

SCEFI EMBLEMATIC STORIES

The National Strategy:

Strengthening Leadership Capacities and Local Governance Structures To Adapt To A Modern Age



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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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The National Strategy

Strengthening Leadership Capacities and Local Governance Structures To Adapt To A Modern Age

SUMMARY

Traditional leaders across Fiji's iTaukei communities are in dire need of skills building and leadership training to cope with the governance challenges of a country at a crossroad between modernization and traditionalism. Given the similarities in the challenges facing Fiji's 14 provinces, a national approach to strengthen local level governance structures serves Fiji's interest best. In 2014, UNDP's Strengthening Citizen Engagement in Fiji Initiative (SCEFI) and the iTaukei Affairs Board, supported by Provincial authorities, began developing a National Strategy to strengthen local level governance structures. It aimed at equipping traditional leaders with competencies to adapt to fast-paced changes of modern times without compromising on values that makes the iTaukei unique. The initiative involved, among other things, developing a training curriculum and a national manual for local level leaders. The curriculum aimed at improving national and provincial level coordination of local initiatives, and "bringing back" social cohesion as a relevant factor in development planning. In 2015, the training was implemented in 24 villages in a pilot project.

INTRODUCTION

As state-led “good governance” demands place new pressures on local community leaders, skills and knowledge required to respond to such demands become increasingly complex. Many village headmen in Fiji experience difficulties in managing affairs of their communities in the face of changing societal circumstances. Poor leadership leads to wide ranging impacts on village development, succession planning and services delivery. The continued exclusion of women, young people and other vulnerable groups in traditional decision-making structures, for example, is resulting in increased rejection of cultural norms, alienation and emigration to urban centers. Lack of training for local leaders in areas such as financial literacy or conflict resolution make them more vulnerable to unethical influences, and their inability to make informed decisions on the sustainable utilization of communal resources. Given that local leaders are the “first port of call” for the resolution of community disputes or reconciliation processes, such deficiencies exacerbate disputes and threaten social cohesion of iTaukei communities across Fiji. This includes emerging tensions between young people and older generations, different Christian denominations, and even within family structures. It is therefore critical to find effective ways to strengthen community governance structures and leadership capacities in Fiji to foster greater inclusiveness and adapt to change.



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There is little or no training, however, to provide high quality support to village headmen and district representatives to develop critical competencies. Many communities, in fact, face high turnover rates for leadership positions because community leaders do not have confidence in their skills to respond to “new” and emerging needs in their communities. Local level leaders also report that they are unable to provide sound feedback to national authorities due to inadequate information-sharing systems. Information on local conditions therefore are not adequately communicated to higher level governance structures. Provincial leaders are convinced that strengthening leadership and governance capacities at the local level is critical to also restoring the social cohesion that was once the hallmark of iTaukei communities.

In 2014, with the support of UNDP's Strengthening Citizen Engagement in Fiji Initiative (SCEFI), the iTaukei Affairs Board (TAB) and provincial leaders began developing a strategy designed to equip local leaders with the information, knowledge and skills to become strong and competent leaders in the 21st Century (see Box 1). TAB and the Provincial Councils of Fiji are the statutory bodies which monitor all developments in Fiji's Provinces (see Box 2). The initiative was intended to strengthen governance capacities and structures at the local level by developing a strategic, national approach that would work for the country's best interest.



Photo Credit: UNDP

BOX 1. 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.

The highest executive authority at the provincial level in Fiji is vested in the *Roko Tui*, the executive head of any one of Fiji's 14 Provincial Councils, which is responsible for ensuring that local leaders are adequately trained to perform their assigned duties. In early 2014, SCEFI offered the *Roko Tu*s, the opportunity to submit project proposals which would enable them to enhance local governance capacities and structures, make them more responsive to community grievances, and enable them to be more accountable to the people they represented.



Photo Credit: UNDP

BOX 2. Who is responsible for Local Governance in Fiji

The iTaukei Affairs Board (TAB) and Fiji's 14 Provincial Councils are the statutory bodies, established under the iTaukei Affairs Act Chap. 120, to monitor developments in the provinces. They ensure that developments are in accordance with the policies and strategies formulated by the Government and, at the same time, advance the rights, interests, health, welfare peace, order and good governance of the iTaukei people at the national level. TAB and the Provincial Councils are responsible for liaising with community service providers and facilitating community needs to government.

TAB is the national government entity responsible for good governance and wellbeing of the iTaukei. The Provincial Councils provide "goods office to governmental bodies" and play a monitoring role in implementing government projects. They undertake village visits, mediate disputes of various types, convene dialogues, train and mentor local leaders and facilitate village development planning processes. The Provincial Councils also monitor and evaluate government projects in villages; work in an integrated manner with government departments, NGOs and funding agencies.

The highest executive authority at the provincial level is vested in the position of the *Roko Tui*. The *Roko Tui* and the Assistant *Roko Tu*s are experienced staff who are responsible for and have the authority to address *vanua* issues (issues pertaining to iTaukei communities). As part of their duties they facilitate and advise the *Bose Vanua* (meeting for traditional leaders of the districts or province) and are usually present when addressing issues pertaining to village development in meeting of the *Bose va Koro* (village council meetings).



Photo Credit: UNDP

A total of 11 proposals were submitted. The proposals revealed striking similarities, particularly in their focus on leadership capacity development needs for local level leaders. Before SCEFI's involvement, capacity-building initiatives to train local leaders were ad hoc at best, with no validated methodology or adequate capacity assessments. While TAB's training unit endeavored to provide training to the *Roko Tuis* and their assistants, resources were limited to conduct these types of training. Capacity-building initiatives, when they occurred, were decentralized and therefore the training levels of local leaders were uneven, their impacts impossible to measure.

SCEFI with its partners and stakeholders facilitated the development of a draft document which came to be known as "The National Strategy". The National Strategy document was, in essence, a proposal on how to strengthen local level leadership in Fiji and build social cohesion (see Box 3).

BOX 3. The National Strategy: Goals and Objectives

The National Strategy document is a proposal on strengthening local leadership and building social cohesion at the local level in Fiji. The following are its goals and objectives:

Goal: To maintain and strengthen resilient and socially cohesive iTaukei communities where people feel bonded to their communities and work to maintain peaceful and productive communities.

Objectives:

- ▶ **Improved decision-making and problem-solving:** Enabling better access to information with a data-gathering exercise to complete community profiles, and through skill-building in problem solving and peace building.
- ▶ **Improved service delivery:** Enhancing capacities of leaders and service providers on a range of topics and skills to ensure that they have the knowledge and capacities to carry out their duties, and ensure relevant services are provided in an equitable manner. The purpose is also to transform community leaders and prepare them as community mobilizers and agents of change, whilst preserving tradition and community values.
- ▶ **Strengthened community structures:** Ensure all community decision-making structures have clear Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) on processes such as succession plans and financial management procedures to ensure transparency and accountability of leaders. SOPs would delineate the responsibilities of different community structures, so that service providers could better understand the various community structures and how they worked.

PROCESS: COMMUNITY PROFILING, TRAINING CURRICULUM, AND A NETWORK OF COLLABORATORS

TAB and the SCEFI secretariat created a joint working group with all partners and stakeholders to design a pilot project in order to implement the National Strategy. This pilot project gave TAB the opportunity to redesign its community profiling tool, its curriculum on local level leadership and management, and carry out both initiatives through a pilot project in 24 villages in 14 provinces.

Community Profiling Tool

TAB already had in place a community profiling tool which enabled the collection of a great deal of quantitative data. The tool, however, did not collect data on community perceptions on a range of important social issues. The information collected was also not disaggregated by sex or age, making it difficult to identify differentiated impacts on different segments of the community.

At TAB's initiative, its village profiling exercise was included as part of the National Strategy. This not only provided TAB with access to UNDP's technical support to redesign the tool, but the data gathered through the TAB's village profiling efforts also contributed directly to building SCEFI's baseline information database. Moreover, if shared with other government ministries, civil society and donors, the collected data could potentially have significant impact on national level planning and policy development. Upon SCEFI's request, the draft of the National Strategy was modified to include opportunities for sharing the results of the survey with a broader group of stakeholders.



Photo Credit: UNDP

Village Profiling Exercise

Collaboration among TAB, Provincial Authorities and SCEFI enabled comprehensive revision of the community profiling tool. Consultations with provincial authorities helped identify information gaps in the profiling tool (see Box 4). Some of these gaps included:

- ▶ issues related to social cohesion
- ▶ leadership and local governance issues
- ▶ conflict resolution and problem-solving
- ▶ retention of cultural knowledge and practices
- ▶ data on specific issues, including: disaster mitigation and climate change adaptation; resources, environmental and waste management; youth-related issues; and land related issues

BOX 4. Questions To Develop A Comprehensive Community Profiling Tool

Provincial authorities provided a list of suggested questions based on different themes which would help cover the gaps in TAB's community profiling tool:

Social Cohesion

- What contributes to social cohesion in your village?
- What are some of the social cohesion practices in your village?
- What are your views on the different denominations and beliefs they bring into the village?
- Is external assistance to the village equitably distributed? If yes, give examples. If no, give examples.
- What kind of community would you like to live in 5-10 years' time?

Leadership and local governance

- Are the traditional leaders confirmed/installed (TM/TY/TV)?
- How often is your Tokatoka/Mataqali/Yavusa meeting?
- Do you ever see the minutes of village meetings?
- How is your relationship with your traditional leaders?
- Do your traditional leaders actively participate in village work?
- Have your leaders attended leadership/good governance training? If yes, did they implement the lessons learnt/principles? If no, have they asked for such training?
- Are village by-laws observed?
- Are all villagers registered in the VKB? Who is not? Why not?
- Do you think the leadership of the village know their roles and responsibilities?

Conflict resolution and problem-solving

- What processes does your community use to resolve disputes?
- How do you think the community conflict resolution processes could be improved?
- Do young people and women have the opportunity to engage in community problem-solving? How are they included? If not, why not?

BOX 4. Questions To Develop A Comprehensive Community Profiling Tool (ctnd.)

Retention of cultural knowledge and practices

- Do you know all the cultural practices/protocols of your village?
- Do you feel that your traditional leaders know the cultural practices adequately?
Give examples of where they are knowledgeable or where knowledge is weak.

Specific issues of concern

- What are some of the land issues that your community is dealing with?
- Do you feel your village is prepared for disaster? If yes, give examples. If no, explain why not.
- How committed is your village to its children's education? Why do you feel that way?
- How are women, youth and those living with disabilities being included in your conversations and your village development plans? Are their concerns taken into consideration? Do they have representation in your village committees?
How can you ensure they have a voice?

With SCEFI's support the survey instruments were revised to capture data on the information gaps. Once completed, the village profiling exercise was undertaken with the following steps:

- ▶ consultation meetings with 25 targeted communities to explain the endeavor and gain buy-in
- ▶ redesigning the profiling tool with broader consultation and review of other tools
- ▶ recruitment and training of 50 young people from targeted villages to conduct the exercise
- ▶ conducting the profiling exercise in 25 villages in 14 provinces
- ▶ collation of the information and analysis of data
- ▶ dissemination of information to various audiences
- ▶ incorporating findings into training curriculum

SCEFI committed funds to the Provincial Offices to cover direct costs related to the profiling exercise in the 25 target communities. SCEFI also convened a meeting where the results were shared with a broad group of stakeholders. The results from the profiling exercise and the information collated helped inform the development of the training curriculum.

The Training Curriculum

TAB had already developed a Leadership and Management Training programme for local leaders before its engagement with SCEFI. There were however no funds for its dissemination. Consultations with Provincial Authorities, NGOs and government agencies revealed that the training curriculum had major gaps which needed to be addressed if local leaders were to develop competencies to execute their responsibilities properly. More information and skill building were required in the following areas:

- ▶ leadership
- ▶ governance and community management
- ▶ disaster mitigation
- ▶ conflict resolution.

The *Roko Tuis* suggested that government agencies and the civil society organizations currently working on strengthening local level governance in rural areas should be included in the curriculum development process, to ensure that it benefited from their expertise.

A joint working group of stakeholders was set up to lead the redesign and testing of the curriculum. In a period of ten months, from June 2015 to April 2016, the team developed a Facilitator's Manual and Participant's Manual with inputs from a number of organizations (see Box 5). This collaborative approach ensured that development of the curriculum benefited from the expert feedback of many sectors.

BOX 5. A Broad Network Of Collaborators

The training curriculum that is part of the National Strategy benefitted from the inputs of many organizations which each contributed with their unique thematic expertise and experience working in Fiji's diverse communities. These organizations were:

- ▶ The iTaukei Affairs Board's Training Division and Provincial Services Division;
- ▶ The Citizen Constitutional Forum;
- ▶ Pacific Centre for Peace-Building;
- ▶ World Wildlife Fund;
- ▶ Live and Learn;
- ▶ UNDP's Pacific Risk Resilience Programme;
- ▶ National Disaster Management Office, Fiji;
- ▶ Fiji Locally Managed Marine Areas Network;
- ▶ Viseisei Sai Health Centre;
- ▶ Ministry of Health, Fiji;
- ▶ Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, Fiji;
- ▶ Fiji Disabled Peoples Federation;
- ▶ Virtues Project Fiji
- ▶ Westpac Banking Corporation
- ▶ UNDP's Strengthening Citizen Engagement in Fiji Initiative
- ▶ The Fiji Election Office;
- ▶ UNDP's Fiji Parliament Support Project

The process of developing the training curriculum provided space for rich discussions on what local level leaders needed to know, and how this could be imparted. The effort enabled local level leaders' access to a uniform training programme in good governance that enjoyed broad legitimacy, built from a wide range of contributions by multiple stakeholders and partners.

The training curriculum consisted of 10 thematic modules, each 1.5 hours in length, and would approximately take 26 hours to complete. The thematic modules were:

- ▶ Leadership Training for a Holistically Prosperous Community
- ▶ Good Governance and Leadership (2 sub-modules: Good Governance and Leadership)
- ▶ Natural Resource Management
- ▶ Conflict Management and Reconciliation (3 sub-modules: Key Concepts in Conflict, The Onion Model of Conflict and Forgiveness and Reconciliation)
- ▶ Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management
- ▶ Health, Wellness and Waste Management (2 sub-modules: Health and Wellness and Waste Management)
- ▶ Financial Literacy
- ▶ Equitable Service Delivery
- ▶ National Level Structures (2 sub-modules: Voter Education and Fiji Parliament)
- ▶ Social and Community Well Being (3 sub-modules: Social Protection, Serving those with Disabilities and Effective Parenting)



Photo Credit: UNDP

Pilot-testing the Curriculum

Piloting the training curriculum enabled the working group to evaluate its effectiveness, before advancing with a national implementation strategy. The National Strategy had envisioned that the training curriculum would be tested in 24 villages in 14 provinces across Fiji. The 24 villages were selected by the *Roko Tuis*, based on a set of criteria that they themselves developed in order to determine a representative sample of villages from across Fiji. The criteria for the selection of the targeted communities were:

- ▶ equal number of provinces per division
- ▶ locations with mixed accessibility
- ▶ inclusion of islands
- ▶ poverty data
- ▶ one village per *tikina*.

Both the community profiling and the training were conducted in the same 24 villages. The iTAB training team was involved in the pilot testing and liaised with the respective provincial *Roko Tuis* in the selection of the villages. Two SCEFI facilitators were also included in this exercise.

At the request of UNDP's Pacific Risk Resilience Programme (PRRP) and its implementing partner (Live & Learn Environmental Education), an initial field test was conducted in 7 villages in the province of Ba from 27 October – 5 November 2015. The pilot test in 24 villages in all 14 provinces took place from December 2015 through February 2016.

Following the 24 test runs of the curriculum, the SCEFI-TAB working group convened a follow-up meeting to discuss challenges and recommended revisions to the training programme. The recommendations primarily centered on how to further contextualize the information for the local *vanua* setting.

Once the suggested modifications were in place the team conducted a three day validation workshop with the *Roko Tuis* to ensure they understood the modification made to the programme. It was then edited, translated to iTaukei, and forwarded to the Permanent Secretary of the TAB. It is hoped that with the formal endorsement of Ministry the curriculum would, in time, be embedded as a budgeted programme of the Ministry, and disseminated to all 2000 iTaukei communities across the country.

RESULTS AND IMPACT

Ownership: The National Strategy is the result of a collaborative effort between the iTaukei Affairs Board and Ministry and several CSOs and partners driven by local ownership which generally informs this project. SCEFI support to the TAB Training Team developing their own Monitoring & Evaluation framework will add value to ownership and effective implementation.

Improving training capacities: The development of the curriculum impacted the manner in which TAB's training department's delivered its training. There is now greater appreciation of the importance of adopting interactive approaches. The experience helped upskill the TAB training team, as it members reported they learned better time management skills through the experience, as well as knowledge on a broad range of issues beyond their original core modules. According to them, the module on conflict resolution was particularly instructive and useful. The TAB training team also noted that they appreciated the value of having course evaluations to assess the impact of the training on the participants and the community as a whole.



Photo Credit: UNDP

Improved Government–CSO relationship: The space for dialogue between government and CSO actors that was created during the developing of the training curriculum led to discussion on issues particularly relevant for the iTaukei setting, their contextualisation and delivery methodologies. As discussions progressed, perceptions, beliefs and attitudes of both parties towards each other changed, from initial suspicion to increased empathy and collaboration. CSO partners, for example, reported that they developed a better understanding of the resource challenges of the TAB training team.

Increased awareness of the importance of inclusion: The curriculum's emphasis on the inclusivity of women, youth and those living with disabilities helped government and local leaders accept the importance of their inclusion in decision-making processes. The training fostered community discussions on development planning and there is now greater emphasis on enabling the concerns of the women, youth and those living with disabilities to be addressed in community forums. There is also new commitment among many traditional community leaders to listen to the concerns of vulnerable groups and address their concerns accordingly.

SCEFI-PRRP collaboration: Since Provincial Authorities requested the inclusion of climate change and disaster preparedness in the curriculum, SCEFI invited UNDP's Pacific Risk Resilience Program (PRRP) to participate in the development process. PRRP staff contributed two modules to the curriculum, and the collaboration enabled the two UNDP programmes to find synergies which enhanced the deliverables of both. The collaboration was also timely for PRRP which was already working in these communities.

LESSONS LEARNED

- ▶ Conducting a village profiling exercise is important to understanding village dynamics. Trainers are better able to tailor their messages and approach for the villages for which they had information derived from the profiling exercise. Understanding village dynamics and sensitivities, for example, enables trainers to develop more effective examples.
- ▶ The problems present in iTaukei communities are reflective of the lack of good leaders to deal with change. While capacity building and training of leaders occurred at the provincial and *tikina* levels, this has not trickled down to village level leaders to date. In many communities, the absence of effective leadership and long standing situations of disputes have made it impossible to sustain quality and equitable delivery of services to deal with changes brought about by modernity. Many traditional titles are vacant and have been for some time.
- ▶ In many villages, the presence of Christian churches with different denominations places pressure on their parish members, and comes in conflict with the *vanua* requirements and protocols. This leads to tensions within communities.

- ▶ Women's initiatives in villages play a lead role in ensuring stewardship of the environment, prioritizing education for children, implementing small income generating initiatives as well as keeping traditional crafts alive. Despite being important voices in their communities, many women still face barriers in getting their views heard in the traditional *vanua* setting. This curriculum is adapted to the local cultural context however an integrated gender and rights based perspective will benefit effective implementation in an inclusive way. A gender training for all *Roko Tuis* linking it to the Gender Policy introduced by the Ministry of Women and working in close association with the Ministry of Women would assist in bridging the gender disparity and encourage the reduction of barriers for women's voices to be heard.
- ▶ Young people in villages are not empowered to contribute in village meetings and share their concerns and there is a lack of space for them to participate in dialogue or decision making processes. Inclusive approaches for implementation taking into account women and youth perspectives and concerns will be critical for implementation.
- ▶ The collaboration among NGOs, SCEFI, TAB, the *Roko Tuis* and the Senior Assistant *Roko Tuis* enabled this initiative in many ways. It helped to ensure that training dates did not conflict with other village commitments and offered incentive for engagement and collaboration between Government and CSOs, as well as helping to create positive working relationships. Hope is that the relationships and inclusive processes strengthened through this process will be maintained to enable local governance structures adapting to the modern age.





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