fijians or the people of Rewa have used over the years and maintained. In general definitions, *tabu* systems existed for different reasons and purposes as shared by the participants. They were, *Tabu na wai!* [River taboo for use] *Tabu ni volitaki!* [taboo for sale] *Tabu ni veivosaki!* [taboo for conversing] *Tabu ni tukuni!* [taboo to mention] *Tabu ni vakaloloku!* [taboo for condolence] *Tabu ni kania!* [taboo to eat] and the word itself, *Tabu!* means a lot of things.

One of the participants explained the difference between the three words in the *vanua* system. They are '*tabu*', '*kua*' and '*warai*' and the different context it is used.

'*Tabu*' is used at family levels of teachings. Children and young people hear this word from home, from parents, grandparents and from extended family members. They learn

and adapt to these teachings as they grow older, and these become who they are and what they represent. An example that was given is '*Tabu na vakasausa e lomanikoro*' '*Tabu na taubeni tauwelu*' [It is forbidden to shout or make noise in the village; it is taboo to put your towel on your shoulder]

'*Kua*' is stressed at *mataqali* or clan level. What children learn from their families, is stressed within the *mataqali* level. It is stressed by the *turaga ni mataqali* during the *mataqali* meetings or events. An example is '*kua na vakasausa ilomanikoro*', '*kua na taubeni tauwelu*' [Do not make noise in the village, do not put a towel on your shoulder]

'*Warai*' is stressed at a larger level of *vanua* or *bula vakavanua* [when everyone meets, all the *yavusa* within the village or district or province]. '*Warai*' is used in the context of not to be seen. It will not be seen that people behave inappropriately. In the '*bula vakavanua*', everyone knows what to do, how to behave, what to say, how to talk and the system guides everyone.

In Nabudrau village and the Noco district, the preserving of the *via* plants without selling them too was how they have kept this root crop. This was their source of food in many disasters such as droughts, flooding and very dry seasons. The root crop can be eaten in all seasons and was always available to them. Although the new knowledge of converting this to flour have reached the area through workshops, many still resist to do it because it has been their source of food during hard times before.

Basically, through linking their traditional ways of being with their everyday environments, the participants wanted to reiterate their sense of existence, sense of being as physical, social, emotional and spiritual.

Secondly, local narratives of the participants revealed their many actions that amounted to adaptation and resilience. These include their accounts of the past, their accounts of their ancestors, accounts of resource use and management and accounts of experiences over the years. They were diverse but rich in reflecting and upholding insights into how they have adapted.

These narratives were frequently told through stories or *talanoa* and passed down to succeeding generations so they may relate to them. History is passed down in oral traditions and they provide a base of the future for local Fijian people. They informed the strategies for responses as articulated by one of the participants, and they helped inform their decisions and actions for the future.

The results included anecdotes about how the locals of Rewa would plant specific plants to help them because the area was mostly clay and prone to flooding. The planting of *via* plants, had two functions in Nabudrau and Noco districts. It provided them with nourishment while also helping to dry up the soil between houses. Other people mentioned planting coconut trees on the village's outskirts (*saula ni koro*) and these stories have helped people of Nabudrau village in remaining adamant about not removing them.

The oral stories also informed how resources are managed or practices. These included traditional methods of catching fish, catching mud crabs and mud lobsters, farming

techniques, and other significant traditional living styles that as participants said, they refer to from time to time.

Thirdly, communal living was something that participants still value even within the major societal changes that emphasize more of individualistic ideas. Communal living involves the relationships of people with other people, with their surroundings and their communities, and with their ancestors too. It emphasized a relational connection to nature, to the seen world or physical environment and to the unseen world or their spiritual environment. Such relational relationships are highly significant in their *bula vakavanua*. Under this concept, many participants are more than important than material things. Their relationship with one another is more significant to financial gains or material resources. The concept of ‘*veiwekani*’ or social ties influences significant decisions of what they do. This was practiced through traditional events and celebrations like *vakamaui* [wedding], *somate* [funeral ceremony] and many others. Even with no or little money, they still believed in themselves and in their strong relationships with another.

Their relationship with the spiritual world goes a long way back and some practices are still practiced today. One example is the practice of ‘*matanigasau*’ or ‘*bulubulu*’ in which they seek forgiveness from a group of people. This may be related to marriage not following proper cultural ways of getting married or settling a dispute with one another. This practice not only symbolizes their seeking forgiveness from those who are alive but also that they are seeking the elders’ forgiveness from who are watching from the unseen world. The other example that was given was clearing bushes in cemeteries and this is termed as ‘*cara*’. This signifies that it was their duty to the dead to clean and clear their rest homes. If this was not done, they would see signs, indirectly the unseen world communicates with them too. There are other significant practices that align with this and have similar ideas of what they recall as significant relations that they always value and pass on to the next generation.

Caring and sharing still existed today. As noted from participants, the social media captured most of this during Covid 19, but it had existed even before that. The concept of ‘*kerekere*’ and ‘*veisa*’ has always been part of communal living. This is the normal way we live, they said. No person can live on their own even though he or she has plenty money. We still rely on each other as one participant expressed: -

“Ni dua na vale e sogo tiko, ena raici vakatani. Ya na vuna ni dua na vale sa lala, ena dau doladola tiko ga e dua baleta e ca na vale ni lala, e vakaibalebale tiko ya me dau dola tiko na noda katuba me da kaci gauna ni kana, se dua e tavali, me dau kacivi”

[If a house has its doors closed, it is inappropriate. This is why when an empty house is in the village, there will be a person who will look after the house and will open and close the doors every day. The same concept applies to all the houses. Doors that are left open always signify that anyone can walk in, and we are supposed to be calling out on people who walk by to eat or rest]

Similarly, as most elders pointed out, doors open signifies the type of person someone is. A humble person with an open mind and heart would be doing this and this align well with the *vanua* system that Fijians belong to. It is crucial to be sharing and caring and looking out for one another in any Fijian society.

The “*veisa*’ reciprocal system is still practiced during traditional events and celebrations. It is not done for fame but more on the belief of giving rather than receiving, the gift of doing good and celebrating one another for each other. In the Rewa context as articulated by one of the participants, the people of Nabudrau and Noco take fish to Draubuta or Tokatoka and pork is given as a reciprocal and appropriate traditional exchange in their context.

Fourthly, knowledge of land use for food, land use for gardening and resource management have always been passed on from generation to generation. In the Rewa Delta, as the main source of food is on the river, the mangroves and the sea, this knowledge is orally passed on. Children are taken too during trips for food gathering and planting.

One of the ways these have been passed on is the use of language and the right terms. The right terms not only help them remember but also understand what they mean so that the right knowledge is passed on. One participant gave these as illustrations of the above.

“Eso na vosa vaka-noda na ‘keli bili’ vata na ‘kucukucu’. Na keli bili ya me keli na via qai kau ga mai ko da vinakata, bi utu yani na kena vo. Na kucukucu ya warai ni tavitavi. Tavitavi vakayagataki na dai, na kucukucu ya ko me bis ana lagi, ira na qai cake mai dela ni qele”

[Some vocabs that are used in Rewa are ‘keli bili’ and ‘kucukucu’. Keli bili is to chop only the piece of via that your family need and keep the rest for future use and this means that this same piece can be used even after years later. “Kucukucu” is catching the mangrove lobster after a heavy rain, and this is when the rain helps with the catching of this food. Otherwise, the normal way is *tavitavi*, the normal way of catching them using natural resources and only a few people can master this skill well]

The participant stressed the use of the right vocabularies and its significance in the instilling of the knowledge system that the *vanua* system is known for. These terms do not only make sense in the Rewa Delta but keeps the connection between people and the environment they live in.

4.3.2 Summary

To conclude, even though there were many forms of change in traditional societies, some systems continued to be followed and, in this context, points to the adaptation and resilient strategies of the people. The *vanua* system as discussed above had its own system and this knowledge was passed on over the years and participants feel that this system supported them in this modern era.

In the following chapter, these results are situated in the context of the existing literature and the conceptual framework developed in Chapter 2.

Chapter 5 Discussion

5.0 Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore and highlight the significance of Indigenous perspectives of change in their societies. This chapter will discuss these findings in relation to the wider literature which focuses on how they have adapted to these changes over the years. It will first discuss the significance of relationship between people and the *vanua*, it will then discuss the nature of change and vulnerability and will conclude with amplifying Indigenous knowledge systems as adaptative for the transformations of their society and culture. Overall, the research addresses the need to integrate relationality into the process of understanding change from the worldview of Indigenous people.

5.1 People and the *vanua*

Participants of this research felt that they were losing some connections to the *vanua* which is an essential aspect of life in the Rewa Delta and to all Fijians too. The *vanua* has profound social significance for Fijians (Tuwere, 2002). This section will explore discussions on this significant connection or relationship which is not only evident in scholarly research but is also identified as an enduring process from the early Fijians until today.

The *vanua* or *bula vakavanua* as some refer to have been recognized in extensive research about Fiji. Many of these explanations mean and involve the same things. They see that the *vanua* has elements that govern and explain the deep essence of being Fijian (Baba, 2008). It explains their core existence since creation (Yee et al., 2022). Similarly, in the Rewa Delta, the *vanua* as defined by one of the research participants is a structured system of Fijian people which includes people (*umatamata*), traditional laws and policies (*nona itovo kei na nona ivakarau*), land (*umaqele*), water (*qoliqoli*) and its resources (*yau bula*). Ravuvu (1983) in his studies defined *vanua* as a sacred overarching structure and system (Mavono, 2017). “The integration between social, cultural and environmental elements have been an essential feature of traditional village life. To understand the changes affecting the village people, one must consider this integration and how it is interacting with the new forces and influences from outside which are now a part of the village environment” (Ravuvu, 1988, p. 14).

The notion of *vanua* must be properly discussed from the viewpoints of Indigenous people. Dr Ilaitia Tuwere (2002), who was one of the first pioneers of the Vanua Framework, explained that *vanua* has both a literal and a symbolic connotation. Land is the physical concept, and the link is the metaphorical one. Ravuvu (1983) explained that *vanua* is not just land that one person occupies, but it is the physical, social, cultural and spiritual system of Fijians. This implies a holistic system that encompasses the interconnectedness and interdependence of people and its natural and spiritual environment.

Significantly, *vanua* serves as a web that holds everything about Fijians. It is a source of life as well as a means of livelihood. The entirety of a Fijian community, including those who came before us, is known as *vanua*, according to Ravuvu (1983). He further

explained that “to live well in this world and in other world, one must live according to the *vanua* beliefs and values” (Ravuvu, 1983). This explains the holistic nature of the *vanua* system. In other words, some scholars stated that the *vanua* encompasses the chiefs, their people and their land, knowledge systems, traditions, cultures, values and their relationships (Baba, 2008; Yee et al., 2022). Based on these descriptions and explanations, it is safe to assume or argue that the people of Fiji, particularly those in the Rewa Delta, have a particular space in their hearts for the *vanua* that they identify with and belong to.

Furthermore, it is also prudent to discuss its value system. What does the *vanua* system value? Does it value possession, commodities and properties? What does it prioritize in its belief system? Ratu, one of the participants explained that *vanua* is not a commodity in which possession is vital. It prioritizes the linkages between people, land, and environment, capturing the idea that identity and existence are inextricably linked. Indigenous people organise many aspects of their lives based on these connections. It does not only represent kinship relations but connection and interdependence (Yee et al., 2022). Maebh (2018) also explained that it is not just kinship relation and custom but a connection and interdependence between people, nature and place. The *vanua* concept extends beyond simple property ownership, it encompasses a strong bond with the environment. Yet, kinship remains an enduring aspect of basic social organisation of Indigenous people in spite of the many transformations occurring in our societies today (Nayacakalou, 1957).

Moreover, a comparison of the *vanua* when detached from people evoked a feeling of lifelessness was described by Ravuvu as “A land without its people is like a man without his spirit” (1988, p. 7). He described that a soul or spirit gives life to man. Without it, a man is dead. The same philosophy is applied to land without people and in this context it’s the *vanua*. People or man give life and meaning to the *vanua* while the *vanua* in return gives life to man. They are interdependent on one another and there is a sense of connection between them. To Fijians, the *vanua* is the most significant thing that they hold dear to their heart, a source of identity and a source of life too. To be cast out of the *vanua*, is the same as being cast out from one’s source of life (Tuwere, 2002). This means that indigenous Fijian people will always have that special connection to the *vanua*.

The crab metaphor makes a critical point about this rock-solid structure. Despite the changes that Fiji’s indigenous people of Fiji are experiencing specifically in the Rewa Delta, people will continue to relate, reconnect, rekindle refer to their links and connections to the *vanua* since it not only prioritizes the best values of relationality but a God-given system that they are born with and is passed on from generation to generation.

A key aspect of *vanua* is land. “Land in Fijian is known as *vanua* as it does not only include the turf but a value-system”(Tuwere, 2002, p. 33). It represents all the natural resources on land which man have an intimate relationship with especially indigenous Fijians and indigenous people all over the world (Klaassen, 2020). This intimate relationship demonstrates the care of these resources that indigenous people have for the environment, their ancestors and the future generations (Veitayaki et al., 2011).

Through this, traditional laws and policies are established to rule them. This system is called the *bula vakavanua* (Nainoca, 2011). Fijians have a responsibility to care for the land for their own use, for keep from their ancestors and ensure sustainability for future generations.

Land is not simply just an asset or property that one owns but a sacred entity that bridges generations, shapes social structures and embodies cultural identity. It is connected to their community where their ancestors were once custodians of the land, passed them down from generation to generation and with a shared ownership descended from the same ancestor.

Another aspect of *vanua* is kinship or *veiwekani*. For Fijian people, their kinship determines most of their social life. Without social cohesion, vulnerability is magnified (Dintwa et al., 2022). There are various classifications of kinship, and these determine attitudes and behaviour patterns. “*Na veiwekani dau veilomani*” is a common phrase that Fijians use to express their love and compassion for one another. Compassion is not a motivation of this social relationship but is done with great intentions and a ground for existence (Toren, 1999). “Traditionally, social links were regularly reaffirmed by means of the physical track normally followed and it is so coincidence that, in most Colo communities, physical paths are usually equated with social paths. Hence the Fijian adage, “*Tubua na sala*”, “the track is overgrown” refers to a person who has rarely gone home, no longer keeps in touch with his relatives or does not comply with customary obligations. But an over track can be cleared when a new relationship is created and former social links are reaffirmed.” (Ravuvu, 1988, p. 19)

As discussed by Nayacakalou in his study of Fijian kinship, the terminologies used are different from one area to another however, the principles are the same throughout (Nayacakalou, 1955). Compassion is reciprocal and even children understand their existence through knowing them and how they are related to other people which is always emphasized in homes by parents and older people. Yet, the society is embracing some shifts.

“The transitional economy, an economy which was traditionally (and fundamentally still is) one of subsistence agriculture; but from which many traditional elements have been abstracted, and to which new principles of organisation, new objectives and new incentives, together with something of a money economy, have been added. Gone are the days when the full male labour force could be mobilised for communal and kinship work-related. A new individualism has now crept in as a reaction to the need of money....” (Nayacakalou, 1978, p. 18) . “There have been other fundamental arrangements made in the traditional structure but the basic core of that structure remains although much changes has already occurred” (Nayacakalou, 1978, p. 18).

The above discussions show the significant relationship between people, indigenous Fijians and *vanua* which not only represents their identity but is the source of life for every Fijian. Overall, *vanua* is an embedded concept of relationality and social relationships and understanding this better helps us understand how these communities respond to societal changes such as climate change.

5.2 Nature of change

Previous numerous studies confirm that the Fijian society has transformed a lot in so many ways and mostly, in social and economic dimensions (Lasaqa, 1984; Nayacakalou, 1978). This section will discuss how the change occurred in their communities and how they affected indigenous Fijians. It will also discuss the opportunities these changes have brought about in their lives.

Research on change in Fiji has been done by both local and foreign researchers as explained in Chapter 1. Many of these works appreciated however, (Lasaqa, 1984) that there was a need for more Indigenous viewpoints of these changes as foreign researchers attempted to explaining systems, ideas and worldviews from their own perceptions and cultural contexts. They could not properly understand Indigenous knowledge and systems.

Linda Smith expressed this forcefully in her book, titled, ‘Decolonising Methodologies’, that even the term ‘research’ or to be researched seemed to be part of colonialism (Smith, 2021). This meant that research done by non-Indigenous people would always use the Western paradigms. For instance, a critical analysis of research on economic growth in Fiji takes little attention to the actual development in the villages and the land in which they work (Crocombe, 1971). While this was identified as a challenge for Indigenous people, the *Vanua* Indigenous Research Framework was presented that any research done in local communities should follow the appropriate protocols, philosophies and principles (Baba, 2008).

Any form of change in a society is a change in culture. A change in the way things are done. To study change in a local marginalized society, there are many angles but one must not forget that there are agents of change and factors of change (Nayacakalou, 1978), for instance, the agents of change, e.g., as a result of missionary activity, or the activity of colonial administrators or merchants and traders. Alternatively, cultural change must be studied in terms of the factors of change, whatever the agents may be. From this point of view, the processes of change in Pacific Island communities today can be put down to two major factors: money and formal education, but this study will focus on the introduction of money” (Nayacakalou, 1978, p. 122) . Furthermore, Ravuvu (1988) suggested in his study that to understand the changes in the lives of people today, it must be understood in the framework or view of their historical development.

Lasaqa summed up this connection between change and continuity:

“Social change is accepted by the Fijians; in fact, it has been accepted for more than 150 years. To the younger generation, especially in the urban area, the traditional segments of society appear to have little meaning and value. This is because the local residence group and his employment associates are part of his immediate response. They mean much to him in his daily sustenance. However, in the rural areas, though social change has occurred, the social system continues to display a degree of resilience that ensures social modification in a context of social continuity” (Lasaqa, 1984, p. 32).

Firstly, the increase in economic activities has led to a loosening of traditional Fijian social order (Lasaqa, 1984). “Money has been at least partly responsible for most of the fundamental re-arrangements in the socio-economic pattern of Fijian society” (Nayacakalou, 1978, p. 122) . The indigenous Fijian culture is more structured to communalism as the *vanua* system values. This social order is threatened by individualistic ideas and notions that arise from depending on money as a source of livelihood. Many Pacific and Indigenous people struggled to see how their traditional way of life might help them in a world where money is increasingly important (Vunibola & Scheyvens, 2019).

Surprisingly, Nayacakalou’s findings imply that when economic activities are integrated into traditional patterns of economic organization, they tend to maintain and even strengthen them (Nayacakalou, 1978). This was possible in villages where there was plenty of land and *solesolevaki*. Cultural values and custom tenure have been seen to support socially embedded economic activities when land becomes the resource for the economic activity (Vunibola, 2020). Yet, the Rewa Delta is known for its swampy soil and land scarcity is a challenge in the two villages studied. They rely on work outside for those who can and others who don’t work are left in the village with the little land that’s conducive to farming. Draubuta village has more land than Nabudrau village which is why many people in Nabudrau rely on the mangroves as a source of income than land. However, Nayacakalou’s suggestion regarding integration of the new economies into traditional systems is important because it hints that there may not be a simple set of dichotomies between modern and traditional or commercial and subsistence or even change and custom. Instead, there may be room for local *iTaukei* to exert a degree of agency to incorporate some elements of into the daily life, whilst possibly resisting others that threaten established norms and values. Although the findings of this research, outlined in chapter 4 seem to indicate that older people see those dichotomies and conflicts at work, they also express a strong desire to maintain traditional systems at the same time as accepting some forms of change.

Secondly, people’s diminishing connection to their environment was also identified as a form of change. It is understood from the research that Indigenous Fijian people have a unique relationship with land and their environment, but the participants felt they are losing such connections. Movono (2017) validated that there is a unique connection between environment, culture and society within indigenous communities and Long (2018) explored and corroborated this in her study that this connection is embedded in the ‘*vanua*’ concept of relationality which is defined as interconnection and a dynamic aspect within those connections.

Moreover, the interconnection in the ‘*vanua*’ highlights an inextricable bond and link between people, the land and their surroundings. They are mutually dependent on one another and are profoundly connected. Yet, it is dynamic too and not static. It has some potential and constantly evolves as people interact with the land and the environment.

Witnessing the traditional ceremony of welcoming the Indo-Fijians who were descendants of shipwrecked sailors of the Syria, as ‘from Noco’, the district where I come from in Rewa and is also one of the case studies in this research, I was

prompted to ask the question of why this ceremony was significant to the people during the interview at Nabudrau village when one of the participants raised it as something the *vanua* of *Noco* is known for in Fiji.

“Era sa mai maroroi na wekada na Idia ena soso vaka-Burenoco. E guilecavi na ka taucoko ka bibi ena noda tiko qo na veimaroroi. Ke mani vaka na wa ni culacula na keda isema, e warai ni dua na ikoti e tiko ena ruku ni matanisiga qo me kotiva rawa”

[They belong to us, these Indo-Fijians, they are part of the land and the *vanua* of *Noco*. Everything about (difference in race, politics, religion, etc) them have been ignored because this relationship is more important. Even if this relationship is as thin as a sewing thread, there is no scissors in this earth that can cut this bond]

The above quote signifies the importance of relationships and connections made within the *vanua* system. The ancestors of these Indo-Fijians were buried in the *Noco* soil and have turned to soil (land). To Fijians specifically in *Noco*, this was an emotional story they had kept within them for years before the descendants of this group of people (the *Girmitiyas*) started finding connections to their beginnings. Their descendants were traditionally welcomed in 2016 during the *Rewa Day* celebrations, and this formed a never-ending relationship as articulated also by the research participants. However, some participants felt that these relationships and connections (*vanua* and the people) were being weakened.

Another way this is justified is their concept of land tenure. The land tenure system in Fiji is very complex as articulated in previous research (Fison, 1881; Overton, 1989). This is evident in the ways land was given as presents in the olden days and this is still valid today. ‘*Covicovi ni lou*’ is a concept of giving land to another clan so that they can plant food there. It is referred to as ‘*ikanakana*’ at times. This means that this will belong to them and their generations although they do not own it. This exchange and mutual agreement were done in the context of ‘sharing’ ‘*veiwasei*’, ‘caring’ ‘*veirairaici*’ and kinship ‘*veiwekani*’ because usually the two clans are related somehow. In other instances, the ‘*vasu*’ concept, where you can inherit anything from your mother’s village [land and sea] or in other cases, when women are married off, they take some land with them. Yet, a more interesting example was given during the research in which land was donated to the chiefs when they arrived and settled after the commoners have inhabited the villages. According to Ratu Mosese Volavola and argued by Crosetto (2005, p. 71), ‘land is an extension of Fijian people, a concept of *vanua* and lies within the heart of Fijian identity’.

The definition of *vanua* by some research participants in Chapter 4 that ‘*vanua*’ includes people with their set of rules, manners, etiquettes, values who acquire and live on land, sea and its resources. Land as noted above is a concept of *vanua*, a governing system that is sacred and acts as an intricate web which fosters relationships and connections.

Lastly, formal education has been identified as a challenge, and both a factor of change and an agent of change. “It would seem obvious and indisputable that the

current education system and its curriculum prepare the Fijians for a life away from his village” (Lasaqa, 1984, p. 96). It supports a life that is similar to living in towns and cities and this makes it legitimate to move further to urban areas. Benson et al (2002) argued in his research paper the need to rethink Pacific Education because the visions and values of the Pacific people have no attention at all in the current system. Students are being taught foreign knowledge such as science in their classrooms but live in communities where traditional knowledge and culture is emphasized and encouraged. As discussed with the research participants, Puamau (2004) and Norton (2017) stressed the need to incorporate Indigenous values and systems in the current education system in Fiji.

5.3 Nature of vulnerability

The outcomes of this study revealed that Indigenous Fijians felt challenges and vulnerabilities in their lifetime, which stems out from both internal and external factors. This section will discuss the nature of vulnerability of indigenous people in the Rewa Delta with references to literature. In general, some changes were big that they could not resist them, and this put pressure on indigenous people, but they shaped their resilience and adaptation strategies.

Firstly, vulnerability can be seen as a dynamic process (Hidalgo et al., 2021) and not a static structure that put tension on local communities. Similarly, local research participants see change in the same view. It is reiterated by one of the local participants and noted in the description of the metaphor of the crab’s moulting process. Despite multiple changes, Fijians were able to live gradually by adjusting. It is dynamic when seen from the Fijian worldview of change because it emphasizes relational knowledge of change. Relationality is not static or something that will die over time but a body of knowledge that will adapt to new situations overtime (Dorji et al., 2024). Several factors have influenced their defenceless, but these fluctuate overtime. This confirms that vulnerability is multilayered (Hidalgo et al., 2021), and they shift based on different hazards or the various changes they encounter and being resilience to them works the same way too. They implement different strategies to each and overtime, more adaptive strategies are built and used by local people.

Secondly, vulnerability as suggested by Hidalgo (2021) is determined by its exposure, its sensitivity and capacity to adapt. This implies that the definition for vulnerability needs to be appropriately expressed or explained in order to increase understanding of how communities can be empowered through donors and development for adaptative strategies and activities (Daniela et al., 2021). Whether climate change or any other time of hazard or pressure on societies and communities, it is measured through how exposed it is and the capacity to manage and adapt to avoid loss. Fijian communities in the Rewa Delta have managed to cope and adapt with the change although being pressured to changes with its socio-economic system (Sakapaji, 2022).

We cannot keep focusing on vulnerability as a simple universal concept as ways to counter changes and threats especially climate change when local communities have proved able to adopt a variety of strategies to help themselves. A ‘one-size fits all’ global approach to ‘vulnerable’ communities especially with funding agencies are not helpful (Korovulavula et al., 2020). Their capacity to adapt over the years needs greater

recognition rather than using vulnerability simply to drive external funding and interventions (Daniela et al., 2021). This suggests that autonomous communities have a hope for future adaptation by conserving traditional knowledge (Korovulavula et al., 2020).

Thirdly, vulnerability can be viewed as an opportunity too. Opportunities mean space for growth and growth in the context of this study is resilience. There is an interconnectedness between vulnerability and resilience as overtime, they are interdependent on one another (Hidalgo et al., 2021; Miller et al., 2010). As explained by the metaphor of the crab, they left their old shell and continued to live and grow with their new shell. The new shell symbolizes new opportunities for growth. By investigating constructive communal transformation, locals seize new opportunities by combining their vulnerability and their willingness to be resilient rather than merely reacting to the pressure of change (Hidalgo et al., 2021). Fijian people learn new things and ideas from the forces of the changes or their state of vulnerability. Some studies addressed the need to look back at ancestral origin when indigenous societies face challenges such as climate change and urbanisation and this was considered as an opportunity to help and shape how they responded (Hill et al., 2024). As it is not static, they embrace new strategies overtime as they encounter these changes and learned new methods to adapt to changing circumstances. This is a process rather than a static framework for indigenous people. It is argued that studies should explain why societies and communities respond in a certain way to hazards rather than on their vulnerabilities as historical processes have shaped their actions (Cagilaba, 2005).

Fink et al (2021) suggested that local knowledge needs to be integrated with western knowledge systems for adaptation to be successfully implemented. Veitayaki (2011) argued in his studies that Fijian communities and other indigenous communities possess knowledge, wisdom and experiences which offer possible alternatives to facilitate sustainable development planning and policy making. These knowledge systems and practices must be embraced especially with sustainable development (Klaassen, 2020). On the other hand, Nainoca (2011) suggested and proved that engaging in a *talanoa* was the best way to talk about changes that communities go through in order to adapt as cultural well-being and survival is the main goal of indigenous communities. While the context of '*talanoa*' was to be modern and to involve everyone (Nainoca, 2011), aid and development need to incorporate this knowledge system to give space for integration with western knowledge and systems of adaptation.

Finally, the nature of vulnerability is context-specific (Mavhura, 2019). The drivers of vulnerability differ from context to context. For the Rewa Delta, because it is prone to flooding, natural disasters were identified as main drivers of change and vulnerability. According to several studies, critical analyses of adaptation processes and methods don't adequately describe or depict the use of Indigenous research perspectives (Yum & Baars, 2024). This highlighted the significance of not to misinterpret 'vulnerabilities' of local communities but to basically incorporate their ideas and views into adaptation and resilient matters.

In summary, indigenous Fijians have persevered through hardship, change and vulnerability. Yet, they managed to adapt and did not see these transformations as something that would inevitably and permanently ruin them. Rather they could be a springboard for fresh concepts and opportunities.

5.4 Indigenous knowledge as adaptation

This section will discuss how Indigenous relational knowledge of change is understood by previous research and can be used for adaptation purposes. It was once ignored but as local people refer to their knowledge systems as adaptative strategies, these knowledge systems are now being considered (Dintwa et al., 2022).

There is power in the unseen as what is not spoken or deliberately (Oliveira, 2017). The sociology of absence argues that there are missing perceptions and voices from public narratives and studies today. Sometimes, what is missing and what is not discussed constructs our reality. In this context, it is the marginalized groups of indigenous experience and relational knowledge of change. Cagivinaka et al (2024) argued in his research that Fijians already have intellectual resources with which to approach change, and this can only be generated through engaging with the *vanua* in terms of *veitalanoa* as an approach.

Engaging with local communities will help discuss the resources that exist in and within the indigenous systems. The *vanua* system acts as both a guide and empowerment in the context in which they work. It guides these communities for generations and empowers them in terms of change. It helps with how they adapt and be resilient to change. There are three elements of connections that vividly explain this.

Firstly, interconnectedness with one another, with nature and the unseen world is one of the resources that Fijians and many other indigenous societies have. Engaging with the communities is the only way to understand their narratives as these connections are not just abstract ideas but the lived experience of the people in their communities overtime.

These connections are both physical and spiritual. While aspects of communal living such as *veiwekani*, *veirairai* and *solesolevaki* are physical, the spiritual remains unseen but are part of their belief system. For instance, if their '*veiwekani*' is disturbed at some level, there are protocols or traditional ways to mend this relationship to avoid the consequences. The challenges they face are often linked to these broken relationships. This can be done through presenting their *bulubulu* or *matanigasau* (traditional way of asking for forgiveness).

On the other hand, when these relationships are built, they are protected and nurtured. There is evident in that Fijian people are not only connected through kinship but are also connected through tribal connections and provincial connections. The same is explained when Indo-Fijians were renamed as *luvedra na Ratu* (*chiefs' children*) by the Noco chief and people and this signifies how relationships are formed and connected.

These connections are part of the social structure of indigenous Fijians which is the basis of economic relationships within Fijian communities (Nayacakalou, 1978). Embedded in this social framework is the Fijian notion of exchange of goods and services. It makes it immoral to see exchange through Western notion of buying and

selling, yet the principles that determine their choices of exchange is their connection through kinship. In Nayacakalou's study (1978) of Fijian villages, he discussed three incentives for work and essentially was on obligation. These responsibilities are part of their culture, and they are; obliged to help out at all times, obedience to senior members and force of public opinion and the organisation of groups is the third one. "These obligations are an expression of existing social relations" (Nayacakalou, 1978, p. 119). This is reflected in how traditional ceremonies are still organized today. Despite how money determines most of the things they do, this way of working together still exists now.

Moreover, with the significance of interconnectedness, the spiritual world connects well with the values of humanity. It aspires the values of sharing, caring, tolerance, patience, respect and many more. When these values are not adhered to as well, Fijian people face challenges. This means that the challenges they face are linked to their disturbed relationship with one another, with nature and with the spiritual world.

Secondly, reciprocal living is also embedded with interconnectedness and is a resource within the traditional knowledge systems. In the context of indigenous living, it is not just a concept of giving and taking from one another, but it is the concept of mutual dependence of people and their environment. Many depend and live on the land and its surroundings, cared for and relied on.

Indigenous Fijians reciprocal living goes beyond this because of traditional totems (Cagivinaka et al., 2024). The dependency is born out of a relationality based within their social responsibilities (Brewer II & Johnson, 2023). Indigenous people have a social responsibility to nature and to another. Applying the values taught within the *vanua* system, *kena itovo kei na ivakarau* [its manners, etiquette and system] as discussed in the findings of this research, they can always adapt to change as they have done over the years. This also explains why some older participants do not see climate change as a challenge but building relationships with the *vanua* and adhering to the correct protocols help ease life from time to time.

Solesolevaki was a form of reciprocal living too (Nayacakalou, 1978). While those who participated to help with work felt obliged to help their relatives and help without expecting or needing to be paid, those who are helped are also obliged to provide *oco*, the traditional way of saying appreciating the work that has been done for you. This is also a good example of how important connections are from money. Obligations, reciprocity and kinship are social protection mechanisms identified to be forms of adaptation and resilience in a changing society especially because of globalization (Ratuva, 2014).

Thirdly, their knowledge systems and practices are resources for adaptive strategies, which have developed over the years in local communities and are always linked to their history and long interactions of their environment (Petzold et al., 2020). Because of this connections, local people are identified as vulnerable to the drastic impacts of climate change. Yet, they have adapted through practices such as resource management and social structures.

Resource management is evident in local communities because of their rich knowledge of their local ecosystems. One of the ways this is managed is through conservation and preservation (Janif et al., 2016). In the findings, we see the evidence and significance of preserving the river mussel as a way of managing resources. This is sustainable development in their context.

In summary, when the key themes were organised (*vanua*, change, vulnerability, indigenous knowledge, etc), I can see some clear linkages with the wider literature. However, these linkages are strongest with the work of Fijian and Indigenous writers. The findings of this study suggest that several of the main understandings of change from a global perspective (such as climate change) have missed the point in several ways. In particular, they undervalue or ignore the possibilities for local agency, the use of Indigenous knowledge and diverse forms of adaptation and response.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

6.0 Introduction

This research addressed the processes of change (climate change, westernisation, cultural transformations and socio-economic changes) that have been experienced by two villages in the Rewa Delta region of Fiji and discussed that Indigenous people have adapted and responded to these changes over the years.

This chapter will begin by discussing the research questions and how the study was able to address them. It will also discuss the mud crab metaphor as a central theme, then it will summarize some key findings and conclude with some limitations of the study and suggest areas for further research.

6.1 Reflecting on the research questions

The Rewa Delta is a flood-prone area in the Southeast of Viti Levu and due to its proximity to urban areas (Suva/Nausori), it has undergone many changes over the years in addition to the effects of climate change and other environmental changes. While the focus of this study is on Draubuta and Nabudrau villages in the Rewa Delta, many previous scholars had chosen Draubuta village in particular as their study site. This gave an opportunity to undertake a re-study on the area and discussed how they have managed and responded to change over several decades.

Many global narratives of development and change have dominated Indigenous perceptions and views throughout the world, and they have tended to marginalise local aspirations, actions and understandings. To amplify Indigenous views, this study concentrated on integrating relationality into the way change is seen in order to understand how *iTaukei* have responded. Relationality and the significance of connections were found to be embedded into the reality of life of Indigenous Fijians.

To address this, the study focused on the three research questions as follows:

1. What are the major processes and factors that have contributed to change within the community?
2. What are the key aspects of the indigenous perspectives of change and response?
3. How can cultural practices and traditional knowledge be used to increase resilience and response to contemporary forms of change?

For research question 1, participants discussed their views of the processes of change. They identified how westernisation, development, urbanisation brought new ideas and transformed most of their lives and livelihoods. Some of these were seen as positive and were incorporated into daily life but others were seen more negatively in terms of the way they undermined established and cherished ways of life. There were social changes, economic changes, cultural changes and environmental changes. In many ways, it was social and economic changes that were felt the most and it is interesting to note that, when asked unprompted, climate change did not emerge as a prominent aspect of change. Their discussions centred mostly on how they managed these range

of changes over the years. This helped us understand that these changes formed and affected in different ways the lives of the people. A deeper understanding of the intricacies of these shifts and how they manifested locally made more sense when the deep relationships between people and with their environment – a *vanua* perspective – was adopted.

For research question 2, the main aspects of Indigenous views on change centred on the local relational understanding of change. People do not see themselves as totally vulnerable to these changes, but they do see some opportunities for change and growth when discussed in the context of Fijian societies. People saw themselves as always referring to the ‘*vanua*’ in all aspects of their life because this consistent structure informed their reality which brings meaning and sense to their world and along the way, they adapt and move on. The *vanua* provided both the context for change (change was assessed in terms of the way it affected the *vanua*) and the means to respond to change (the *vanua* provided the understandings and resources that could be used to deal with change, resisting or limiting those which were not welcome but incorporating those which could bring some benefits).

Lastly, for research question 3, cultural practices and traditional knowledge were a source of increase resilience and respond to contemporary forms of change. Traditional knowledge has long been undermined and ignored in global approaches to development and even responses to climate change. Global theories of change, whether modernisation, neoliberalism or sustainable development, have usually drawn on external and Western theories and policy prescriptions and local and Indigenous worldviews, protocols and institutions have been regarded conservative, incapable of innovation and belonging to the past, this study has argued the opposite: the need to include existing Indigenous knowledge in the discussion of change in Pacific Island countries such as Fiji. Indigenous knowledge has been renewed and regenerated over the years while adapting and responding to change. This needs to be understood by both internal (state) and external funding bodies, and academics also need to address this in their studies.

Together, the research questions informed the aim of this research which was to explore Indigenous perspectives and perceptions of change in Fiji and specifically in the Rewa Delta.

6.2 Data collection

As an ‘insider-outsider’, and the research questions and expressing these understanding was both significant and a responsibility in terms of addressing the gaps that most researchers ignore about Indigenous communities. I observed the values and principles of the Vanua Research Framework being the overarching methodology of this study.

The VRF encouraged the use of *talanoa* and semi-structured interviews and photo voice and observation were also incorporated. Participants enjoyed the opportunity to talk about what they felt was significant and maintaining traditional protocols were part of the process of collecting data.

The connection between the researcher (myself) and the community was strengthened as we had something in common which was to amplify Indigenous systems and knowledge. I now have a duty to not only report the findings to the Ministry of *iTaukei* Affairs (Roko Tui Rewa, Provincial office), I also have a duly responsibility to take these findings back to my research sites and will contribute to other matters that I can participate in (offering assistance as a form of reciprocal duty).

6.3 Limitations of the study

This research was confined in scope by the limitations of a one-year thesis project. This meant that field research was restricted to a relatively short period of interviews in only two villages. With an emphasis within this timeframe on *talanoa* interviews, it was not practical to be able to undertake intensive data collection and comparison with earlier studies of Draubuta.

Another necessary limitation was the demographic basis of the interviews. It was decided to choose only older participants within the villages as they had a longer view of change. Younger people, or those from the villages but living elsewhere, may well have quite different views and experiences of change. For example, they may have been less tied to the *vanua* and less linked to its values and relationships.

Finally, with a focus on the Rewa Delta, it is acknowledged that this has given a rather limited view of rural Fiji. The Rewa Delta is close to Suva-Nausori urban corridor and has had a long history of close contact with the outside world. In some ways, the village economy here is almost suburban, with commuting to wage work relatively common. Remote regions may well have rather different experiences and views regarding change.

6.4 Further research

With these limitations in mind, it is clear that much further research could be conducted in Fiji to explore this topic more deeply. There is a lot of opportunity for further research especially in other remote areas in Fiji and Indigenous societies in the world.

One of the most important possible areas for future work would be research involving younger people. This study revealed how older participants felt that younger people were possibly losing connections to their *vanua* and to the values and practices that maintained core *iTaukei* ways of life. However, very little is known about how younger Fijians see the world and their future in it. It is possible that they are more aware of some forms of change, such as global climate change, but less concerned with the world of their grandparents. This is a key topic that should be addressed in future research.

6.5 The metaphor of the moulting crab

After discussing the research questions, the mud crab metaphor that was used throughout this thesis provided a means of conceptualising how change, adaptation and resilience function in a Fijian setting. While many previous scholars concentrated on how societies were affected negatively by change, often portrayed as passive victims of change (Barnett & Waters, 2016), this study stands firm in addressing the

deep meaning of a crab moulting and how it shows that *iTaukei* are both capable and active in responding to change.

This was not only a metaphorical representation of this research, but it was significant to note that this was a respondent's view of change: it came from the villages themselves. It was important to discuss this metaphor and the deep meaning it portrays. This particular participant thought that changes (including climate change) was not only affecting these societies but also gave an opportunity for growth and resilience. Even though they were affected, and redundant parts of traditional knowledge may have fallen away, the structure of society – the *vanua* – remained and they managed to grow a new shell and continued to live peacefully with each other and still embrace the environment they live in and connect to physically, emotionally and spiritually.

The old shell represented traditional and Indigenous society before contact and change. The structure was the *vanua* which was solid and dynamic at the time. It embraced the deeper meaning of connections, people with one another, people and the *vanua* and people with the environment (physical and spiritual). The *vanua* had its own system, knowledge and was sacred too. This meant that it was treated as their source of belonging and something that is close to the heart of every Fijian.

Then change occurred in many forms such as contact with the outside world, the influence of the state (colonial and post-Independence) and new economic drivers such as globalisation. This firstly made the old shell uninhabitable, and it was shed. Then, before the new shell grew sufficiently, it was soft, and this was the nature of their vulnerability. Yet, while adjusting and trying to adapt, the new shell grew hardened, leading to new ways to respond and adapt to change. Critical in this, was the way the new shell was shaped by the underlying structure of the crab: its inherent self. This provided the template for regeneration. Furthermore, that regeneration then allowed the body to protect itself again.

Thus, we can appreciate how Indigenous people have worked hard to manage and respond to the various forms of changes. Over the years, while many studies focused on the old shell and labelled it as 'vulnerability' or seen it as static and outdated, this study focuses more on the growth of the new shell and with the continuing strength of the *vanua* structure, how Indigenous people have continued to live and despite considerable challenges, hold on to their *vanua*. Consequently, their narratives, their experiences, their knowledge and perceptions continue to help us understand them better and will contribute to challenging disempowering conversations about Indigenous people.

6.6 Conclusion

The study has investigated Fijian Indigenous understanding of change that focus on relationality and interconnectedness, drawing on local narratives, experience and worldview to make sense of their reality and highlighting how they have been resilient to a wide range of sweeping change through the years.

It has found that change has been a constant feature of Fijian life for at least the lifetimes of the participants of this research. It has taken many forms and brought both

good and bad. Some changes have been short and sharp (a flood or a military coup) but many of the most important forms have been the result of a long period of contact with the outside world in ways that have challenged and sometimes damaged long-established ways of living.

However, although we often see change as invariably threatening or simply imposed, this research has suggested that it is the relationships that people in Rewa Delta have, with each other and with their *vanua*, that allow them to live with change. Relationships help make sense of the world and the way it is changing but relationships also crucially provide the means for people and communities to respond, adapt and regenerate. The basis of these relationships in the *vanua* is not just the land, but the people, the culture, the customs, the spiritual connections, the previous and the future generations, all that is deeply communal and rooted to in tradition.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Guiding questions for semi-structured interview

Semi-structured interview (probe questions)

1. What are some changes that have occurred in this village over the years?
2. What do you think cause these changes?
3. Are these changes good or bad and why?
4. How do you think people are coping with the changes?
5. What system exist within the communities that help people out?
6. What is your definition of *vanua*?
7. How do you view the changes that affect the *vanua*?
8. Name some form of developments in the village
9. What is your view on these developments?
10. Can you compare th village population to 10 or 20 years ago?
11. Why is there an increase?
12. Are many people working or relying on land?
13. What values do communities uphold?
14. What values do families uphold?
15. What is your view on schooling and education system?
16. What is your view on the building of roads compared to before?
17. What is the role of the government and how effective are they in terms of the views of local people?
18. Do you receive external funding and what is your view?

Appendix 2 In-house ethics approval

Ethics Notification Number: 4000029236

Title: Exploring Indigenous perspectives on socio-economic change and development: A Case study of Draubuta and Noco in the Rewa Delta

Thank you for submitting a low-risk notification for your research/teaching/evaluation.

This email is to acknowledge receipt of the low-risk notification and to inform you that the details of your project have been recorded in our database for inclusion in the annual reports to the Health Research Council Ethics Committee (HRCEC) and the Massey University Research Committee (URC).

You may proceed with your research, though it is advisable to provide a couple of weeks before commencing, as all low-risk notifications are checked for completeness and clarity by a Research Ethics Advisor. You may be contacted if your application is incomplete and/or further clarification is required.

The low-risk notification for this project is valid for a maximum of three years.

Please notify me if situations subsequently occur which cause you to reconsider your initial ethical analysis.

If a sponsoring organisation, funding authority (e.g., the Health Research Council) or a journal require evidence of ethical approval from a Human Ethics Committee (with an approval number), you need to complete a full Massey University Human Ethics application to be reviewed and approved by one of our Human Ethics Committees. Applications must be submitted and approved prior to the commencement of the research.

Please note that travel undertaken by students must be approved by the supervisor and the relevant Pro Vice-Chancellor and be in accordance with the Policy and Procedures for Course-Related Student Travel Overseas. In addition, the supervisor must advise the University's Insurance Officer.

Please include the following statement on all public documents (e.g., information sheet, consent form) related to your project:

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of this research that you want to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Massey University Human Ethics by email: humanethics@massey.ac.nz.

I wish you all the best in your research, teaching or evaluation activities and appreciate your thoughtful consideration of ethics principles and practices.

If you wish to print a copy of this letter:

1. Please login to the RIMS system (<https://rme.massey.ac.nz>).

2. In the Ethics menu, select Ethics Applications.
3. Using the Advanced option, select Ethics Applications (Area), Application ID (Search On), enter the ethics notification number in the Value area and select Find on the toolbar.
4. With the application in the Results Tab, tick the empty box on the far left of the application and select Reports from the toolbar.
5. Select the "Human Ethics - Low risk notification letter" link, this will open the report viewer.
6. Select the application code from the Report Parameters dropdown and submit. You can then select an export option from the top toolbar (Print, Save).

Ngā mihi nui,

Professor Tracy Riley
Acting Chair, Research Ethics Chairs' Committee

Appendix 3 Consent of the research participants (form)

Research Participation Consent Form:

- Research Project Title -** Exploring Indigenous perspectives on socio-economic change and development: A case study of Draubuta and Nabudrau village in the Rewa Delta
- Primary Research Question -** How do the Indigenous local people of Rewa experience and perceive the significant changes that have happened in their entire lifetime while adapting and be resilient with the Indigenous knowledge and culture?

I have read and understood the information sheet and I understand that I can request more information at any stage. I am aware that participation is purely voluntary, and I can withdraw at any time, refuse to answer any questions, or retract any statements.

I consent to my real name being used in publications:

I would like to be identified using: (please tick one)

- The name of an organisation/position (please identify)
- A code name (please identify)
- Other (please identify)

I understand that the information I give will not be used for any purpose other than those mentioned in the information sheet.

I would like to receive a final report of the findings at the conclusion of the research **Y / N**
If yes, my address is:

And/or my email address is:

I, consent to being interviewed and audio recorded by Apisaki Naivaluvou for the purposes of completing a Master's thesis, producing one or more journal articles and presentations at conferences.

Signed

Date

.....

.....

Appendix 4 Approval letter to conduct research from Ministry of iTaukei Affairs



MINISTRY OF ITAUKEI AFFAIRS, CULTURE, HERITAGE & ARTS



NORTH WING, ITAUKEI TRUST FUND BUILDING COMPLEX
87 QUEEN ELIZABETH DRIVE, SUVA
P.O. BOX 2100, GOVERNMENT BUILDING, SUVA, FIJI

TELEPHONE: (679) 3100 909

FAX: (679) 3300198

Ref: MTA 42/2-12

27 February 2025

Ms. Apisaki Bania Naivaluvou



Dear Ms. Naivaluvou,

Re: Ministry of iTaukei Affairs Research Support

Thank you for your correspondence received to conduct research on indigenous perspectives of change and development in the Rewa Delta.

This is to inform that the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, Culture, Heritage and Arts supports your research work conducted on the topic '*E vaka e vakatukakaso na sasalu ni veidogo*': exploring indigenous perspectives of change and development in Draubuta village and Nabudrau village in the Rewa Delta.

It is noted that the aim of study is to investigate the socio-economic effects of development and change in the Rewa Delta from the local viewpoint through interaction with the communities involved. This in turn provides insights from the communities and promotes understanding between the two.

Considering the impacts of the research and the support it can provide by positively contributing to the livelihood of the two mentioned communities, you are encouraged to contact the following office(s), to relay your research findings:


Rewa Provincial Council Office

Roko Tui Rewa, Mr. Kitione Raibevu on mobile no. 9907878 or Senior Assistant Roko Tui Rewa, Mr. Soroveveli Vura on mobile no. 8093246.

We request that a copy of the research be provided to the Ministry and provincial office upon completion.

We wish you all the best.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pita Tagicakirewa', written over a horizontal line.

Pita Tagicakirewa (Mr.)

Permanent Secretary for iTaukei Affairs, Culture, Heritage and Arts