

Social Capital and Vanua: Challenges to Governance Development in a Community-Based Natural Resource Management Project in Cuvu Tikina, Fiji Islands

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Indigenous Fijians believe that survival of their culture is inextricably linked to their position as land and resource owners. This is summed up in the dual meaning of the term 'vanua', which literally means land but also symbolizes the cultural and socio-political traditions of the people. These traditions form the basis of Fiji's natural resource management system and the production of social capital in Fijian villages. Due to legally recognized resource tenure and the communal nature of village living, Fiji has been a popular site for community-based natural resource management projects (CBNRM). The aim of these projects is to empower local communities and leaders with knowledge and resources to improve the management and governance of their natural resources. Despite a significant amount of time and effort put into governance development, many CBNRM initiatives fail to achieve their goals.

The purpose of this study is to identify challenges faced by Partners in Community Development-Fiji in implementing governance development activities during the Coral Gardens Initiative in Cuvu Tikina from 1999-2003 and to also explain why these challenges emerged during the project. Using the framework of analytic ethnography, data gained through PCDF's project documents, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation are used to identify and explain the challenges. Ten challenges are identified that show how the interactions between key players affected, and continue to alter, the results of the project. These challenges were created by a combination of influences including PCDF's approach, pre-existing social tensions amongst the stakeholders, and cultural and location-specific constraints. The impact of pre-existing social capital and how the project affected this social capital is also examined. Seven specific recommendations are offered to CBNRM facilitators and village participants, including the importance of understanding community dynamics, building strong internal and external networks, utilizing the pre-existing governance institutions, and using an asset-based approach.