

Navigating our Futures Together

Our Pacific Leadership Journey

NA TIMI VITI

October 2014

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*The sun has set on Vuda Bay
I sit, I stare, I admire in awe
The vastness of the ocean
The greatness of the sky
I feel the breeze, with salt from the sea
I know I'm safe, I am at home.*

*Towards Lautoka, I travelled
Through fields of canes, raw and burned
I paused to smell the sweet scent
I kneeled to kiss the soil, so warm, so dear.*

*Degei, pardon but carry me
As I walk the soils of Vunikoka
Alas, I feel the spirits of warriors
Upon I stand on grounds of their blood.*

*I call you Dakuwaqa
Come, pave the waters to Labasa
Where Turukawa, will fly me
Over the valleys of Urata.
I watched the water ambush the River*

*Oh, Viti, your palm trees, green pastures, leaves
Flutter like birds
You whispered, here's your garland
Its perfume has rocked the air
Yes they sing their happy songs
Proud of wisdom of a thousand years*

*Here, I call you from Vila
Come, hold my gaze
I stretch my arms, come lift me.*

*I've drunk the waters of Yaqara
Walked the flood of Labi
I found you in Noumea
I found me, I found us.*

*Hold my hand, and we paddle
With our past and present
Entering our future.*

SisiunoHelu
EPLD Fiji 2014

Emerging Pacific Leaders Dialogue 2014 (EPLD) is a programme aimed at connecting and developing future leaders from countries and territories across the Pacific. The programme brings together emerging leaders from diverse fields and from across the region, and focuses on the significance of leadership across areas including economic, social and community development; regional co-operation and infrastructure; governance and security; the environment; as well as education and health. The conference opened in Noumea, New Caledonia, with approximately 90 people. These separated into 8 study tour groups looking at these issues in more in depth in the context of a particular part of the Pacific. This is the report of 'Na Timi Viti', the Fiji Study Tour Group, on leadership in Fiji and our own leadership journey throughout this programme.

Background

Our approach

The concept of a distinctive 'Pacific leadership' style was discussed during the plenary in Noumea. These discussions gave us an initial framework for reflecting on leadership in Fiji, and some of the ideas that emerged can be seen reflected in our findings. However, we did not confine ourselves to these, and our conclusions are instead based on the values that stood out to us most strongly in our Fiji experience.

Going into the tour, we identified the following principles that guided our approach to visits:

- **Gratitude:** for the opportunity to be on the programme, and for the generous sharing of knowledge.
- **Openness:** to new perspectives and learnings, regardless of our different preconceptions of leadership.
- **Humility:** an awareness of the limits of our knowledge, and our position as 'outsiders' to many of the challenges faced.
- **Strengths focus:** identifying existing strengths within every organization we visited.

With these principles in mind, we respectfully offer our observations and suggestions from our brief view of Fiji, and share own leadership journeys, shaped by our Fiji experience.

Fiji context

The indigenous people of this region were skilled navigators of the sea. Arriving by canoe, they named their home Fiji. Figuratively, Fiji is a ship, sailing a Pacific story.

The sea helped shape the culture, nourish the people and establish a civilisation. People continued to come from other lands and Fiji's story grew to include British colonisation. In 1970, following 181 years of British colonial rule, the people of Fiji took back the helm of their nation. In the 44 years since Independence it has not all been smooth sailing. Fiji has had to contend with natural disasters, political upheaval and substantial social adjustment.

Fiji has grown to be a central hub of the Pacific Islands countries. It is a country abundant with natural resources, the most valuable of which is its people and its unique culture. Fiji has been through different forms of leadership but all strive towards their vision of a better future.

Today, Fiji is led by a democratically elected government following the first general elections since the 2006 coup. Fiji has since been reinstated as a full member of the Commonwealth, and the ban by the Pacific Island Forum has been lifted. Fiji continues on its journey and, for now, the winds appear more favourable and the seas calm.

Programme of visits

During our Fiji Study Tour we had the opportunity to engage with the organisations and speakers listed in the table below. All those we visited and heard from have had a huge impact on our understanding of Fiji and our ideas about leadership.

Organisation or individual	Brief synopsis
Naziah Ali, publisher	Naziah is an EPLD alumni, who among other achievements is the publisher of Mai Life magazine.
Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC), Lautoka Mill	Lautoka Mill is one of four state-owned sugar mills in Fiji. Sugar cane processing was once one of the top in a largely agriculture-based economy, however, a decline in sugar cane production caused by uncertainty over land rights has caused decline in the industry, and it has been plagued by management issues. The Lautoka Mill is still recovering and the industry is heavily subsidised by Government.
South Sea Orchids (SSO)	South Sea Orchids (a family owned business) produces and sells floral plants (primarily orchids) to local florists and providing an out-grower program which provides seedlings and technical assistance to women and families in the surrounding area, providing them with the skills to grow and to generate income from that. A 'living museum' is also present at the home-based business site.
Koroipita Rota Homes, Model Town project	This project, driven by Peter Drysdale, provides affordable permanent housing for homeless and disadvantaged families in the surrounding area. The model town community includes kindergartens, shops, library resources and training facilities, and a waste management system; and encourages self-sufficiency through growing food and other useful plants.
Foundation for Rural Intergrated Enterprises and Development (FRIEND)	FRIEND is an NGO that works to link the opportunities and resources to empower marginalized communities for economic and social sustainability. It supports employment for deaf young people, and supports small scale production.
Fiji Water	Fiji water is a large producer of bottled water that has built a huge export market around the world. The water comes from a natural aquifer.
Vunikoka Eastgate Farm	Vunikoko farm is a highly self-sufficient farm project that incorporates a hydro-pump for water irrigation and hydro-power to run its operations. The farm has sheep, cattle, and vegetables.
Robin Yarrow	TITLE?? Guest speaker at lunch at Vunikoko farm.
Adi Cakobau School (ACS)	ACS is a boarding school founded on the premise of providing "refined" intermediate education to girls of rank. Now it has become a full-fledged secondary school for girls with excellent marks and social involvement.
President Ratu Epeli Nailatikau	Special Guest at cocktail function.
Flour Mills of Fiji (FMF) Ltd, biscuit factory	FMF has several subsidiary companies, one of the most significant of which produces biscuits for local and international consumption. It produces cream biscuits for other brands such as Griffins and several supermarket home brands, as well as its own in brands.
Pure Fiji	Pure Fiji produces a line of natural beauty products that, as well as being sold to individual buyers, supply many of the top hotels in Fiji.
Navua Crab Farm	A pilot program set to grow the mud crab industry set in the backyard of Navua. The vision is to partner with selected villages to set up industry standards in production and outputs in Fiji for exporting
Corrections department, Yellow Ribbon Project, Naboro Prison	Reintegration of offenders back into the community through awareness for the need of second chance, generate acceptance and to inspire the community.
J Hunter Pearls	Based in Fiji's second largest island, the pearl farm through community partnership, innovative scientific methods and environmentally sound practices are able to produce and harvest unique and prized pearls
Nukutoso Copra Farm	Another one of Fiji's oldest industry, copra, Nukutoso copra farm maintains that manual making of its product by removing the shell, breaking it up and drying followed by depositing its product to the mill factory
Copra Millers Processing Facility	A largely subsidized government operation, the processing facility buys from local copra farms. It is one of the two larger local manufacturers of crude coconut oil which it exports overseas

**Ministry of Fisheries and Forestry,
Tilapia Fish Farm Project (Savusavu)**

A government run project it aims to provide sustainability and economic growth to interested growers by providing the technical assistance and seedlings.

Observations

Sustainable Economic Growth and Business

We were able to see clear strengths in the approaches of Fiji industries that allow for sustainable economic growth. Many utilise Fiji's rich natural resources as a commodity: its water (Fiji water), agriculture (FSC, Copra, South Sea Orchids), aquaculture (Navua Crab farm, J Hunter Pearls, fisheries support) and traditional knowledge (Pure Fiji, Taki Mai kava beverages). The emphasis placed on resourcefulness and the need to 'look to our own backyard' to create economic growth encourages innovation and allows economic development that is resilient to changing markets (reducing supply costs and encouraging diversification) for both large and small scale enterprises (South Sea Orchids and FRIEND). The associated use of local suppliers ensures more of the economic growth 'trickles down'. Several businesses go further and have successfully leveraged Fiji's positive international image as a pristine island as a selling point to reach a higher value market both locally and internationally (in particular Pure Fiji and Fiji Water). This positive 'Fiji' brand has shown resilience to international uncertainty around the political situation.

We saw that several of the most successful businesses maintained high standards far above any minimum bottom line. These included standards of community engagement and contribution (FMF, Pure Fiji, South Sea Orchids), hygiene (Fiji Water), quality control (Navua Crab farm, J Hunter Pearls), and environmental responsibility (Fiji Water). This appeared to be driven by leadership that had clear values and emphasised discipline in achieving those values. In some, the sense of giving back to the community was a strong part of their model for growth (South Sea Orchids, FRIEND), or were so valued that they took precedence over economic growth (Pure Fiji).

There was a strong sense of opportunities for further growth within many of the existing markets, with many successful companies not yet filling their demand (Fiji Water, Pure Fiji, FMF, South Sea Orchids and Navua Crab Farm). However, there was also evidence of some innovation and diversification leading to discovery of new markets and greater resilience (Taki Mai kava beverage, as discussed by Robin Yarrow).

While the 'Fiji' brand is a clear strength and there is opportunity for greater use of this brand to increase value of Fiji-sourced products, it appeared that current high quality and environmental standards are predominantly self-imposed by businesses. While development of new businesses utilising the reputation of quality Fiji products is a good thing, new businesses that do not share similar values and standards could undermine all businesses that rely on that image (Fiji Water, J Hunter Pearls). Stronger regulation of bottom lines in these areas may be useful to ensure that new businesses maintain and do not damage the reputation that has been built by others.

Further, environmental degradation through poor land management, waste disposal and natural disasters poses a large threat to both the availability of resources and also to the sustainability of businesses that rely on the 'pristine Fiji' image. Therefore in particular strong environmental protection principles are needed to ensure sustainability and growth of higher value markets.

Two cornerstone industries of Fiji's economy that we visited – sugar cane and copra – have both suffered from depleting supplies as people have moved away from production, in part due to insecurity of land. Both these industries are currently propped up by government, and there is a question whether they are sustainable in their current form. Support from government appears to focus primarily on sustaining the current industry at lower levels.

However, greater investment could help to creatively develop higher value products (for example, refined and packaged sugar; virgin coconut oil) that can allow the industry to regain self-sufficiency and also ensure more of the added value trickles down to the primary producers in Fiji. This may require options for greater investment in these areas to be explored by government.

Difficulty of raising investment in new or growing businesses is a further barrier to growth (Navua Crab Farm). The Global Financial Crisis led to reduced availability of international investment. In addition, international investors are reluctant to invest in the face of uncertainty of land rights and international criticism of the political situation. The recent elections may prove to renew international investor faith in Fiji, but this is yet to be seen. It will be important for Fiji to demonstrate a strong commitment to human rights and democracy in the immediate future to ensure a positive international reputation is solidified.

Community Development

The non-profit organisations we visited were united by a genuine compassion for others. Many of the flourishing organisations work in collaboration with people in need, aiming to alleviate poverty. Some of the partnerships include organisations resourcing the community with skills to foster self-sufficiency (FRIEND) and highlighting “the potential of (utilising) what is in your backyard...you can make money at no cost to you” (Aileen, speaking of South Sea Orchid’s ‘living museum’). A necessity for ‘discipline’ and conforming to organisation rules and guidelines is also enforced by some community groups (South Sea Orchid, Koroipita Model Town) which has resulted in positive progress and outcomes. Additional informal community supports have been provided by businesses supporting self-sufficiency (such as Eastgate Farm supporting village access to a local water supply). Some organisations also provide supports aimed at improving access to basic needs including safe and secure shelter, a sense of community, and education (Koroipita Model Town). A number of governmental organisations provide support to alleviate poverty (Ministry of Fisheries and Forestry, Savusavu prawn farming) and support a sense of community (Yellow Ribbon Corrections Department supporting community reintegration of offenders).

Community organisations have faced a number of challenges including withdrawal of core funding (Australia and New Zealand aid), and natural disasters (such as a cyclone in 2012). Despite this challenge, the majority of organisations have displayed resilience through re-building and continuing their activities without losing momentum. Sustainability is also a significant threat to community development, as many of the organisations appear to be driven by the founder and/or leading pioneer with limited succession planning in place. While some of the community development organisations applied a collaborative approach, some focused on a more directive and authoritative structure. Our group reflected that the latter may hinder genuine empowerment, potentially impacting on future engagement with priority community groups.

There appeared to be room for stronger strategic planning across the sector and the development of structures to ensure sustainability for the future. For example, the development of an organisational capability framework may be useful for assessing each organisation’s current capability, funding, and support (mentoring and experience coaching) enabling them to become stronger, more integrated and more sustainable. This could involve encouraging greater collaboration, strengthening relationships, and building a sustainable culture of continuous improvement, supported by mentoring, sharing of knowledge and experience, and collaborative problem solving. In addition, access to secure funding by enhancing regional cooperation, and an enhanced awareness and implementation of genuine empowerment principles to reduce potential alienation of communities in need.

Youth development and education

Our visit to AdiCakobau School (ACS) showed a very highly regarded public school that took a holistic approach to education, recognising the role that today's youth will play in Fiji's future, and actively working towards developing women as well-rounded future leaders. This demonstrated strong education opportunities for young women that were accessible to all. Other organisations we visited also put an emphasis on community education as part of their operations, including specific education for children and adolescents (Koroipita Model Town); education for business purposes in order to ensure quality, reliable suppliers (South Sea Orchids); and community education to support prisoner reintegration (Yellow Ribbon). These showed that many actors recognised and placed importance on education and access to education in long term poverty alleviation and in sustainable village life, as well as in developing sustainable business using local suppliers.

However, in some areas – particularly the agriculture sector – there is a disconnect between the desire of young people regarding career choices and employment opportunities, with farming not being viewed as a respected career choice. While some incentives have been put in place to encourage training in this area, there was a sense that this is not enough, and a greater culture-shift is needed in the way that agriculture is perceived. An integrated approach, utilising incentives along with social marketing and profiling of successful and innovative farmers could be useful in addressing this.

Environment and climate change

Environmental management, in particular climate change, is one of the most pressing issues facing small island developing states and Fiji is no exception. Environmental degradation imposed naturally and exacerbated by human influence has already placed pressure on the resources and livelihoods.

Across our visits we saw commitment to environmental integrity. Every sector we visited has put in place measures to ensure sustainable use of resources and some sound environmental practices. In many industries effective strategies have been developed to safeguard and ensure integrity and resilience of natural ecosystems, for example, the government has invested in reviving the sugar cane industry partly because cane is a resilient crop and not likely to be impacted by climate change. In addition, some small scale industries such as copra farming, cut flowers (South Sea Orchid) and aquaculture (tilapia, prawn and pearl farms) have successfully implemented best environmental practices that enhance the resilience of natural ecosystems.

We were excited to see innovative new practices demonstrating that businesses and towns can grow without compromising environmental sustainability. For example, systems to recycle and separate biodegradable and other household waste (Koroipita Rota Home Model Village), recycling kava remains to make paper for cards that are biodegradable (FRIEND) and use of hydro generated power (Vunikoka Farm).

In more established industries, there was evidence of heightened environmental awareness. For example, Fiji Water has worked to decrease the amount of plastic in their bottles and overall reduce product emissions, as well as increase their use of renewable energy to offset emissions; and FMF has participated in the national "One Million Trees" campaign to offset emissions. Within government, the Ministry of Fisheries and Forestry continues to work with traditional land owners to establish marine protected areas for conservation and breeding of endangered species that are rapidly depleting.

While sound frameworks have been developed, there appears to be some resistance likely due to existing mindsets. In cane farms, burning is still common although it has proven to be a major contributing factor to stripping soil of its nutrients and increasing the chances of extreme soil erosion. Community engagement and education has increased awareness of these environmental issues, however more needs to be done to change ingrained practices and give practical alternatives.

Enforcement of proper waste management systems allowing waste reduction and sanitation remains a major concern, as well as impacts of climate change (sealevel rise, flooding, and droughts) have been identified as significant barriers to the development of industries. Cyclones and floods have caused setbacks (J Hunter Pearls), and salt water intrusion has affected copra production (Copra Farm). Droughts impact greatly on agriculture and in sugar and other farms.

Governance and regional cooperation

Governance in Fiji has been disrupted by a series of coups since 1987. Last month, the first elections since the 2006 coup were held, under the newly adopted 2013 Constitution. These elections reinstated Prime Minister Voreqe Bainimarama, now with a democratic mandate to replace the military rule of the last 8 years. While it has been criticized by some groups, President Ratu Epeli Nailatikau spoke proudly about the 2013 constitution, which he reported shows a commitment to democracy, moves away from the race-based electoral system that existed previously, and includes a broad bill of rights that encompasses some social and economic rights.

During Fiji's military rule, regional co-operation was compromised, with Fiji being excluded from the Commonwealth, from engagement with the Pacific Islands Forum, and from PACER Plus negotiations. Despite this, Fiji has remained active in global and regional governance bodies: it made history by being the first country of the Pacific to chair the biggest bloc of the United Nations, the G77 plus China; and for two years it chaired the Melanesian Spearhead Group. Many regional organisations, such as SPC, have continued to operate in Fiji. The recent elections represent a step forward for regional cooperation in Fiji, with reacceptance back into the Commonwealth and the lifting of the ban from PIF.

Health

Health was not a direct subject of any of the visits, however, the subject permeated every visit in some way. We saw that businesses were strengthened when they achieved synergies between health outcomes and business objectives (FMF flour fortification to reduce anaemia; Pure Fiji promotion of healthy lifestyle), and that organisations were strengthened when they recognized the relationship between health and their own objectives (ACS embrace a holistic framework to ensure success of their students; Yellow Ribbon used constructive work, spiritual guidance and programs for anger management and stress relief to transform inmates). Some individuals and organisations also directly promoted health messages and programmes as part of their core activities (the President himself is an ambassador for HIV/AIDS prevention; FRIEND provides a free program that assists those in poverty with chronic illness).

Workplace health and safety was a clear issue in some industries, and a shift in diet towards processed foods was identified as challenge facing Fiji. Some measures had been implemented by businesses to address associated health issues (FMF reducing sugar and salt in food products), but this needs to be accompanied by further social messaging.

Arts, Culture, Religion

In the Fijian society, tradition and association with historical events, is frequently conveyed with the use of symbolic articles or metaphors to depict the roles played by various characters in navigating from the past through the present times. The strength in the use of religious and traditional symbols lies in its ability to unite people in both a consistent moral framework and in a shared historical context. It helps people to identify and so understand the purpose of conforming or working towards a stipulated common goal.

The sevusevu (a formal traditional Fijian welcome) conveys the rich history that is still part of the Fijian culture today. South Sea Orchid showed generations of connection with the country and with a colonial history through the display

of antique household items including photos, books, furniture and handicrafts. We witnessed a Hindu festival (Diwali) that showed the cultural diversity in Fiji. A refocus on traditional values through metaphor was used effectively by the Yellow Ribbon project - the 'three legged stool' used to represent the three founding pillars of Pacific societies – culture, family and religion – formed the basis of their rehabilitation program and allowed them to explain the cultural and moral underpinnings of their program to participants and communities.

Our team have recognised the power of symbolism and shared culture and have incorporated this important facet of leadership into our presentation. The group devised a dance in which the movements are based on our shared history drawn from our experiences on our tour of Fiji. The concept for the dance is drawn from the diverse cultural backgrounds of Fiji incorporating the traditional Meke and Indo-Fijian celebratory dances. The particular actions depicted in our dance represent the various organisations and companies visited. The dance is an expressive form of art and intended to be symbolic. The process of creating the dance was as important as its execution. The dance demonstrates that although a leader must be strong and knowledgeable, they must also be collaborative and inclusive. There are several significant lessons about leadership that came from this process; lessons such as conveying a shared vision, group coordination, giving and receiving instructions, and motivating and supporting others.

Key Themes

Six main themes drawn from our observations and interactions in Fiji were identified as relevant to our Pacific leadership journey, as follows:

Bulavakayalo (spirituality) A fundamental dimension essential for overall wellbeing and prosperity was often referred to in terms of religious faith. In the broader sense spirituality also explored relationships with the environment, between people, and with cultural heritage and sense of belonging. Strength in this dimension was observed through wellness, and a secure personal identity.

Nomu rai (vision) The leaders in charge of successful and sustainable organisations had a clear vision and objectives related to what they wanted to achieve and where that organisation should be in the future: "know your values and know what you're trying to do" (Harry Punja, FMF). Not only did successful leaders know where they were going, but they also knew how to bring people along with them.

Varokoroko&dokaikoya (respect & discipline) Reference was made to a willingness to show consideration and appreciation through respect and discipline, and more specifically the self-discipline required to achieve the vision. An example of the latter was expressed in the aim of the Yellow Ribbon project:

"We aspire to be captains in the lives of offenders committed to our custody. We will be instrumental in steering them towards being responsible citizens with the help of their families and the community. We will thus build a secure and exemplary prison system" (Yellow Ribbon project).

This concept involves one's ability to act in accordance with rules, and a commitment to values, building character and inspiring those around you.

Veilomani (compassion) A common theme represented by the majority of organisations was of a deep sympathy for others facing misfortune. It was not uncommon for industries to highlight their strong desire to alleviate suffering (specifically social issues) before economic growth. Such priorities were identified as "a labour of love" (Pure Fiji) where providing secure employment for the community and a sense of identity and family within the industry were of importance. This humanity-based approach ingrained in the Fiji and wider Pacific culture fosters kindness,

sympathy, benevolence, generosity and a non-judgmental attitude. This is reflected in this statement written on the entrance wall to Naboroprison:

“In here we have a husband, a brother, a father, or a son” (Yellow Ribbon project, Department of Corrections).

Talanoa (story) The process refers to open discussion usually around a kava bowl and facilitated by that process. It is not restricted by western structure (for example, not avoiding the use of an agenda but rather providing an opportunity for open communication). A number of principles can be related to Talanoa including interconnectedness, togetherness, collaboration, inclusiveness (of all cultures within Fiji) and reciprocity, a process of giving and taking mutually.

Dauvosota (resilience) This theme was observed in the capacity of individuals, communities and organisations of Fiji to withstand stress and catastrophe. We observed an ability to adapt, overcome risk and adversity, and rebuild lives even after devastating tragedies (such as natural disasters) and political instability. This included perseverance and determination to continue despite difficulty or delay in achieving success and also resourcefulness with the ability to overcome challenges utilising creative solutions: “look around you” (Aileen, South Sea Orchids).

Concluding comments

Our Pacific journey through pristine landscape of Fiji has shaped our views of leadership. In reflection of the categories and key themes identified during our observations

Na Timi Viti would like to acknowledge all individuals, community groups and organisations, and sponsors who contributed to our leadership journey. We thank you for your time, patience and commitment to supporting our development.

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