

## SCEFI EMBLEMATIC STORIES

Pacific Centre for Peacebuilding:

# Building Inclusive and Peaceful Communities in Rural Fiji Through Training and Dialogue



**EUROPEAN UNION**



Strengthening  
Citizen Engagement  
in Fiji Initiative



50  
YEARS

*Empowered lives. Resilient nations.*



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The series of emblematic stories under the Strengthening Citizen Engagement in Fiji Initiative (SCEFI) were developed in collaboration with the relevant civil society organisations, with contributions from:

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## SUMMARY

Fijian society is at a crossroads between modernisation and traditionalism. Modern lifestyles based on individual freedoms coexist and sometimes collide with centuries of traditional communal social hierarchies and conventions of behavior. In the face of modernisation, people in rural communities request improved public services such as access to clean drinking water, electricity and medical facilities, better roads and transport. Therefore, developing the capacities of local communities so they can better address a variety of social concerns and engage with government bodies is critical. In 2014, the Pacific Centre for Peacebuilding (PCP), supported by UNDP's Strengthening Citizen Engagement in Fiji Initiative (SCEFI), initiated a project in Vanua Levu to strengthen local level governance structures in 12 rural communities. The project involved collecting evidence through baseline surveys and conducting contextualized training in the target communities, so that they could constructively engage in dialogue with government to collectively find solutions to longstanding community problems.

## INTRODUCTION

Despite Fiji's transition to democracy in 2014, many poor rural communities in Vanua Levu remain skeptical of real change on the ground and of the possibilities for improving their lives. They do not articulate their problems to the government either due to lack of confidence or knowledge of how and where to address them. Few forums exist to discuss social issues openly among community members or with local decision makers.

Open discussions of sensitive social problems are not a common practice in Fiji. The culture of silence that was pervasive in Fijian society during the pre-parliamentary democracy phase is embedded, and people are reluctant to address socially sensitive issues in public. Issues such as teen pregnancies for example, are seen as individual or family problems and rarely as collective community problems that need to be addressed at a broader level. Decision-making in Fijian communities is also often seen



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as a prerogative of male elders from which women and young people are excluded. Even when minority groups do have a voice, it is not strong enough to impact decision making. As a result, critical social problems that affect certain segments of the community such as women or young people remain unaddressed in the public domain. This exclusion has pronounced negative impacts on many aspects of rural community life such as village development, succession planning and intergenerational relations.

The Pacific Centre for Peacebuilding (PCP) is an organisation working to transform, reduce and prevent conflict in the Pacific region (see Box 1). Between 2011 and 2013, PCP implemented two governance strengthening programmes in Vanua Levu which included training on the strengthening of rural leadership. The success of these programmes led local communities to request additional support and follow-up.

## BOX 1. What is The Pacific Centre for Peacebuilding?

The Pacific Centre for Peacebuilding (PCP) was established in 2007. Its mission is to “work with all communities to reduce, prevent and transform violence and conflict”, and is underlined by the values of:

- ▶ using transformative peacebuilding approaches
- ▶ respect for human rights and responsibilities
- ▶ power and wisdom of local capacities, ideas and solutions
- ▶ integrity, dignity, humility and trust
- ▶ collaboration and inclusive participation as key to interactions that transform relationships.

Currently PCP has offices in Suva and Labasa. Its four main programmes are on Women’s Peacebuilding Leadership, Restorative Justice, Transitions to Democracy, and Building Peaceful and Multi-Racial Communities in Vanua Levu.

In 2014, with support from UNDP's Strengthening Citizen Engagement in Fiji Initiative (SCEFI), PCP initiated a two-year project on "Building Peaceful & Multicultural Communities" in 12 rural communities in Vanua Levu (see Box 2). While the problems facing each community were very different, underlying similarities also existed in the challenges they faced.

## BOX 2. How SCEFI Supports Civic Engagement in Local Communities

UNDP's Strengthening Citizen Engagement in Fiji Initiative (SCEFI) is a three year project (2013-2016) aimed at strengthening peaceful and inclusive development in Fiji by enabling citizens to engage in community activities. It emphasises fostering democracy from the bottom up, and as such, the strengthening of collaboration between decision-makers and citizens. SCEFI is organized around six core themes: transformative leadership, non-discrimination and inclusiveness, equitable service delivery, accountability and human rights, voice and choice, decision making and coalition building.

SCEFI's outreach strategy involved receiving proposals and funding projects of civic engagement across Fiji. Towards this objective, it recruited and trained 11 local facilitators who visited Fiji's 14 provinces and conducted 236 information sessions that reached over 3,000 people in 2014. SCEFI facilitators were critical to realizing the Initiative's aim of targeting far-flung communities and citizens groups, and identifying emblematic projects which represented empowerment, self-help and collaborative action.

Through the outreach effort, 88 project proposals in total were submitted for consideration. Facilitators also helped organizations to prepare grant proposals. Once the grant proposals were approved, representatives of each organization attended a three-day training workshop where grantees were informed about SCEFI's overall objectives and provided support on management and reporting requirements. The training provided skill-building and information on key concepts such as civic engagement and strengthening collaboration between government and civil society. Facilitators also provided mentoring and facilitation support to grantees during project implementation, and assisted with reporting and financial requirements.

## **PROCESS: EVIDENCE-BASED TRAINING AND ENGAGEMENT WITH GOVERNMENT**

The “Building a Peaceful & Multicultural Communities” project focused on strengthening local governance through training in the target communities by developing their capacities in conflict analysis, management and engaging in dialogue with government representatives. The overarching goal of the initiative was to enable communities to deal with the multiplicity of challenges they faced in a more constructive, inclusive and peaceful manner. The project was carried out in two phases over the course of 2014-2015.

### **PHASE 1: BASELINE SURVEYS AND TRAINING**

A first phase involved strengthening the capacities of local communities for effective conflict resolution and engagement with government representatives. It consisted of conducting preliminary baseline surveys of the target communities, direct engagement with the communities themselves, and the development of a contextualized training curriculum to help develop effective ways to strengthen their community governance structures and leadership capacities in a manner that fostered greater inclusiveness. The strategy for the project was developed through a participatory process, with inputs from both PCP and UNDP/SCEFI.

► Scoping visits: PCP conducted scoping visits to each of the 12 target communities in Vanua Levu. In Fijian society, prior consent to work in a community is critical. Such consent was affirmed symbolically with the presentation and acceptance of kava in a formal traditional ceremony. Building trust required full disclosure of the intended project and the methodology to be used. Once community leaders were satisfied that a project was in the best interest of their community, consent could be obtained. The objectives of the scoping visits were thus to:

- ▶ build trust and relationship between the communities and PCP
  - ▶ inform the communities of PCP's programme and approach and address any concerns that they may have with the implementation of the project
  - ▶ obtain consent
  - ▶ conduct a baseline survey
- ▶ **Baseline surveys:** The baseline survey was conducted in 7 of the 12 target communities. It elicited an array of quantitative and qualitative information including population data, types of activities carried out in the communities, religious grouping, sources of income and challenges faced by these communities. PCP was also able to gauge the involvement of women and young people in decision-making processes through the surveys, better understand the traditional structures and dispute resolution mechanisms in place, and the strengths and weaknesses of the existing structures. PCP developed an analysis report which informed the development of the contextualized training curriculum.



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- ▶ Curriculum development: The curriculum developed by PCP comprised of 6 thematic areas: peace building and human rights; conflict resolution; mindful communication; transformative leadership; good governance and citizenship rights.
- ▶ Training: PCP employed a participatory approach in the delivery of the training. The training involved 55 participants from Macuata province and 18 from Bua province. The ethnicities represented by the participants were 79 iTaukei, 13 Indo-Fijian and one person of Kiribati nationality. A total of 53 women and 40 males participated in the training. PCP conducted three trainings sessions in the 12 communities during July-August 2014, each lasting for three days.
- ▶ Follow-up evaluation: In August 2016, PCP conducted follow-up consultations in the target communities which comprised one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions. The objectives of the evaluation were to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and practicality of the trainings on the target communities. A group of 25 participants who were part of the first training, and whom PCP ensured were empowered to speak on behalf of the communities, provided the initial feedback.

## **PHASE 2: COMMUNITY-GOVERNMENT DIALOGUE**

A series of preparatory activities were undertaken to ensure that the dialogue process could be conducted successfully on all fronts. This included training for internal staff and communities, as well as engagement with government representatives. The preparatory initiatives helped actors develop skills to engage in a collaborative manner during the dialogue process with government.

- ▶ **Community meetings:** A series of community meetings, starting on January 2015, were conducted five months after the completion of Phase 1. The objectives of the meetings were to re-establish relations with the communities and assess their progress. All the communities demonstrated greater interest and confidence in tackling important community problems. Specifically, PCP observed that community representatives were writing letters to government officials, visiting government offices for meetings to follow up on their issues, and facilitating more community meetings to priorities issues of importance. One participant reported that he had written letters to different stakeholders including the District Officer Macuata, Commissioner Northern and even the Attorney General. In Yakama Village where the community hall was earlier used as a kindergarten, a new kindergarten was established. After undergoing training, the village headwoman (“Maramanikoro”) successfully negotiated with partners and donors to secure a fully funded new building as the community kindergarten.
- ▶ **Government-stakeholder meetings:** PCP staff conducted a series of consultations with the local government officials in Labasa. Through the consultations PCP was informed of the government’s development plans for the targeted communities, and government representatives were also introduced to alternative approaches and tailor-made solutions to community concerns. Government representatives showed a genuine commitment to work with PCP to assist the communities.
- ▶ **Facilitator’ training:** Three PCP staff members involved in the project underwent individualised training. The training was to help them with facilitation skills for the dialogue process and develop a contextualized dialogue methodology suitable for both community representatives and government stakeholders.

► Training for dialogue and mock exercises: PCP conducted two trainings to prepare communities with the skills necessary for the dialogue with government and develop their confidence. The first was held in Labasa for nearby communities and the second at Nasorowaqa Community Hall for communities located at a distances. Invitees to the training included 20 individuals representing 11 communities. During the training participants were given the opportunity to articulate and frame issues they felt needed to be addressed with government counterparts. The training employed conflict analysis tools to help the representatives better understand their positions, interests, and also develop an understanding of the possible positions and interest of their government counterparts. “Mock sessions” of community presentations



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were conducted to help them gain a better sense of how the meeting with government officials could flow, and to help build their confidence while presenting their case.

► **Presentation to Heads of Departments:** PCP made a presentation to heads of various government departments based in Labasa to inform about PCP's work and present findings of the analysis report from the 12 communities. Government officials responded with concern to the issues raised and noted details of the areas where the various problems persisted so that they could follow up with their own investigations. Phase 2 culminated in a dialogue process between representatives from 10 target communities and government officials in their regions to draw attention to community concerns and find collaborative solutions. The dialogue between the government and representatives took place on 8-9 May 2015 in Labasa. Government representatives at the meeting included officials from the Ministries of Health, Environment, Town & Country Planning, Water Authority of Fiji, Provincial Administrators, Provincial Councilors and Ministry of Youth.

While both government and community representatives were hesitant to openly discuss issues at the beginning, skillful facilitation by PCP and the introduction of dialogue tools constructed a safe space that eventually enabled both parties to openly discuss priority areas. Community representatives highlighted a series of problems requiring assistance which included lack of proper roads that hindered access to basic services such as medical facilities, and posed problems to young people's commute to schools in inclement weather. Other challenges included lack of access to safe drinking water, disputes over land boundaries, need for consultation between government and resource owners on development projects. Participatory decision-making was a

key concern within communities as well as with government.

In response to the issues raised by the communities, government officials committed themselves to an action plan that was jointly developed by the end of the dialogue. Communities were also informed of the services provided by government which could help address many of the issues raised.

## **POST-DIALOGUE MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

To evaluate the impacts of the dialogue process PCP conducted face to face interviews and focus group discussions a month after the dialogue with nearly 20 community representatives. At least 50 per cent of the government officials that attended the dialogue were also interviewed. The follow-up made clear that all the parties remained actively engaged to solve the various issues that they highlighted.

## **RESULTS AND IMPACT**

- ▶ **Contextualised community training:** The contextualized training curriculum developed by PCP enabled target communities to better understand the root causes of conflict and find appropriate solutions to longstanding community problems. Skills on conflict resolution introduced at the training aided community representatives to respond to issues differently from the manner in which they had done before.
- ▶ **Transformative leadership:** Traditional leaders saw the importance of consulting with community members. They began adopting a consultative and inclusive approach, using mindful communication techniques such as empathetic listening and diplomatic speaking. As a result, interactive and

inclusive decision-making processes among villagers were strengthened. The communities also adopted simple peacebuilding tools to identify and solve a range of interpersonal conflicts on their own.

- ▶ **Strengthening local level governance:** Following PCP's training and the dialogue with government, target communities were able to develop strategic plans and outline possible solutions to collective issues. The training taught communities the skills to analyze and prioritize issues.
- ▶ **Strengthening community-government engagement:** The dialogue represented an achievement and turning point for the communities. Target communities began to liaise with the government on a consistent basis and grew more aware of their rights and the decisions that affect their lives. They were also introduced to platforms that enabled collaboration with services providers and helped build better networks with relevant stakeholders.

## LESSONS LEARNT

- ▶ **Community training in conflict resolution is critical:** Traditional systems, such as dispute resolution structures, cannot accommodate new problems communities face in modern times. PCP observed that such traditional structures strengthened social solidarity to a certain extent. The traditional processes of "i-soro", "veisorosorovi" or "carasala", for example, used "symbolic interaction" as a means of resolving conflict. Mats, livestock, tapa cloth and kerosene were used to show respect to historical lineage and relationships, and symbolic gestures allowed to restore relationships. This, however, does not obfuscate the need for more inclusive approaches in community governance systems.
- ▶ **Engagement with government:** The use of constructive approaches to advocate for community needs elicited the participation and

commitment of the government. PCP's collaborative rather than an adversarial approach facilitated government–community engagement.

► Synergy with SCEFI-funded projects: PCP worked closely with the iTaukei Affairs Board (TAB) in its efforts to conduct village profiling surveys in the target communities. The village profiling exercise is a TAB-led initiative, also funded by SCEFI, which is designed to gather a range of statistical information to provide better grounding for the design of Village Development Plans.

► Value of community baseline surveys: There is need for a baseline survey to be conducted in every community to develop understanding of village conditions, gather statistical information, and outline needs and concerns of people. Projects that are based on an up-to-date reading of the context can adjust their strategies to make them more targeted and effective. Village profiling can be a first step in developing Community Development Plans or Village Development Plans. Involvement of community representatives from various subsections of the community, including youth, women and the disabled, are critical since development plans without meaningful consultations can often increase tensions within sections of the community. Without proper consultations scarce resources also often go to waste.



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