

Reclaiming Identity for Sustainable Futures

Culturally Grounded Development
Approach in Nasautoka Village

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Introduction

- US Fulbright Hubert Humphrey Cultural Exchange 2021-22
- Development of a comprehensive village development plan for Nasautoka Village



**Humphrey
Fellowship**

A Fulbright Exchange Program

Common Concern for Development

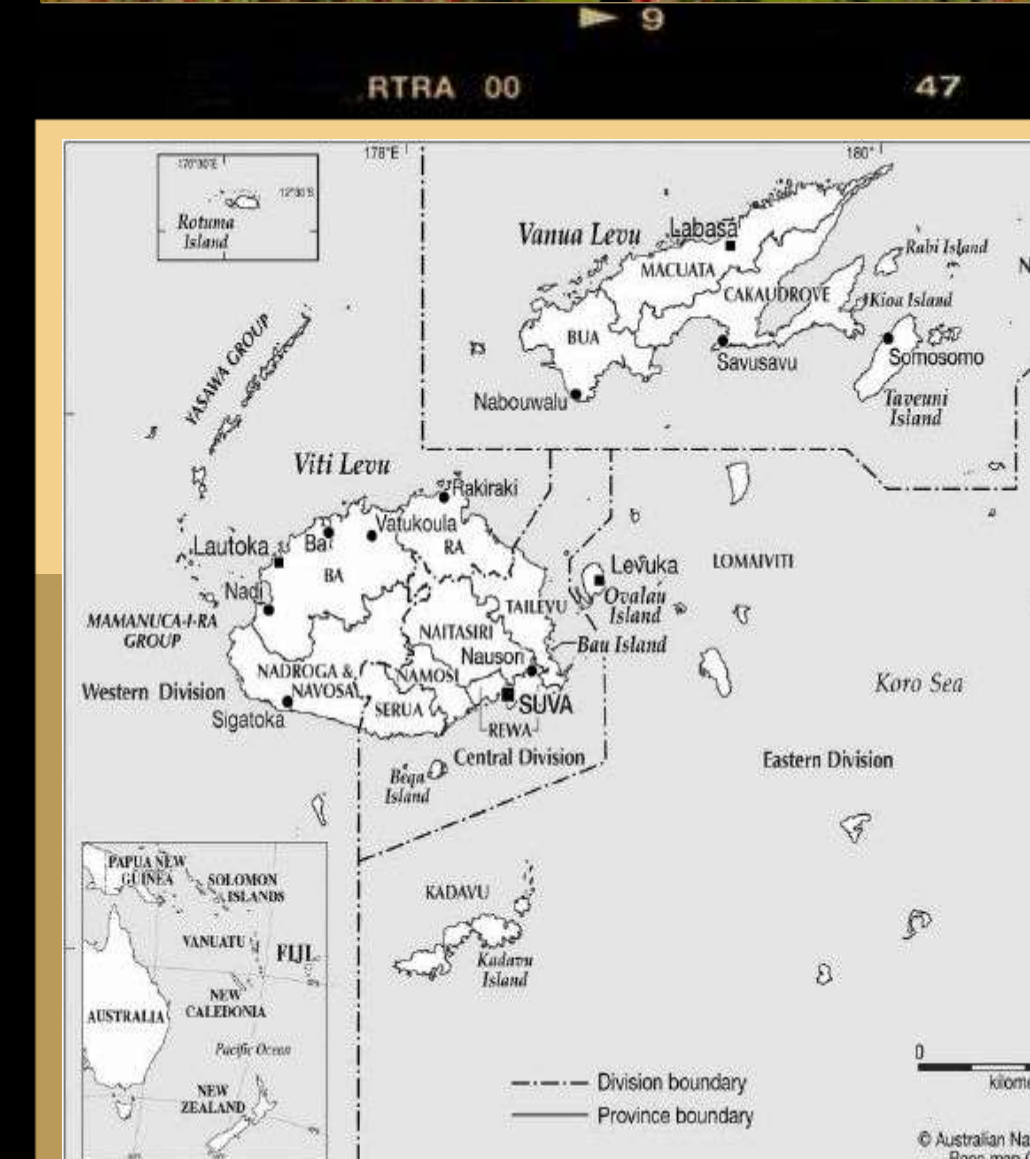
Failure to achieve sustainable and equitable outcomes for indigenous communities.

- External models are inappropriate
- Cultural frameworks are ignored
- Limited success



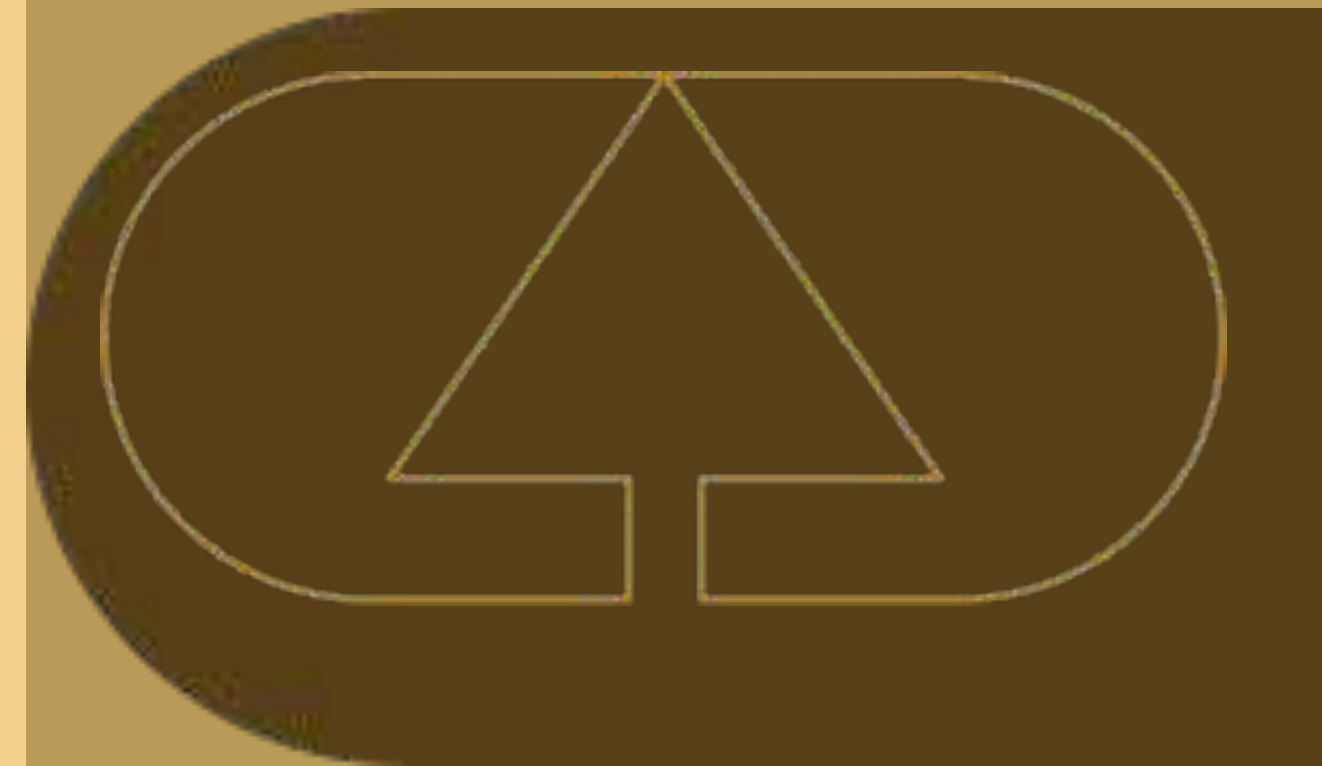
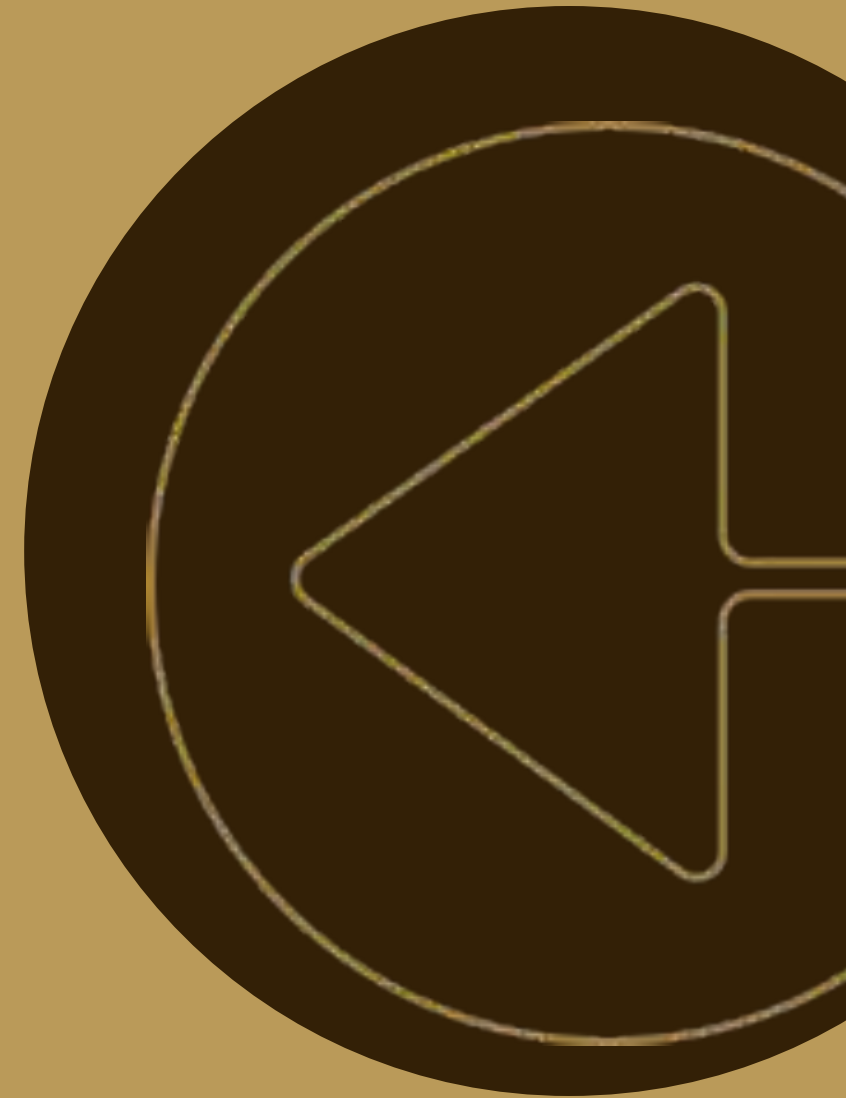
Case Study : Nasautoka Village

- Located in the province of Tailevu on the main island of Viti Levu
- The Vanua of Nasautoka is run by a hierarchy chiefly system
- The population of rural Nasautoka villages is made up of over three hundred people, with a distribution of roughly 44% Male and 56% Female.
- Population age ranges from approximately 70-18 and 19-35. with a youth population of 50%.
- Nasautoka Fiji Tourism started in 2011 by the village youth group.



Question

How can development planning for indigenous communities be effectively grounded in their unique cultural identity to foster sustainable and responsible growth?



Literature Review

- **Problem:** Top-down development models frequently fail to achieve sustainable and equitable results for Indigenous communities globally.
- **Root Cause:** These models often overlook or undermine unique cultural frameworks, traditional knowledge, and social structures.
- **Consequence:** This leads to a disconnect between the development project and the community's needs, resulting in limited success and potential cultural erosion.
- Scholars like Arturo Escobar and Linda Tuhiwai Smith argue that "development" can be a neocolonial tool that imposes Western ideals and marginalizes Indigenous ways of knowing.

Methodology: A Participatory & Mixed-Methods Approach

PHASE 1

Foundational Research (2021-22)

- **Methods:**
 - Fulbright Hubert Humphrey Fellowship research.
 - Desk research and collation of existing data.
- **Key Data Sources:**
 - iTaukei Affairs records.
 - Village census data.



Methodology: A Participatory & Mixed-Methods Approach

PHASE 2

Community Led data Collation

- Facilitated Focus Groups.
- Participants: 8-10 members from key village committees (Development, Business, Culture & Tradition, Natural Resources Management, Education, Faith Based).
- Guiding Questions:
 1. What are the key challenges and issues facing our village today?
 2. What are the root causes of these challenges?
 3. What do you think are the solutions to these problems?



Results & Outcome

- **Finding :** A need to re-emphasize the iTaukei identity
- **Core Principle:** Identity is rooted in the interconnected pillars of Lotu (faith), Vanua (land and people), and Matanitu (governance).
- **Outcome:** A deep understanding of this connection is fundamental for fostering strong community bonds and driving sustainable practices, particularly in tourism and agriculture.
- **Practical Application:** These findings are now integrated into the Nasautoka Strategic Development Plan 2025-2030, guiding all developmental undertakings.



Discussion & Implications

- Theoretically grounded in Ratu Sukuna's "three-legged stool" concept.
- The late Chief Ratu Semi Seruvakula books—*Bula Vakavanua* and *Na Veiwekani ena Vanua*—provide ethnographic and philosophical insights, an invaluable "previous research" for an Indigenous-centric approach.



Three Key Takeaways

1. Indigenous Identity is the Foundation for Sustainable Development.
2. Methodology Matters - From "Research On" to "Research With".
3. Sustainable Tourism requires a New Definition of Success.

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Vinaka Vakalevu
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