

# Traditional authority and community leadership: Key factors in community-based marine resource management and conservation

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## Abstract

Community-based marine resource management (CBMRM) is more widespread in Oceania than in other tropical region. In this article, I examine the relationship between community leadership and CBMRM, based on a Fijian example. During 2004, sociological community surveys were conducted in five communities on two remote islands, to investigate the status of local traditional authority, with strong leadership being deemed as a critical foundation for successful local marine resource management. Findings show that local traditional customs, for example around the instalment of chiefs, are eroding and one result is that village leadership generally weakens. This local foundation therefore requires more careful attention — without it, implemented management measures may be impractical and unsustainable.

## Introduction

Devolution of resource management via a system of community-based marine resource management (CBMRM) may have much to contribute to small-scale fisheries management worldwide (Hviding and Ruddle 1991; Ruddle 1987, 1998; Fa'asili and Kelekolio 1999; Johannes 1978, 2002; UNESCO 2004). The main anticipated hypothesised results are improved sustainability, efficiency and equity of resource use.

However, it is not always apparent how those results might be achieved and sustained in practice (Ruddle 1987, 1988; Jentoft and McCay 1995; Bolido and White 1997; Berkes et al. 2000; White and Vogt 2000; Christie et al. 2002; Johannes 2002; Pauly et al. 2002), because many social and ecological characteristics are not well understood. This is a major constraint because resource management not uncommonly requires restrictions on the exploitation of resources, and CBMRM, in particular, demands difficult decisions that must be based more on social values than on technical merits (Amos 1993; Jentoft 1998; Johannes 2002; UNESCO 2004). Further, it is a dynamic process of social inventions, shaped by local experience, and influenced by external forces (Bailey and Zerner 1992), such that attempts to create or strengthen existing systems therefore demand a realistic assessment of the motives, ethics, interests, and cultural conceptions driving local stakeholders (Bailey and Zerner 1992; McGoodwin 2001; Johannes 2002). In other words, CBMRM is more about the resource users (the community) than the resources; it is about the management of human activities in relation to the resources (McGoodwin

1994; Jentoft 1998). As a consequence of this appreciation, managers and researchers are increasingly focusing on local communities as webs of social interaction tied to place, history and identity (Jentoft et al. 1998).

Management and conservation activities are driven by various mutually linked forces, for example support by contacts (e.g. to government officials), knowledge and education, religion, community dynamics and hierarchy, or perceptions. Social issues of a general nature, such as justice, power and equity, penetrate local resource management systems in ways that may distort their functioning (McGoodwin 1994; Jentoft 1998). A respected village leadership is noted as a key factor for successful CBMRM; changing leadership and community instability can have a distorting effect on CBMRM and conservation efforts and need to be better understood (Fong 1994; McGoodwin 1994; Jentoft 1998; Veitayaki 1998; Robertson and Lawes 2005). It can also be noted that a widespread constraint is ineffective information exchange between authorities (e.g. fisheries officials and local village chiefs), including the transmission of knowledge and perceptions of resource status and management regimes already implemented (Ruddle 1987; Cooke and Moce 1995). In addition, participation in management can be especially problematical in isolated locations.

In this article, I examine these issues in five communities on two islands in eastern Fiji (Fig. 1). Two topics were chosen for this examination: CBMRM in progress, and the role of traditions and traditional authority in CBMRM. In the concluding section, I summarise and evaluate the recent status of tradi-

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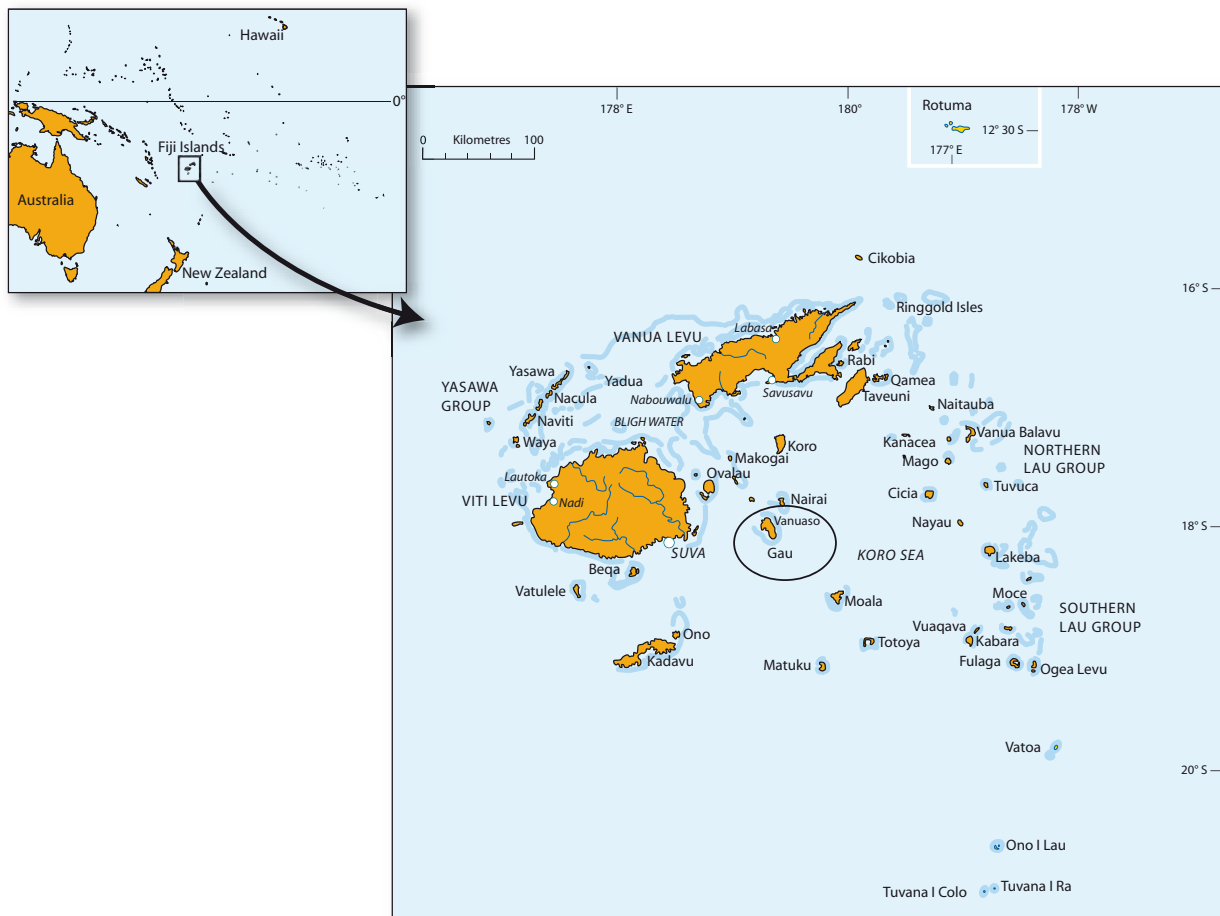


Figure 1. Overview of Fiji and the location of Vanuaso District on Gau Island (18°00'S, 179°20'E).

tional authority and leadership in the communities I studied. I discuss how one can define the status quo of the communities during their balancing act between development and traditions, new and old, and also whether or not rural Fijian communities can still be described as traditional (having already moved too far beyond their traditional ways of living to “turn back”), and whether or not the latter would still be desirable.

During 2003–2004, I conducted research in the eastern part of Gau Island in the four coastal communities of Malawai, Vanuaso, Naovuka (Fig. 2) and Lamiti (Fig. 3), which share the same fishing ground (*qoliqoli*) and belong to the district of Vanuaso, and in Natauloa Village on Nairai Island. Gau and Nairai form part of the Lomaiviti Islands, the central eastern islands of the Fiji Group. The population of the five villages studied ranged from 100 to approximately 200 people. Women predominate in Fiji’s inshore fisheries and also form the main fishing force on Gau, in terms of both time spent fishing and resources harvested (Rawlinson et al. 1993; Vunisea 2005). On Gau, recent community work-

shops on conservation issues and development of management plans concerning the *qoliqoli* and coast in general (e.g. protected marine areas, gear restrictions, mangrove rehabilitation, waste management) offered access to the communities.

Face-to-face life history interviews, focus groups, and participant and non-participant observations were employed to investigate people’s perceptions of change in their complex social environment. Research was conducted over a period of 14 months, with 10 weeks spent in the communities. For the life history interviews, one older woman and one older man (> 60 years) were interviewed in each village. The interviewees had lived in their communities for most of their lives. Towards the end of the interviews, the older people were asked how they saw the future of their respective village and its people, what their fears or hopes were, what perspectives the future would hold. Because of the personal and time-consuming character of this interview type (1–2 hours), only one female and one male was selected per village. Information derived from five female focus group meetings complemented the in-



**Figure 2.**  
Naovuka seafront, Vanuaso District,  
Gau Island. [Photo: A. Lanting]



**Figure 3.**  
View from the east coast of Gau Island of  
*qoliqoli* with fringing reef in the background  
and Lamiti in the foreground.  
[Photo: A. Lanting]

formation gained through the individual interviews. In each community, a focus group meeting was conducted with four women, using guiding questions on subjects concerning family life and perspectives on the future of the villages. In addition, participant and non-participant observation was conducted during each visit to the communities. This involved participating in and observing the daily activities in the communities studied, and immersion in the research subjects' lives. All direct statements quoted here were taken directly from the 24 people interviewed (hence the use of the vernacular), and thus were specific to their villages and their *tikina* (district).

### The context of leadership in Oceania

Variety is a predominant characteristic of Oceania, since there exists considerable ecological, cultural, social and political variation both among and within the countries of the region. Nevertheless, the region shares a broadly similar history (Dahl 1980; Feinberg and Watson-Gegeo 1996; Kolig and Mückler 2002; Novaczek et al. 2005).

In pre-colonial Oceania, the various forms of chieftainship and community leadership were based on matrilineal or patrilineal systems, were either inher-

ited and/or merit-based, and some were ritual and spiritual (Gustafsson 1992; Feinberg and Watson-Gegeo 1996; Hooper 1996; Shuster et al. 1998; Leckie 2002; Tarisesei and Novaczek 2005). During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, various colonial authorities came, often in power for more than a century, and established new types of leaders and power centres that competed with the islanders' traditional systems (Feinberg and Watson-Gegeo 1996). Traditional political leadership of the countries of Oceania was thus challenged and undermined by powerful new structures, with Christian missions further severely challenging the notions of spiritual power that had often signified precedence in the old systems (Gustafsson 1992; Feinberg and Watson-Gegeo 1996).

The complex co-existence of new governments and traditional structures during the colonial period did not vanish with independence in the 1970-1980s; new ways paralleled old traditional ways, although the latter had often been rendered invisible for decades. As a consequence, the countries of Oceania entered into independence in a variety of ways and conditions. Problems persist where countries try to combine both old colonial and old traditional systems into something modern (Churney 1998). Political disorder was a hallmark of independence in



many South Pacific countries because of the co-existence of two separate systems, one based on traditional (genealogically) acquired authority, and the other on democratic election and the institutions of a modern nation state (Besnier 1996). After independence from centralised colonial governments, and under increased decentralisation efforts of many island nations within this political disorder, reliance on communal and village levels of governance gained a new focus.

In most South Pacific countries, traditional leadership had remained important throughout the colonial period. Thus it survived and still continues to shape people's identity (Shuster et al. 1998). However, traditional leadership has now acquired a new importance, not least because of natural resource issues. In many nations, changing definitions, functions and expectations of leaders followed political independence, in the wake of accelerating social and economic change (Feinberg and Watson-Gegeo 1996; Churney 1998). As they experiment with leadership arrangements at varying levels of socio-political inclusion and authority, Pacific Islanders are reworking leadership offices (e.g. splitting titles in Samoa; Shore 1996), synthesising traditional and Western models, and drawing on indigenous values and symbols to validate the result (Watson-Gegeo and Feinberg 1996).

"Leadership" therefore remains a fuzzy category that requires specification and description in given cases. However, it is not only in the theoretical literature that leadership lacks clear definition (Watson-Gegeo and Feinberg 1996), because in many contemporary Pacific societies, islanders themselves are debating the meaning of leadership in response to a variety of political and socioeconomic factors (Besnier 1996; Hooper 1996; Lutkehaus 1996). Through most of the Pacific, authority was formerly based on spiritually derived potency combined with a commitment to promote the common good. The introduction of money, commodity production and market exchange, however, have worked to undermine communal spirit by promoting individual competition and accumulation (Shuster et al. 1998).

Under such conditions, traditional leaders are often tempted to use their privileged access to economic resources to benefit themselves and their immediate families, thereby establishing themselves as an exploiting class, alienating themselves from their followers, and damaging their own legitimacy (Howard 1996; Lutkehaus 1996). In other cases, chiefs maintain commitment to the older, more communal economic values, and find themselves attacked by those preferring the more individualistic, competitive, and, in a sense, egalitarian system provided by the new political and economic order

(Feinberg and Watson-Gegeo 1996). At the same time, they usually lack the skills and worldly experience to be effective leaders in a modern context, and may thus become increasingly defensive and self-centred, further isolating themselves, compromising their authority, and creating a vacuum to be filled by new leaders of a variety of types (Feinberg and Watson-Gegeo 1996).

### The Fijian context

As in other Pacific Island nations, marine fisheries are one of Fiji's major industries, with estimated annual landings of about 35,000 mt, valued in excess of USD 108 million (1995). Further, an estimated 50% of all rural households are involved in some form of subsistence fishing, landing between 15,000 and 20,000 t yr<sup>-1</sup> (<http://www.spc.int/coastfish/Sections/Community/fiji.htm> 18 August 2007).

Not unusual for the region (Crocombe 1994; Hunt 1997; Johannes 2002; Novaczek et al. 2005), Fiji has a customary marine tenure (CMT) system based on local autonomy and self-reliance, its potential function being to control invasion of local marine space, use by groups within the community, and use of specific resources and fishing gears (South and Veitayaki 1998). CMT divides the inshore fishing areas into 410 registered customary fishing rights areas (*qoliqoli*), which provide most of the catch for subsistence fishers. *Qoliqoli* are an integral part of a tribal land-sea "estate" (*vanua*) or *tikina* that extends from the watershed seawards, generally to the outer margin of the seaward slope of the fringing reef. The chief of a *vanua* (Paramount Chief of an area), together with his/her clan (*mataqali*), is traditionally regarded as the owner or, in the case of the chief, as supreme guardian of its land, waters, resources and resident indigenous people. This kind of kin group tenure system also occurs elsewhere in the Pacific (Sudo 1984; South et al. 1994; King and Fa'asili 1998; Johannes 2002; Kolig and Mückler 2002; Foale and Manele 2003; Caillaud et al. 2004; Novaczek et al. 2005).

In the heavily exploited *qoliqoli*, CBMRM is becoming increasingly important as pressure from local users increases and is no longer considered sustainable. In addition to the rapid exogenous change, the *qoliqoli* may thus not be capable of fulfilling the role in marine resource management that many anticipate (Anderson and Mees 1999). This is magnified as the marine environment becomes increasingly vulnerable, through previous exploitation and such environmental stresses as coral bleaching events or soil erosion. Subsistence lifestyles are still prevalent and are respected, but not sufficiently supported at government level, although departments seem to rely heavily on the general autonomy of the communities (UNESCAP

2003), being already overwhelmed with their responsibilities in urban areas.

Prior to colonisation, Fijian society, like many other Pacific societies, was strongly hierarchical (Kelly and Kaplan 2001). Indigenous Fijians lived in villages in well-defined social units that were the basis of all social groupings and activities (Veitayaki 2002). As in other island groups in Oceania, community leadership was intimately bound to the idea of *mana* (mystical or spiritual potency), kinship obligations, and responsibility for preserving community welfare (Hooper 1996). *Kerekere*, a system of gaining things by begging for them from a member of one's own group, ensured that surpluses were shared, thereby preventing the accumulation of wealth (Nayacakalou 1978; Capell 1991). This social kinship system, also known from other parts of the western Pacific, was the safety net that enabled people to meet their needs (Davis 1984; Novaczek et al. 2005).

Since independence, in 1979, chiefly succession disputes and pre-colonial rivalries were revived and had an impact on national political as well as communal issues (Kelly and Kaplan 2001; Leckie 2002). Thus, the political role of chiefs in a modern democracy remains a key political issue in post-colonial Fiji (Toren 1990). Debates include the desirability and viability of the state remaining neutral from traditional politics, and the limitations of traditional and chiefly authority (Kelly and Kaplan 2001). Colonial rule strengthened chiefly power and also enabled many chiefs to have preferential access to education and employment opportunities (e.g. as legal holders of company titles), notably within the bureaucracy. Dr Bavadra (elected Prime Minister in 1987 for a month prior to the coup) repeatedly questioned the abuse of chiefly power and the entanglement of tradition with modernity that, in the extreme, had become embedded in corrupt practices (also called "communal capitalism"; Leckie 2002). Grievances were directed at development projects, scholarships and state expenditure being unfairly allocated to the traditional seats of power, showing both that traditional status still bears heavily on participation in the monetised economy, and that poverty is not constrained by ethnicity (Leckie 2002).

As in many British colonies, the state implemented a dual administrative structure, with regulations and institutions pertaining to indigenous Fijians and those for the general population (Leckie 2002). The Republic of Fiji has a parliamentary government system while retaining traditional chiefly rights. The *Bose Levu Vakaturaga* (Great Council of Chiefs; GCC), composed of the 14 paramount chiefs of all provinces (the highest ranking members of the traditional chief system), brought to life under the Deed of Cession in 1874, still has political power and

sets policy for general Fijian affairs on matters relating to the indigenous community (Ruddle 1995; Lal 2003). Many Fijians feel that the GCC should play a more active role in national politics (e.g. Madraiwiwi 2002; <http://newspad-pacific.info> 2005). Its role and authority are an important political as well as constitutional fact, and, perhaps more importantly, seen to be beyond dispute or debate — at least until the most recent coup, after which the interim Prime Minister Bainimarama dismissed the GCC of its function for an unknown period (Lal 2003; [www.pireport.org](http://www.pireport.org) 2007).

Thus, in contemporary Fiji as a whole, traditional authority and the economic power of chiefs appears to remain intact, and in many traditional villages the installed chief of a *vanua* is still regarded as the guardian of its land, resources and people. Yet, although the respect paid to a chief depends on many factors, such as strength of his/her character, knowledge and authority, this traditional respect seems to be declining, its relevance for daily decision-making, including CBMRM, questioned, and the chief's roles and positions are increasingly of a ritualistic nature (Ravuvu 1988; Cooke and Moce 1995; Ruddle 1995; Feinberg and Watson-Gege 1996; Vunisea 2002). Lal (2003) even goes further in stating that the era of dominance of paramount chiefs, with overarching influence across the whole spectrum of indigenous Fijian society, has ended.

For traditionally owned resources, as is the case in large parts of Oceania, the planning of CBMRM must therefore consider the social structures of the communities involved, including the issue of leadership. The specific situation and circumstances under which a community exists must be considered before CBMRM can be successfully implemented. This correlation between the existing leadership and authority setting and CBMRM efforts has not hitherto been examined in Fiji, yet it is essential to understand how those management systems work and the manner in which they are linked to the status of traditional authority and village leadership.

### CBMRM in progress

Having focused and scaled-down community-based research work to examine specific settings for CBMRM and community perceptions, how might general conclusions be drawn from a very specific small island study? And is it valid to extrapolate conclusions from these communities to other settings?

Perhaps the main valid generalisation is that CBMRM managers and researchers should examine the ordinary, everyday life of people before beginning ambitious projects. This requires a focus on a specifically developed research methodology (e.g.

including various social groups), specific environmental conditions (e.g. fishing or deforestation activities), specific combinations and characteristics of people involved (e.g. community structures and hierarchies), and on specific perceptions.

Natural resource management varies throughout the South Pacific. Owing mainly to the existing CMT system, the Fijian government takes a “cooperative” co-management approach (Sen and Raakjaer Nielsen 1996), in which government and users cooperate as partners in decision-making. Fiji has never had a formal, uniform national co-management arrangement. Like other studies (Cooke and Moce 1995; Tawake and Aalbersberg 2002), my research verified that management strategies and the level of government involvement vary greatly, and depend solely on individual fisheries officers, chiefs and communities. This causes problems and conflict where people feel they are treated unequally or with disrespect. Such a situation is not confined to Fiji and the South Pacific; a greater focus on core individuals, their respective influence, knowledge and character may be most useful for coastal zone management research elsewhere, where governments try to decentralise natural resource management (UNESCAP 2000; Courtney et al. 2002).

Therefore, decentralised responsibility in Fiji cannot be classified as co-management; rather, it is a parallel arrangement between government and rural communities, the latter having principal responsibility for their resources. Owing mainly to a lack of funds and personnel, the government relies on the local governance and self-regulation skills of coastal fishing communities. Were this approach not taken, the government’s problems would be much greater. However, given their present structure, skills and resources, the communities alone could not establish the management needed to mitigate the increasing pressure on their resources. Knowledge of different management options is scarce, and resource owners, like government officials, often lack the ability to quantify impacts on the fishery (Cooke et al. 2000). Hence, they require external assistance in the form of biological, environmental and conservation education together with help in planning, monitoring, evaluation and enforcement.

Some Fijian communities have already established close bonds with local NGOs and official institutions (e.g. University of the South Pacific–USP and Secretariat of the Pacific Community–SPC). Ways have been found to facilitate management activities, such as through communication with Suva officials and academics (e.g. the Mositi Vanuaso project; Veitayaki et al. 2007), follow-up of NGO workshops, or hearsay from other communities or relatives. A privileged connection to official institutions is often positively related to a higher degree of manage-

ment and awareness (Cooke et al. 2000), not only in Fiji (Beger et al. 2005). However, activities always depend on the ambitions of the communities and individuals involved.

In many places, marine protected areas (MPAs) have afforded the first chance for local communities and outside agencies to work together (Polunin et al. 1983; Riedmiller and Carter 2001; Kunzmann 2002). MPAs can play an important role in the decentralisation movement and establishment of local management authorities. Seasonal or temporary *tabu* areas (traditional area closures), an ancient concept in Fiji, are used often for ceremonial reasons (e.g. the place where the chief took a bath was not to be fished) (Veitayaki 1998). However, since 2000 these areas have been increasingly used as a management tool through the Fiji Locally Managed Marine Area (FLMMA) network (Caillaud et al. 2004). The FLMMA network was established by people involved in community-based fisheries management, including government departments, other conservation agencies, and individuals from the private sector. FLMMA has formed new partnerships with communities throughout the developing world, and used pilot management areas and those involved in the projects to facilitate continuing community management work (IAS 2002; Tawake and Aalbersberg 2002; Vunisea 2002). Promoting the idea that healthy living standards and additional income can be obtained from properly managed marine environments and fisheries resources, the network has become the main factor changing the face and driving the process of CBMRM in Fiji. However, although a more sustainable approach to exploitation has been pursued over the last decade, the varying degrees of success in Fiji are a reminder of people’s general inability to organise themselves (Veitayaki 1998; Zann and Vuki 1998).

Attempts are still being made everywhere to modernise methods of exploitation and management, especially for coastal and marine fisheries. However, in heavily exploited fisheries, where little knowledge exists of the sustainability of the resources, the wisdom of making fishing techniques efficient must be questioned (Jennings and Polunin 1996; Bavinck 1997). Because a resource could easily be exploited beyond sustainable levels, potentially beyond recovery, the precautionary approach to fisheries should be implemented at the village level.

These challenges can be met only through a good bond between communities and official agents, based on continuity, community consensus and trust. For example, every community or district could have at least one experienced fisheries manager working closely with respected community members. Ideally, this would permit acceptance of conservation measures and general compliance,



communication and networking, and data collection and analysis. Under a system of extension workers similar to that established for teachers and nurses, these “marine advisors” could monitor projects, make marine conservation and education matters of everyday life for the communities, and thus support long-term thinking. Such a system already exists in other places, for example in the form of park rangers (e.g. in Tanzania and Tonga; Malm 2001; Riedmiller and Carter 2001), and would greatly strengthen Fiji’s capacity for monitoring and managing its marine biodiversity in coastal waters through the traditional users’ rights. Without such a system, underpinned by the skills of academics, NGOs, and regional agencies, CBMRM in Fiji may remain unorganised and too dependent on local authorities to achieve reliable and sustainable marine resource use and conservation. Each community practicing CBMRM should be in the position to take responsibility for the enforcement of management measures and locally developed regulations and rules (Crawford et al. 2004). But for this, people first must understand and be involved in developing these measures, which in turn depends on a good community sense and leadership. Marine resource management, at least in its initial phases, requires sacrifices, not only by the fishers but also by the entire community (Veitayaki 1998).

### What role do traditions and traditional authority play in CBMRM?

#### One voice

All 10 interviewees in the life history surveys agreed that important decisions in the village were easier if the chief was respected and just “one person talks”. In three of the villages, people said that “before” the situation in the villages was better and that nowadays there were “plenty people who can’t listen to what the chief says”. Before, “either the *turaga ni koro* [village headman] or the *turaga ni vanua* [chief of the village or area] decided and told people what to do; it was good, easy to follow better; now it is very hard, now there are so many people, that’s different today”. This meant there were not only more people in terms of quantity but also that more people were giving their opinion and going their own way without much effort to integrate these into the community. “*E na koro sega e na lala* [there will be nothing in the village, nothing will be done], before they listen to one command, with respect for the chief, now not anymore”.

Interviewees also said that generally, the atmosphere in the village had changed and even worsened. “The people were good, now they are bad; before they respected the chief, the village, but now ...” Some village customs such as respectful behaviour were not adhered to anymore: “before we can’t shout from

there to here [pointing down the hill to other houses], and now we can call, anywhere you stand you can call”; similarly with sharing (*kerekere*): “today, if you want something, we can ask for it, but have to give some money; you have to pay, you can’t give it just like that to relatives, we have to pay all the things today”. “*Sa sega na loloma*” [there is no love/pity/kind-heartedness], “*sa sega na vakarokoroko*” [there is no respect and politeness]. “The way of life changes; the situation in the village is different now, there are plenty problems, it’s like Fiji now — independent; and there are plenty of different things coming in, church *solu* (fees/donation), education in the village, etc.” “There are major changes, compared to the olden times, especially the behaviour of the younger generation, they seem to clash with the traditional people and ways of life.” The “rules and guidelines that were used by the people” have also changed. Not always have they become less adhered to, but “now with all the changes that come nowadays, different decisions are made to suit the environment; before we could feel free to go around, but now we have to take a [fishing] license”.

Only one village (Naovuka), the smallest and youngest in the *tikina*, was content with their village and its decision-making, “decisions are made in the same way as before, one speaks, one talks, because [we are] only one family here, not like in the [other] villages where there are many families”. Consensus and compliance existed in this community and were facilitated by an educated and charismatic character, the last of a chiefly line of brothers. “He is a good leader because people like him”, one interviewee said. They have had some problems in the village they come from (Lamiti), after which they moved down the coast in the 1980s to re-settle on their family land. Their new chief said “it was very hard, now it’s good, now those elders died, it’s easier now for us; before it was different you know, different-minded people, and the children, the boys, the elders had different opinions”, and another one adds, “but he can bring them together now, because he always laughs, people like and respect him.”

#### Chiefly death

During the period of this study, a traditional chief of one of the villages died in Suva. Traditionally, the corpse would have been transferred back to his village to be buried there with major ceremony. On this occasion, however, there was not enough money for the transfer, and too much discussion between family members. So he was buried in Suva, where some of his family lived.

When asked what had changed about customs surrounding the death of a chief, presumably symbolising changes in traditional authority, all interviewees but one (who said everything stayed the same) said

there had been changes in that less and less respect was paid by the villagers. A chiefly death could now be more or less “just like that of some other person”. A few decades ago, when a chief died, the children of the village were kept in one house until the funeral was over. No children were supposed to be seen around the village and outside the house; no playing or noise should disrupt the respect towards the deceased. Men and women were “standing back cooking for the children, that’s the time they respected the chief”. “Before as kids, we just hide inside the house, but now kids just come right to the coffin, onto the grave, now they can run up to right beside the coffin and look in.” Again it was mentioned “before, when he [the chief] said something, people took part in the decision, but now, when the chief says something, people go on doing their own work, they don’t care what he says”. It was also said that the policy within the community was “very strict” before, but “now we have to open up, to go along with time and changes; time has changed, and you must change according to time, if not, you become stagnant.”

For example, a “temporary *tabu* area [*tabu ni wai*] was often established when a chief died, and opened again later with the *tara* [relaxing of *tabu*]” and fished for the accompanying ceremonial feast. However, in *Tikina* Vanuaso, no new *tabu* area was established in addition to the already existing permanent ones, but people “go and catch the [present] *tabu* area; after that, the area is *tabu* again”.

Hopes for the future of the villages and their people mostly concerned the importance of a respected leader. Some were summarised and can be elucidated by the following direct quotes:

“It’s up to the elders, it’s up to the church elders, or the family elders, to tell the children how to keep the village and the life for tomorrow; it’s up to the family, [they] got to teach their children, [they have to] see the future of Lamiti, and make a good Lamiti next time.”

“[There is] no chief here now, the one that died in February was not a real chief, [he] was not installed to be a chief, the Fijian way. We have to make a chief, and [then] he can speak, one talks and the others listen; at the moment there is none [no chief] but if we have one next year, we will see the change.”

“They will become good, the people in the village, and there will be more people in the village in the future.”

“It will be better next time [in the future], more people to come to the village, good for

the *tikina* and the school, many school kids would be good.”

“I am praying for a good chief, [a] good village, one talks, [people] respect each other, that’s what I hope.”

Stagnating development on Gau and Nairai, and the often-passive attitude of villagers towards this trend, may be a link to the worsening traditional village functioning and loss of traditional chiefly authority. Both reflect a general feeling among villagers of loss of power, observed also elsewhere in Fiji (Tomlinson 2004). The last paragraphs suggest that for CBMRM in these villages, the feeling of powerlessness is reflected mostly in aspects such as decision-making, distribution of management responsibilities, evaluation of management plans and measures, enforcement of regulations against outside fishers, but also in terms of income generating possibilities. In addition, both stagnation in development and decreasing community function may mutually enhance their effects towards this feeling of loss. The fact that some communities feel increasingly powerless is likely to have an impact on any CBMRM regime, as consensus in issues concerning the entire community and traditional respect accorded to the chiefs are declining everywhere in Fiji (Ravuvu 1988; Cooke and Moce 1995; Ruddle 1995; Vunisea 2002; Tomlinson 2004; Toren 2004).

Findings also show that this lack of respect is dividing the villages, in addition to increasingly different economical status and religious beliefs among families (Tomlinson 2004). Those who cope with a “modern” individualistic self-determined life independent of *kerekere* have tended to separate from those that still respect the traditional social structure and deem this as a precondition for community function and leadership. The notion of having “too many people who talk”, meaning the lack of and inability to find a consensus on village level was emphasised in the villages of this study. In another study on another Fijian island (Kadavu), people also lamented that “commoners who earn money think they are chiefly too, and begin to act — inappropriately — like chiefs” (Tomlinson 2004).

The chiefly person’s death, traditionally embedded in highly respectful ceremonies and traditional activities (Toren 2004), provided a good example of what changes have taken place in terms of respect and traditional authority. The ceremonial activities and behaviours around this event have loosened. In addition, the period after the burial and prior to the ceremonial instalment of a new chief, seemed to be critical to a village’s function and stability. Some of the villages went for more than a year without a traditionally installed leader, although there were still members of the same chiefly family living in



the village. In the *tikina* Tomlinson studied the chiefs had not been formally installed within living memory (Tomlinson 2004), exacerbating the sense of lost power. Without a formal installation, chiefs were considered ineffective, and in *Tikina* Vanuaso people actually felt during this period as if the community was without a leader altogether, supporting not only the feeling of lost power but also lost identity. Tomlinson's observation (2004) "that people and society in the past were unified, proper, and powerful; the present is fragmented, improper, and relatively powerless by contrast" is corroborated by the present study. With communities being fragmented, unstable or unaware of their power, future CBMRM plans for *Tikina* Vanuaso may become difficult to develop and implement in a useful and sustainable way.

How can an indigenous community recover its social strength and function that have been lost over decades but now are needed for implementation of CBMRM, and assume responsibility for conserving the local environment? As discussed above, the reasons for decline in traditional authority, respect and hence traditional community function have been the subject of wide speculation. They could also be several and complex. One reason is increased adoption of westernised standards from the urban centres (and abroad). Almost every family in the communities investigated had relatives living in urban areas; in the towns, chiefs were increasingly sharing the same problems and rights as any person of non-chiefly origin, and this tendency was reflected through relatives back to the island.

In parallel are more complex changes in the characters of the people and their behaviour. To cope with the effects of change and re-establish a firm basis for community function, crucial for CBMRM, each community will need to independently make its own decisions. Whether or not CBMRM on Gau and Nairai succeeds in the future will depend on the education and character of individual persons, as well as on finding an educated and respected leadership, while preventing long gaps between periods of leadership. This process of re-establishing strong community leadership and stability will be highly complex and variable among communities and *tikina* and thus difficult to predict. The research reported on here, shows that a path cannot be found simply by looking back. To make CBMRM work, every individual community must find a way to establish a stable community structure. If this is not possible in the future by following the traditional way of installing a chief owing to long inter-installment periods, for example, a new type of leadership, including non-traditional leaders, might be needed.

However, whereas that has occurred elsewhere in the Pacific Islands, for example Palau (Shuster et al.

1998), it is uncommon and might not work on Gau or in other parts of Fiji. And again, a strong and continuous connection to the government officials as well as other agents, supported by improved transport and communication technologies, might help the rural communities on Gau to find their responsibilities and strengths in terms of CBMRM in modern Fiji, and to rebuild community structure. Although traditional roles and resource use systems within the communities of this study were still more or less defined, leadership structures, protocol, respect and beliefs were undergoing change and cannot be neglected on the background that a supported community leadership is necessary for sustainable management of natural resources in these regions (Fong 1994; World Bank 2000).

Findings during this study therefore indicated that greater compliance of villagers — needed to strengthen and stabilise local management regimes — can be achieved only through strong and respected leadership, increased environmental education at all social levels, and greater support of basic family needs. All of these again require better correspondence of the remote islands with authorities on the main island Viti Levu. A neglect of management and conservation necessities and possibilities was, in the communities in this study, not so much caused by misunderstanding over resource user rights and rules, but rather by a general loss of "community" perception and identity, coupled with lack of knowledge of the surrounding environment. The resources were declining; therefore community members bought larger nets, spearguns and smashed coral heads to get even smaller fish hiding in them. An accepted, and not necessarily traditional, leadership could support the revitalization of identity and responsibility for the environment, resources and their management, which is crucial for the compliance with measures and thus stabilization of management.

Smooth chiefly succession and general "community peace", suggested to have positive influence on good management level (Vunisea 2002), no longer exist in many places on these islands. The village-based authority of the islands can be revitalised only by reversing the general feeling of loss of community perception and identity. Better control over fishing activities by outsiders and their interference with the community has occurred on Gau and Nairai through the decision of the communities (facilitated by management workshops) to not grant new fishing licenses to outsiders, as well as through the appointment of fishwardens since 2002. One main objective of Fiji regarding CBMRM should be to enforce financially and legally those measures with the "marine advisor" scheme. But only in a few cases will the communities and districts be able to address this issue by themselves.

Independence is the “hope and hurdle” of outer islands such as Gau and Nairai, unwanted but accepted at the same time, where true long-term independence in terms of sustainable resource use will work only with government reforms that result in improved communication, information and transport services to enable the people to make their own wise choices. Believing that the situation on the islands (including social and environmental changes and hazards) could be ignored for many more years, while financial and natural resources can be used for “pressing” urban issues, may eventually backfire. The role of the rural communities will become more important since they will be crucial for enabling the government to achieve a balance between developing the country and safe-guarding it.

### Concluding remarks

Marine inshore resources are today endangered even on remote islands in the South Pacific, where subsistence lifestyles persist. When centralised government services cannot reach the remote islands spread over vast distances, Pacific Island states such as Fiji require a CBMRM system. Although CBMRM is springing up on many Pacific Islands, it faces many challenges as the environment changes quickly, and inside (e.g. resource ownership) and outside (e.g. foreign fishers) pressures increase. In this study I have documented changes over space and time as perceived by Fijian villagers in their natural and social environment, including traditional authority and village leadership, which requires adaptations by the community members. However, such changes are not considered in many community management plans, for which it was still assumed that a traditional communal hierarchy and order exists.

To face the challenge of adapting to these and future changes while still supporting the livelihoods of island communities, villagers’ need for strong and knowledgeable leadership must be acknowledged. Such leadership is critical to successful marine resource management and of direct consequence to community welfare and function, the distribution of responsibilities, transfer of knowledge and acceptance of management measures, and thus needs to be prevented from further erosion.

The rural communities reported on here are in danger of becoming simultaneously decreasingly traditional and increasingly undeveloped in relation to the urban areas of Fiji. Although villagers hope for an improved quality of life, better access to information, improved infrastructure and reinforced community leadership, attempts have been slow and often not successful. This study therefore gives an example on how villages can be caught between needing development and wanting adaptation and

improvement (e.g. for their children and grandchildren), and their former traditions, which they lose but still mourn. People were becoming less dependent on the traditional cultures, a situation which a few decades ago they could never imagine. Similarly, many people who had made their way to towns or abroad could not imagine coming back to the villages. Another very old and very complex traditional system is losing its efficiency and complexity over time. What remains are societies that are no longer traditional but still “developing”, versus the “old” traditional but undeveloped ones. The wide perception that the traditional system is becoming eroded is thus a reality, but have these rural communities already moved too far from their traditional lifestyles to be able to turn back (re-establish pre-colonial status) or to adapt these lifestyles to the changing circumstances of life in modern Oceania, a region that is barely comparable to its pre-colonial status and identity? The people interviewed in this study felt that turning back was not the best option for community welfare, nor for the management and conservation of their resources, as the communities did not want to stand back while the world developed around them. How then could CBMRM work successfully in these communities? One way to lighten the dilemma of being caught between past and future without direction for the present would be by an enforcement of the village leadership, for example through faster re-installments of new chiefs, under the responsibility of each individual community.

These trends and findings are based on CBMRM research in Fiji; however, considering the importance of village leadership and local marine resources in the region, some generalisations may be made for the wider Pacific Island region. It remains uncertain, whether the present traditional chiefly systems can survive the changes in the region and regain the ability to fulfil their duty of leading and sustaining the communities, or whether they will be replaced by new types of leadership, for example by including non-traditional leaders into the nomination process. Obviously, the latter would be an even greater departure from tradition in some ways; and even with a locally elected leader having the blessings of the community elders, this way would not be accepted in all communities. Nevertheless, if the traditional chiefly system can no longer convey the necessary kind of leadership, for example owing to a lack of competent people of chiefly descent — electing an educated and charismatic leader of non-chiefly descent would mean a boost for some communities in terms of identification, welfare and development. Respect and support for community leadership, and with it social capital and collective action, may be rebuilt, essential for future community existence and the environment, islander’s “bank and insurance”. The necessity of consider-

ing these community aspects towards improved local resource management and conservation with a view to wise decisions must be supported more widely and merged into funding opportunities and policy-making processes. In this way, a more holistic approach to the management in this area could make management measures more meaningful, sustainable and hence successful in the future.

Nevertheless, CBMRM efforts in Oceania will have to remain case-specific regardless that generalisations are required, such as, for example, the regional and national management plans. The changes in the villagers' everyday lives influencing management regimes are not the same in all villages, and one cannot generalise community concerns because of the actions highly depend on the individuals involved. Although traditional respect and social ties are loosening, they do so with varying speed and manner. Hence, the aspects of community leadership mentioned in this article cannot be considered independently; they form a complex network that differs among communities and islands. For deeper insights, understanding and generalisation of statements, larger-scale follow-up research is needed to unequivocally address the issues raised by this study. Further, deeply focused studies are needed on the specific aspects of social environment of the communities themselves and the development history of each island. Such long-term research and assistance would best be based in the communities themselves, to detect the specific community concerns and integrate them in the management planning process.

Finally, paralleling any CBMRM efforts, and before any clarification of leadership status can take place, other pressing issues of development in the region should first be attended. Principal among such issues is communication between remote and main islands and capitals. Rural communities generally need and want a closer relationship with their urban and official counterparts, and decentralisation must be used for good (co-)management and not just to release pressure and responsibility from overwhelmed government departments, or to look back and ignore the enormous changes these countries have undergone in the past century.

The key challenges for CBMRM in rural archipelagic Fiji (and likely beyond) can be summarised in a somewhat idealised way as being to:

- maintain or re-establish strong community leadership;
- increase knowledge on everyday life of people, including information on the social and natural history dimensions of the island;
- increase focus on core individuals, their respective influence, knowledge and character to increase effectiveness of management responsibility delegation;
- identify ways for greater input from outside agencies in the form of biological, environmental and conservation education as well as help in planning, monitoring, evaluation and enforcement (such as marine advisers); and
- thus find ways to (re-)establish and maintain a strong bond among and between communities and official agents, based on continuity, community consensus and trust.

Many small and remote islands in developing states such as Fiji are still far from achieving their full growth potential in terms of sustainability of resource use and livelihood, not least because of political instability. Nonetheless, by supporting a more balanced situation between rural and urban areas, with continuous local leadership appropriate for all aspects of community reality, the communities could connect to the government, other facilitating agents and their information resources. A possibly triangular (co-) management scheme might thus become possible in the region as one choice for successful resource stewardship and CBMRM. Otherwise, the traditional independent island life is likely to become further eroded and the small islands and villages even further detached from the general way in which their countries try to represent or identify themselves.

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