

RESTORATION OF KUTA WETLANDS OF MACUATA
SITE VISIT REPORT – 29TH JULY 2ND AUGUST, 2019



Na Turaga na Taukei Buca Ratu Eremasi Matana from the Village of Navakasobu in Seaqaqa stands beside the Laulevu Kuta Pond –

"Harvesting the kuta by picking the kuta reads instead of chopping off the kuta reads from the plants helps maintain the general health of the Kuta farm. This is the traditional process of harvesting that was practiced in the past by our ancestors" The traditional method has to be preserved at all times "...

End of Quote - Ratu Eremasi Matana – Taukei kei Buca

***Ms. N. Tuvuki
Senior Craft Development Officer
9th August, 2019***

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BRIEF REPORT

1.0 BACKGROUND

It is evident that the Kuta ponds in Macuata are diminishing because of agricultural and development of infrastructure which has affected its kuta wetlands. The wetlands are a huge part of their environment and its preservation and longevity is of very much importance because these are habitats of kuta plants which are widely used by the traditional weavers of the Vanua o Macuata.

The district of Macuata consists of fifteen (15) villages that have their Kuta Ponds or marshes which the women have been harvesting from for the past decades to weave their kuta Mats as a form of income generating to their families and meeting their Vanua or Church obligations.

The kuta mats is significant to the Vanua O Macuata and is their identity and treasured possession. *"Over recent years, the marshes have been depleted and re-planting has not been as successful as we hoped due to many factors, a major one being Climate Change"....* as mentioned by the Turaga Bale na Tui Macuata, Ratu Wiliame Katonivere. Apart from this, the depleting resources as a result in Climate Change, other issues such as agricultural developments, other environmental problems and harvesting practices are much to be mentioned.

The Taukei Buca in the village of Navakasobu, Ratu Eremasi Matana stressed that *"The Traditional harvesting of Kuta strictly involves a traditional process that has been passed down from ancestral custodians. This involves plucking of Kuta leaves instead of cutting off the stems. This Traditional process ensures the maintenance and yield of the Kuta Farm and also prevents other unwanted plants from displacing the kuta plants in their Natural Habitat"*.

2.0 Proposal for Field Visit

Preliminary discussions during the Entrepreneurship Workshop for Practitioners that was organized by Fiji Arts Council held on 29th- 31st May highlighted some of the complications now faced by our local weavers in procuring their everyday natural resources such as voivoi, kuta and masi for their craft businesses. The proposed site visit and awareness program to be carried out in identified resource sites was mooted

after discussions with UNDP after the entrepreneurship workshop emphasizing the availability of funding targeted towards programs that are directed towards Climate Change adaptations as a result of the adverse effect of climate change. This also aligns to the visions of Fiji Arts Council that recognizes the importance of necessary actions to be taken to assist grass root practitioners in the rural areas who are heavily depended on the use of such natural resources for their daily sustenance of their raw materials.

Other issues as strategized to be incorporated in such projects augurs well with Fiji Arts Council's mission in the preservations of our Fijian Cultures and its traditions through the nurturing of traditional skills and knowledge and restoration of the raw materials that they use

Raw material is very important in weaving in various aspects. It is one of the most decisive factors for the quality of their woven products. Use of proper raw material is critical for producing voivoi mats, kuta mats or woven baskets of any kind, of high quality at a minimal cost. Technologically the raw material sets a fair starting point for all craftsmanship industries. Proper selection of voivoi, kuta or other local weaving used by materials used by weavers of any type, - their post-treatment is critical for successful competition in the market.

The proposed field visit to the Kuta Wetlands of Macuata was therefore both timely and crucial since it is very substantial at this pointing time that our craft practitioners are to be encouraged in considering the safeguarding of their natural resources, which is their main source of raw materials for a sustainable livelihood derived from their income generating initiatives now and the future.

3.0 Aims of the Site Visit Project

The project is geared to provide the best information and guidance to the kuta weavers about climate change impacts and practical actions that they take to protect their livelihoods, cultures and traditions and most of all the sustainability of their Craft businesses through -

- Proper ways and means of preserving of their raw materials to maintain longevity of kuta accessibility
- Proper ways in protecting their kuta ponds
- Recognizing the true value of their kuta as being their *Iyau Ni Vanua*
- Identifying the problems now faced by the weavers
- Identifying the solutions to their problems

Information gathered will guide decision makers in the future and help resilience for better changes in coming decades.

4.0 The District of Macuata Kuta Wetland – A Pilot Project

Kuta Wetlands are mostly found in the nine (9) Villages of Buavou, Naqumu, Niurua, Nasea, Nabukadogo, Naividamu, Nakalou, Nabouono and Korotolutolu which sources other adjacent villages within the District of Macuata their kuta materials in times of harvest .Kuta Ponds in the Seaqaqa areas, Korovuli , Navakasobu, Sasa, Dreketi Raranibulubulu and Korotolutolu are some of the worst affected areas.

The four days Field trip commenced after presenting our Sevusevu to the Vanua on Sunday 28th July which was received by Adi Neomai Katonivere in the absence of the Turaga Bale Na Tui Macuata who was away in Nadi for a meeting.

The program for the visit were as follows –

- Monday 29th July – Conducting meeting with the women of Navakasobu and Korovuli in the District of Seaqaqa and visiting Laulevu, Madrai and Wakaverevere kuta Ponds**
- Tuesday 30th July – Meeting with The Turaga Bale Na Tui Macuata**
- Wednesday 31st - Meeting the Women Weavers representing the Villages of the District of Macuata at the Commissioner Northern Building in Labasa
(Fiji Times Report on Friday 2nd August) attached to this brief**
- Thursday 1st August – Visiting the Kuta Ponds of Nabuavou (“Bilo Mei Saro Pond”) and Naqumu/Rokosalase (“Vavalagi Pond”) conducting a Meeting with the Women of Rokosalase and Niurua Villages**
- Sleep over in Niurua village**
- Friday 2nd August - Return to Labasa**
- Saturday 3rd August - Return to Suva**

Meeting the Turaga Bale Na Tui Macuata was an impressive gesture as he acknowledged his entire support and blessings to the proposed venture. The Chief welcomes the partnership as a great contribution to advancing environmental work at his provincial level highlighting the fact that the Vanua o Macuata is proud that they have championed sustainable living in Fiji, being the first province to ensure Marine Protected Areas which have placed bans on the fishing and catching of sea life and have been made a RAMSAR site in their bid to work and preserve their wetlands which was reviewed and updated in August 2018. –

(An agreement by SPREP and WWF – Pacific, 2 major environmental activities for Macuata Province - one of which was to review and update the Macuata Natural Resource Management Strategy (NRMS) second was to broaden the Qoliqoli Cokovata proposed Ramsar Wetlands Site Management Plan to include management requirements of a Rasar site, that address land-based activities as well as cross-sectoral governance) .

5.0 OUTCOMES OF THE VISIT

Village visited	Number of attendance	Problems raised During discussions	Suggested ways to overcome obstacles
Navakasobu Village- (The Laulevu Pond of Navakasobu)	15 kuta weavers were present supported by their Chief Na Taukei Buca	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Overgrown wild grass and water Lily have dominated kuta plants in the ponds – dreaded enemy of kuta b) Kuta plants have been pushed over to the hedges due to the invasion of other plants resulting to less kuta c) Animal grazing around the ponds is always be a problem d) Water ways is very poor e) The use of knives in Cutting of Kuta instead of plucking the plants during harvesting f) Agricultural Land lease issues , women were not consulted in the first place g) Environmental impacts on sugar cane farming- Chemical run-off from sugarcane plantations h) Presenting the first harvest of kuta to the Chief is no longer practiced since this is their <i>Iyau ni Vanua</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Cleaning the ponds and its surrounding is to be embraced by the whole community to restore the wetlands to their former state. b)transplanting native trees around the ponds to restore stability due to erosion c) Water ways are to be well dug d) ponds to be well fenced to prevent animals e) they have to revert to traditional practices of harvesting as observed by their elders in the past



Adi Asenaca a kuta weaver from the village of Navakasobu points to the part of Laulevu Pond which has drastically affected the growth of kuta plants due to the invasion of water lilies in their habitat. Stagnant water also affects the poor growth of kuta plants

Village visited	Number of attendance	Problems raised During discussions	Suggested ways to overcome obstacles
Korovuli Village- 2 Ponds of- Madrai and Wakaverevere Ponds	8 kuta weavers were present	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The women of Korovuli have been finding it harder to harvest kuta from both ponds as one of the ponds barely grows the plant due to agriculture and development of infrastructure which have affected both ponds 2. Encountering objections from farm leaseholders opposed to the women's customary access to the ponds which forces them to go further and further afield from their own village areas 3. There were two ponds in the past and only one of the ponds is now available and due to the above problems women seems to be 	<p>a).The awareness was a wake –up call for the women in the villages as they have confirmed that replanting of kuta in the diminished pond to be embraced by the whole community to restore the wetlands to their former state.</p> <p>b) Transplanting native trees around the ponds to restore stability due to erosion</p>

		<p>losing interest in weaving their traditional kuta mats</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Kuta plants have been pushed over to the hedges due to the invasion of other plants resulting to less kuta 5. Animal grazing around the ponds is always be a problem 6. Water ways is very poor 7. The use of knives in Cutting of Kuta instead of plucking the plants during harvesting has caused the regrowth of kuta 8. Agricultural Land lease issues , women were not consulted in the first place 9. Environmental impacts on sugar cane farming 10. Presenting the first harvest of kuta to the Chief is no longer practiced since this is their <i>Iyau ni Vanua</i> 	<p>c) Water ways are to be well dug</p> <p>d) ponds to be well fenced to prevent animals</p> <p>e) they have to revert to traditional practices of harvesting as observed by their elders in the past to ensure the maintenance and yields of kuta</p>
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The restoration of Kuta in the “*Wakaverevere*” Pond of Nakorovuli which was one of project assisted by WWF Pacific through the Macuata Kuta Wetland Initiative in 1998 is now a grave concern of the village women as this has now turned into a fishing pond and no longer a source of their precious raw material.

As its habitat becomes more disregarded by the villages there is also a growing concern that the cultural traditions surrounding it will also die out rapidly



The ***Wakaverevere*** Pond has now become a fishing pond for the villages and barely any kuta plants seen in the pond

Village visited	Number of attendance	Problems raised During discussions	Suggested ways to overcome obstacles
Buavou Village "Bilo Mei Saro Pond"	8 kuta weavers were present at the Village Pond	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The pond is not well maintained and neglected due to the overgrown wild grass 2. Pond is about 3 kilometers from the village. 3. No proper road- Access to the Pond is only possible to four-wheel vehicles during good weather otherwise they have to walk 4. Animal grazing around the ponds is always be a problem 5. Water ways is very poor 6. The use of knives in Cutting of Kuta instead of plucking the plants during harvesting has caused the regrowth of kuta 7. Presenting the first harvest of kuta to the Chief is no longer practiced since this is their Iyau ni Vanua 	<p>a). Cleaning up campaign has been confirmed by the whole community to restore the pond to their former state.</p> <p>b) Transplanting native trees around the ponds to restore stability due to erosion</p> <p>c) Water ways are to be well dug</p> <p>d) ponds to be well fenced to prevent animals</p> <p>e) they have to revert to traditional practices of harvesting as observed by their elders in the past to ensure the maintenance and yields of kuta</p>



Overgrown weeds at Bilo mei Saro Kuta Pond of Buavou Village that has been neglected for a very long period



Vavalagi Kuta Pond of Naqumu Village which is about 3 km from the village

The 4 ponds visited, faces similar problems as highlighted in the templates above. Therefore it is envisaged that deliberations highlighted during the village discussions and meeting with the other women representing non visited ponds will catalyze these ideas that will make a difference on the ground and deliver tangible benefits

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is evident that their kuta resources in terms of economic value are very crucial for their livelihoods and these resources should be carefully monitored and managed according to what they have now. Exploitation in their resources is also obvious. Women have to be aware of how they use their resources in a way that does not dangerously reduce their supply, the greatest threat that they now face.

It is therefore recommended that consistence awareness is carried out at all times at the village level

- All ponds are to be fenced - Fencing stock out will encourage plants to regenerate from natural seed sources,

- Consistence cleaning of ponds is very important- Controlling the weeds are one of the greatest threats to kuta ponds and, in many cases, weed control will be the most important thing they can do in restoring their ponds.
- Transplanting of native trees around the ponds to give shades to the habitat and also to restore soil stability
- Women are to be encouraged to revert to their traditional harvesting practices as done in the past by their elders
- Waterways are to be dug to promote better water-flows in the habitat
- Developing partnership with the community
- Recognizing the work that has been done by WWF – Pacific and other organizations that have involved the community in the past through restoration projects but adding value through strengthening relationships and enabling continuity.

7.0 CONCLUSION

The support of the Turaga Bale na Tui Macuata and the Vuvale Vakaturaga o Bolatagane is very much applauded and appreciated. The representatives of the various villages visited Korovuli, Navakasobu, Naqumu, Buavou, Rokosalase, Niurua that facilitated the meetings in the respective villages is very much appreciated.

Biggest Vakavinavinaka to Mataasi Qaroro (the only male mat/kuta weaver in Fiji) who was very instrumental in providing relative information from all villages and site visited. Mataiasi is a Fijian Crafted License holder, a member of the Fiji Craft Society and has represented Fiji in COP23 in Germany, 2017 and Melanesian Festival of Arts New Caledonia in 2010.

Vinaka Vakalevu

NTUVUKI
SCDO (Fiji Arts Council)
27th August, 2019

Fiji Times 3rd September, 2019

NATIONAL NEWS

Concern over handling practice of straw grass

By SERAFINA SILAITOGA

HANDLING practices of traditional artefacts and resources should be improved among resource owners who use it.

Fiji Arts Council senior development officer Niga Tuvuki made the comment while opening the Macuata Soqosoqo Vakamarama Kuita (straw grass) consultation

in Labasa this week.

She said the handling practices done by forefathers were no longer used and had resulted in the loss of some traditional resources.

Mrs Tuvuki urged women to respect the natural resources given to them by God.

"The *vanua* of Macuata and Bua are known for its *kuta* mats

and there are certain ways of picking the *kuta* from the ponds," she said.

"Our mothers and grandmothers used to pick the *kuta* from the ponds because that's how God created it and not cut it with knives like we are doing today.

"So as a result of using knives because we want to cut out plenty *kuta* and earn good money, the

ponds are now filled with other shrubs and grass."

Such attitude, Mrs Tuvuki said, needed to stop.

"We need to look after our resources and respect our traditional artefacts as it identifies us as iTaukei women.

"Our resources created by God are connected to us so let's look after it, let's treasure it and keep

it." The group's executive Filomena Katonivere reminded the women that they played a vital role in protecting the resources that generated income for many in rural areas.

"Let's play our part and protect our *kuta* because it identifies us as women of Macuata and it signifies traditional values as iTaukei women," she said.

NAVAKASOBU VILLAGE. - 29/7/2019 (Mundana)

YACANU RUARU

DALITALI KUTA / SEOT

1 Sereima Divavani (77)

✓

2 Melaia Sewa Sewa (67)

✓

3 Sereima Divavani (27)

✓

4 Mere Turagaeau (48)

✓

5 Nomai Bitu 63

✓

6 Laite Naisala 55

✓

7 Adi Aseuaca Loloma 39

✓

8 Melaia Senasewa (20)

✓

9 Asema Omo (24)

✓

10 Kelera - TUCAKE (70)

✓

11 Losavati - MARANA (52)

✓

12 SILIVA - LUVAKABA (42)

✓

13 ANA Dimaku (34)

✓

14 Raijieli Daku (21)

✓

15 Ruva Marana (24)

✓

KOROVILI VILLAGE - 29/1/2019:

YHEAMA RUTUA - YHEAMA NUBUA DALUALI KUTA / SEGA

1	BUSEVA YIBAKIUNIA	71yrs.	✓
2	Anaseini Matoga	68 yrs.	
3	Ledua Yalaitoga	49.	✓
4	Imama Vui	42.	✓
5	Nomai Lerutoro	66	✓
6	Gereana Salaiwala	49	✓
7	Dsefa Meiceausa	42	✓
8	Sekema Sorokodrigi	58	✓

TACAMU KUAKUA	KORO	TIKINI GIGA NISURU	DARTALI KUA /SEGA
1. Ana Tapa	ROKOSASA (Naguma)	10.4.66 15.11.78	Dau tali kut Dau tali kut
2. Mewalesi Tuo	(vilo)		Dau tali kut
3. Merelita Nauvi	Matailabasa	15.6.1987	Dau tali kut
4. Alanieta. Niunatesi walu. Nasekula.		12.08.73.	Dau tali kut
5. Anele - Vokalala		25/08/84	Dau tali kut
6. Tupou - Kaunselu	DREKETI Qelenumu	13/06/91	Dau tali kut
7. Jamila Bi Turudale	Nasasa	1/07/68	Dau tali kut
8. Tarusila Dina	Buaru	10/08/77	Dau tali kut
9. Sasane Li.	Buaru	23/04/73	Dau tali kut
10. Elena Guresomo	Naravuka	01/09/64	Dau tali kut
11. Mere Vusahi	Naravuka	10/05/73	Dau tali kut
12. ARIETA SAMOST	NARAVUKA.	13/1/54	Dau tali kut
13. Aysia Kauona	Matamua	24/11/42	Dau tali kut
14. Selai Vuibucalau	Matamua	6/7/75	Dau tali kut
15. Mewalesi Pawaquana	Vuitoka	26/01/86	Dau tali kut
16. MELIKI WAKUWAI	WALLEVA	26/03/66	Sega.
17. Ranadunira Ralima	Nadogo	23/06/62	Sega.
18. Fenisa Vuaga	Naravuka.	16/10/65	Sega.
19. Vinisimere Rangi Nakaradogo	Nadogo	8/7/54	Dau tali kut Sega
20. Senimili Bose	Naduri	13/03/68.	Sega.
21. MENIANA - BAILEA	NABAYATO	18/8/214	Dau tali kut Banat
22. Mei Luekai	NABAYATO	30/6/1952	Dau tali kut
23. Melani Pomate	Nasekula	15/08/64	Sega.