

# Traditional Salt Crafting

Vusama Village  
Nadroga Province  
Fiji



## A Brief Ethnographic Portrait of the Vusama Community

In 2018, the Vusama Village Community formed a group consisting of 128 *iTaukei* individuals from 35 households. The village is located on a coastal ridge of the Rove Peninsula, on the southwest coast of Fiji's mainland of Viti Levu.

By language, social organization, and culture, the Vusama villagers belong to an original group of indigenous tribes, that settled on the current location some thousands of years ago. Linguistically, the community speak the local Nadroga-Navosa dialect of the *iTaukei* language, which is part of the Malayo-Polynesian language group<sup>1</sup>. Like most villages in Fiji, Vusama Village is headed by a *turaga-ni-koro* (government appointed village headman), is Christian dominated, and families are mostly patriarchal in structure. The men and women often marry outside the Vusama community.

Land ownership in Vusama Village is communal while agriculture, fishing, shellfish collection and raising livestock are the principal subsistence activities. In addition, hunting and gathering still play a role, although in a minimal way, in the lives of the Vusama community. The Vusama villagers are the original custodians of the traditional salt crafting. This is part of their unique identity. This cultural capital sets them apart from the rest of the *iTaukei* community in the country. However, lately this practice has been passed onto nearby Lomawai Village when one of the ladies from Vusama Village married a man from Lomawai.

The traditional salt makers of Vusama are the ones who received the traditional knowledge from their parents. Today, only four members of the older generation consisting of three men and a woman, who had practiced the art of traditional salt making with their parents some 50 years ago are still alive. In the 1950s, each household owned a *matoji* ('well') on the *māqa* ('barren land') and a salt making workshop. Historically, the salt was acquired through the barter system of trade or gifts to high-ranked Chiefs residing in other parts of Fiji for its distinct taste and properties.



Step 1: A suitable place for the *matoji* on the *māqa* is identified.



Step 2: The *matoji* is dug approximately 6 feet and left to be filled with seawater percolating from underground.



Step 3: After a day, the seawater is then collected from the *matoji* in a container or the pot directly.



1 Voegelin, C. F. and Voegelin, F. M. 1964. Anthropological Linguistics. Vol 6. No 4. Archives of Language of the World. Anthropology Department. Indiana University.



Step 4: The seawater is then boiled in open fire from the *dogo* (mangrove wood) which is used as fuel.



Step 5: The salt residues left after boiling are collected in a basket weaved out of coconut leaves.



Step 6: The salt residues are then placed in tin containers and left for drying, either using the heat from the sun or hot stones.



Step 7: Once dried, the tin is cut, and the hardened salt is obtained.



Step 8: The basket to hold the hardened salt is weaved using the flesh of young *dogo* roots.



Step 9: The salt bars are then placed in the baskets and hung from the ceilings of the houses to maintain longer shelf life.



Empowered lives.  
Resilient nations.

# ACCELERATOR LAB PACIFIC

## Acknowledgement

- Vusama Village Community
- Nadroga-Navosa Provincial Council
- Nadroga-Navosa Provincial Office
- UNDP Ridge-to-Reef (R2R) Project Team
- Johannes Schunter and Zainab Kakal (Editing and Picture Credit)
- Nadroga-Navosa Yaubula Management Support Team
- Nadroga Rugby Union

For more information and for a comprehensive step-by-step process of traditional salt crafting by the Vusama Village, please contact Mohseen Riaz Ud Dean, Head of Community Research and Ethnographic Solutions Mapping, UNDP Accelerator Lab Pacific.

Level 8, Kadavu House  
414 Victoria Parade  
Private Mail Bag, Suva, Fiji  
Phone: +679 331 2500  
Email: [acclabpacific@undp.org](mailto:acclabpacific@undp.org)

© Copyright  
2020