

Revitalization of Bure Building Skills in the District of Nasinu in Ovalau
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Case Study Report : Fiji

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Ministry of Indigenous Affairs - Government of Fiji

1. Background of the Project Area

The project was a collaborative effort between two government departments;

- Institute of Fijian Language and Culture,
- Department of Culture and Heritage and the Fiji Arts Council.

It was primarily aimed at revitalizing and safeguarding a strand of Intangible Cultural Heritage. In the course of Cultural Mapping by research officers of the Institute of Fijian Language and Culture (IFLC) of the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs (MIA), concern was raised by villagers on likelihood of an ICH in the village being forgotten and later being lost.

Proposal was submitted to the Department of Culture and Heritage (C&H) of the Ministry of Education to facilitate costing and assist in the planning for a program that will revive this dying ICH.

2. Introduction of Target ICH

The main focus of the project was the revival of an art in traditional Fijian house construction. Commonly known as a “Fijian Bure,” the house is unique in layout and comes in different shapes and sizes. In traditional Fijian villages, a “Bure” signifies status and importance. From the foundation to the roof, each part of the “Bure” is expertly constructed to be in line with specific purposes it has been constructed for.



There are three main types of Bure that is common in Fiji. The first are houses with straight sides and rounded ends, and an arched roof throughout. These are Tongan type houses and are only found in the Lau Group of eastern Fiji.

The second are the oblong houses without a centre pole. These are found throughout the rest of Fiji. They come in two different forms, namely:

- a) Houses with a main post in the middle of each of the short ends. These houses usually have king-posts supporting the ridgepole and the ends of the roof are in line with the ends, i.e., they form gable ends.
- b) Houses with no main posts. In these houses all the wall posts are the same height and the ridge-pole is usually supported by king-posts. The short ends of the roof slope inwards, forming a four sided hip roof.

The third type are the centre poled houses of western Viti Levu. These houses are rectangular in form and have a single main post in the centre of the floor to support the ridge-pole and the apex of the roof. They can either square with a short ridgepole, or oblong with a long ridge pole. The house constructed in Nasinu Ovalau is second type described commonly known as the Doka Leka (Short Pole).

3. Objectives of the project

The objectives are the;

- Revitalization of ICH that is related to Fijian Bure construction for Tikina Nasinu in Ovalau.
- Safeguarding of ICH that is related to Fijian Bure construction for Tikina Nasinu in Ovalau.
- Transmission of ICH that is related to Fijian Bure construction for Tikina Nasinu in Ovalau.

4. Methods of Implementation

Need for revitalization of said ICH was identified during Cultural Mapping conducted by the researchers of the Institute of Fijian language and Culture. Likewise resource person to facilitate transmission of ICH was also identified in the mapping exercise. The project supports DCH work towards finalization of nomination document for Levuka (Ovalau) to be listed in UNESCO's World Heritage Listing.

After consultation with stakeholders and resource person, materials needed for the constructed was prepared and brought to construction one prior to commencement of workshop. Cost of transportation of building materials and laborers was borne by the DCH. Participants were selected from within the Tikina of Nasinu and were taken through a step by step demonstration of how a Fijian Bure was constructed.

The workshop took eight days and 20 participants were young males whose age ranges from 17 to 25. Resource person was remunerated at \$50.00 a day and there are plans to recognize his work by nominating him to be a Living Human Treasure. At the end of the workshop each participant were awarded a certificate in recognition for their participation in the program.

4.1 Parts of the Fijian Bure Constructed in Levuka.

Yavu- (Foundation) This is a mound of earth that is raised to be higher than the normal ground level that is constructed specifically with soil and stone barriers for bure construction.

Duru- (Post) This specially chosen local timber that is to be part of the main supporting structure for the bure.



Duru

Kautabu (Upper Plate)

This is the two main structures that run along the length of the house and it joins the two main posts to make up the two main walls of the building



kautabu

Coka- (Cross beams)

The piece of timber that joins the two upper plate and at the same time complete the four corner structure of the bure.

coka



Boutoka- (Pillars)



The piece of timber that determines the height of the roof. It sits on the icoka and is main supporting structure of the roof.

boutoka

Isa- (rafter) Supporting structure that will hold the roof and upon which baji will be placed.



Isa (rafter)

Baji- Smaller piece placed over the rafters to assist easier thatching of the roof structure.



baji



Ileqe- The main supporting structure for the rafter and Baji. Their function is to strengthen the sides and ends of the roof frame before tying on the thatch.

ileqe

Doka- (Main ridge pole) Main supporting structure for the topmost part of the roof. Here all the baji and rafter end. *Na kau vakababa toka mai cake. Na kau qo era lai cegu kece vua na baji kei na isa ni loma ni vale.*



doka

Latu- Smaller post in between the main ones. This is to support side thatching for the wall.



latu

Qasiqasinikalavo- (Upper ridgepole)
The pole lies parallel to the ridgepole to allow the butui (top thatch) to be well covered and to have the desired shape. The misimisi is then well plaited and weaved to give its overall shape.

Qasiqasinikalavo
(Upper Ridgepole)



Butui- The topmost part of the roof structure. This part determines shape of roof and is carefully crafted to the leading carpenters (mataisau) design.

Vavuni varasa. - Stalks of reeds (gasau) that are tied together to thicken the topmost part of roof thatching.

Wa kalou- A type of strong vine that rows out in the wild especially in dry places. It usually used in the exterior of a bure as it is able to sustain or withstand pressures to changing weather patterns and adverse climatic conditions.

Ulaula- Reeds (gasau) that are plaited together to make up the wall structure.

Vavau- (Baton/Purline) Is chosen from local trees such as makita, dogo, and ivi. This is to allow ample spacing with rafter's and Baji.



vavau

Loru- Balabala Ferntree that is attached to the ends of the upper ridgepoledau is sometimes called the house of rats.

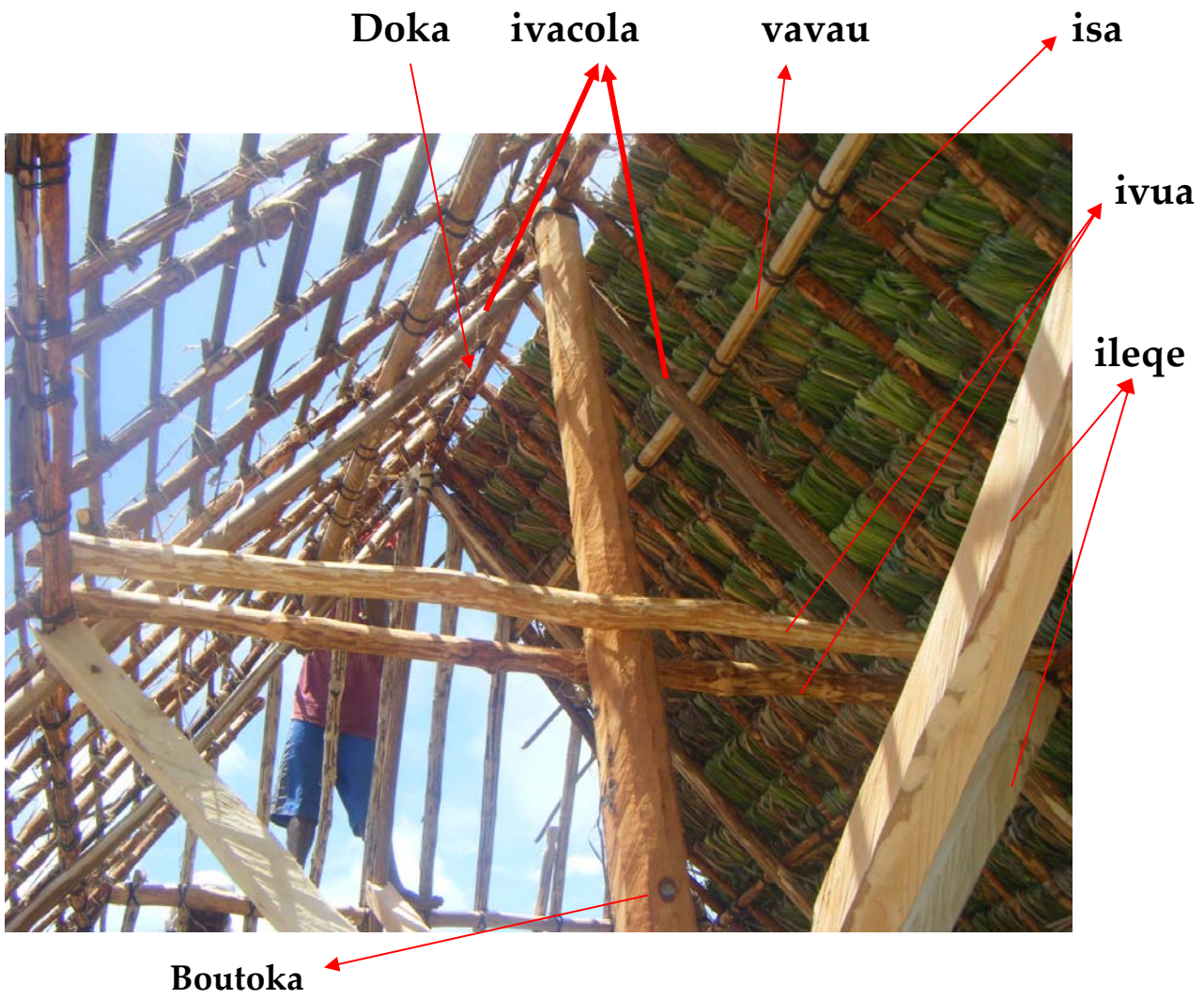


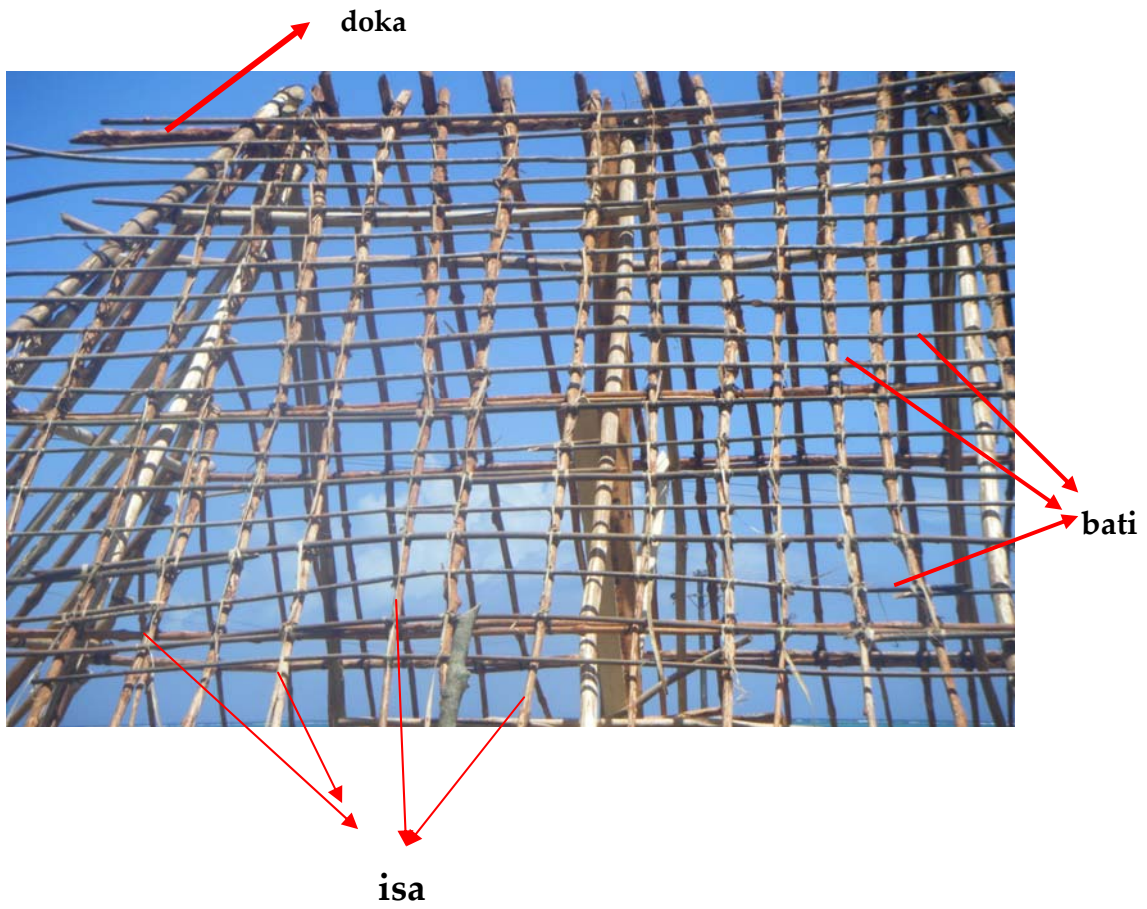
loru

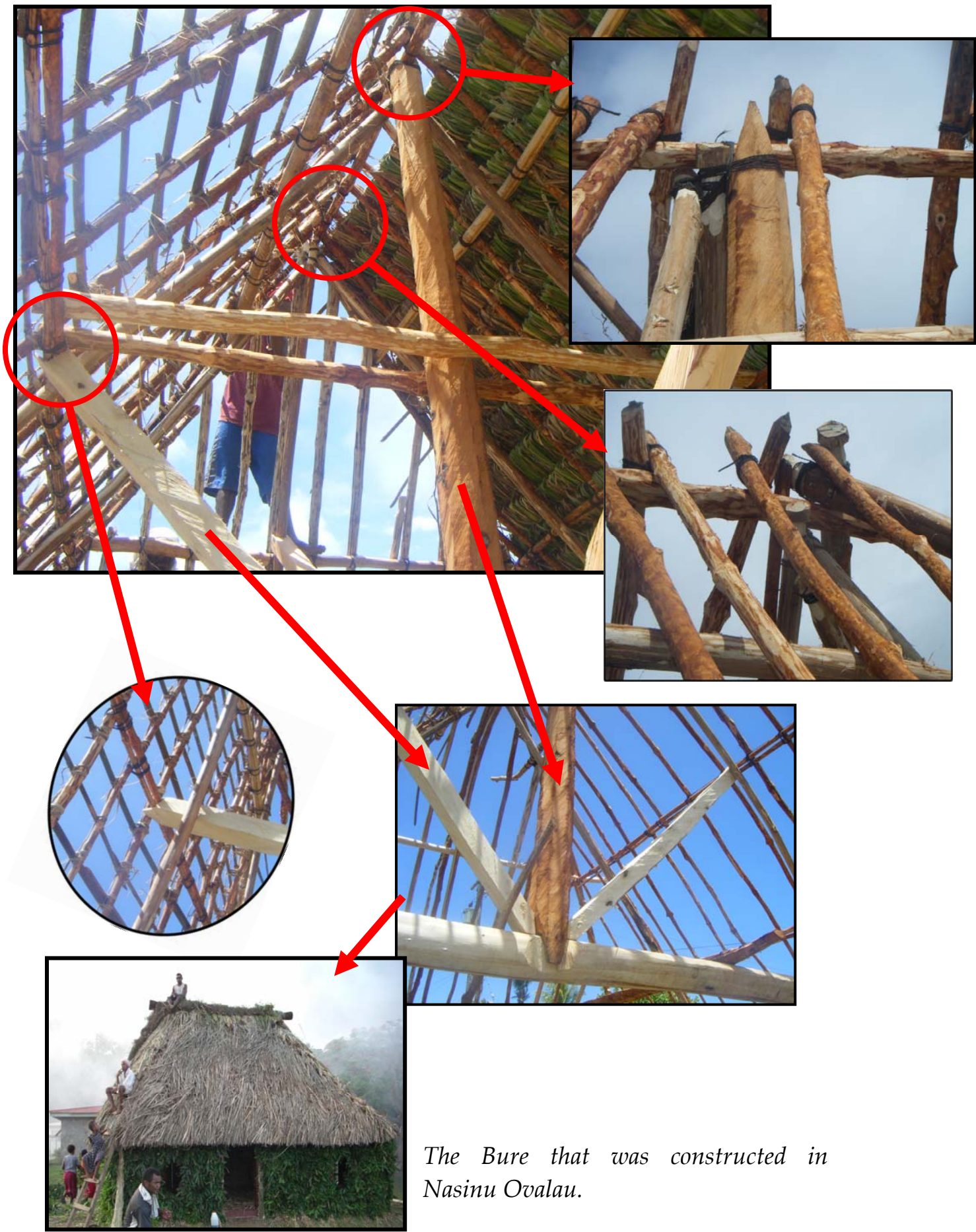
ivua- Supporting structure for the idoka (main ridgepole).



ivua







The Bure that was constructed in Nasinu Ovalau.

5. Outcome of the project

Traditional knowledge that is related to Bure construction in the Tikina (District) of Nasinu in Ovalau was revitalized, safeguarded and transmitted to the younger generation in the district.

6. Conclusion

The project was successful as the objectives were achieved after threatened ICH was revitalized safeguarded and transmitted. This was evident in interest shown by participants and anticipation by members of the village to see the complete structure of the Fijian Bure in their village again. Feedback from participants was encouraging as they vowed to keep the tradition alive through construction of more bure's in respective villages in the Tikina. There have been calls from other villages for similar projects to be carried out on the revitalization of their ICH. Another project has been planned for another Tikina in Ovalau that will involve carving and craft skills of women in the district.

In the discussion that followed tourism project has been envisioned as the revitalized ICH can be expanded to be an income generating scheme. It is recommended that more funding be made available for similar projects that will ensure revitalization of traditional knowledge (ICH) in the rural areas of Fiji.