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Cultural Mapping: An Approach to Safeguarding Indigenous Fijians Intangible Cultural Heritage

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Let me begin by saying that the Pacific is home to unique cultures and traditions and is engulfed with diverse manifestations of aspects of intangible cultural heritage, which is quite a challenge especially with the overlapping nature of the cultures of its inhabitants.

Intangible Cultural Heritage forms the "soul" of a culture.' Moreover, central to its promotion and protection is the safeguarding and revitalization of knowledge and cultural systems. The concept of knowledge or 'traditional knowledge', more specifically, has a close relationship with intangible cultural heritage. In fact, it is at the core of intangible cultural heritage promotion. Knowledge is the very foundation of indigenous cultures; it is in itself part and expression of the culture it originates. It creates a relationship between a particular indigenous community and its ancestral territory; relationship between humans as well as non-humans.

Indigenous Fijians, like other indigenous Pacificans, are unique because we are born into very particular family roles and responsibilities. Responsibilities of a particular family would include special knowledge and skills that are passed down from generation to generation. These are regarded highly as God-given heritage not easy to part with, like other matters of choice or preference.

As with most indigenous cultures, the majority of the intangible aspects of the Fijian culture, are mainly unrecorded. Indigenous Fijian customs, language, dances, traditional etiquette, etc. are oral, and preservation rests pivotally on continual usage and observance. However, given the onset of a dominant global culture, with the combined influence, amongst other factors, of a non-conducive cosmopolitan livelihood, an apathetic youthful population, and emphasis on economic development, intangible heritage has been placed in precariously desperate positions, continually being threatened, and exploited for economic gain. The brutal reality is that if indigenous Fijians lose their culture and heritage, especially the intangible ones, those will be lost forever, since, unlike other cultures in Fiji, no fountain exists elsewhere from which they can be retrieved.

DEVELOPMENT OF A SAFEGUARDING MEASURE.

Prior to 2003, safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and its application was less of a phenomenon in Fiji, even though cultural institutions such as the Institute of Fijian¹ Tangible heritage form the 'body' of a culture; and together (tangible + intangible heritage) they form the whole - Culture.

Language & Culture, Native Lands & Fisheries Commission, Fiji Arts Council, the Fiji Museum, the National Archives of Fiji, USP, and non-government organizations have been involved in the documentation of Fijian intangible cultural heritage. Each had their own mini-inventories in existence.

However, in 2003, with the adoption of the Model Law on Traditional Knowledge and Expressions of Culture, the cabinet approved that options and mechanisms be developed to ensure that the legislation is properly implemented. The legislation arose out of the concern that indigenous knowledge which has been in existence for thousands of years remains unprotected by legal measures and is the subject of unrestricted exploitation and commercialization without due respect and acknowledgement of the *vanua* and local communities. It is important to note that at this stage of formalization, Fiji had less familiarity with the "2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage" and its requirements, particularly Article 12 which stipulates that ".....state parties shall draw up, in a manner geared to its own situation, one or more inventories of [ICH] present in its territory..."²

Legal Measure

Regardless, Fiji's proposed legislation on indigenous knowledge and expressions of culture serves a dual function - it seeks to protect indigenous knowledge from misappropriation and non-customary use, such as commercialization. The second role targets the safeguarding of indigenous Fijian intangible cultural heritage for continuity. This is an opportunity whereby indigenous intangible heritage will be covered under a legislative framework - an aspect of cultural heritage that has been neglected for quite sometime in Fiji's national policy and legislative planning. Currently, the Ministry of Fijian Affairs through its Internal Working Group has almost completed the drafting of this legislation before submission to the legal drafter for final touch-ups to the bill. This will then be presented to local provinces and districts for their scrutiny before a final presentation is made to cabinet and ultimately Parliament.

Administrative measure

With the cabinet's approval for adoption of the legislation, the Ministry of Fijian Affairs was assigned the task of formulating and implementing preparatory works that would assist in the effective enforcement and monitoring of the legislation once it becomes an Act of Parliament. Hence, evolved the idea of undertaking a comprehensive mapping or cultural inventory of the diverse intangible cultural heritage or indigenous knowledge and associated expressions that exist within the culture of the indigenous population. This is a vast and ambitious project, as most have tagged, but to cultural officials at the Ministry, the project is a learning curve and an awakening, since it is the first time ever in our history for an institution as such to focus solely on researching and documenting aspects of Fijian culture in all cultural locales. The Cultural Mapping Programme serves three important functions: 1] is the identification and recognition of custodians of indigenous knowledge and its associated expressions; (2) research and document (digital images, video documentation and digital audio recording) aspects of Fijian culture (including those that have yet to be recorded) and (3) inventorize and map out villages and regions with unique and specific intangible cultural heritages that still exist and those on the verge of disappearing so that revival mechanisms are set introduced. 2 Refer to "2003 Convention for Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage", p. 5.

The core objectives of the Cultural Mapping Programme inculcate the need to create and build links between custodians and the younger generation to encourage the transmission of knowledge and cultural expressions in danger of disappearing; establishment of a network of custodians of ICH for a living human treasurers registry; initiate mechanism for the proper dissemination of "almost lost heritage" with the consent of custodians; monitor and enforce the legislation on indigenous knowledge and expressions; establish an inventory on aspects of Fijian culture to serve as a fountain for those Fijians who may not have the luxury of capturing raw information about themselves and their culture from the older generation who have passed on; harness knowledge and expressions for development and wealth generation for locals; provide employment opportunities for custodians and their descendants; and assist in improving educational policies for the inclusion of culture, language and arts in primary and secondary schools curriculum.

IMPLEMENTATION.

What is Cultural Mapping?

Each of the 14 provinces that compose Fiji and the island of Rotuma has its own distinct local knowledge and cultural system, which characterize their uniqueness. Cultural mapping therefore denotes visitation of each village in the 15 provinces collecting all types of cultural data. Most of these can be categorized as intangible cultural heritage. The following processes envisage the conceptualization of the programme:

I] Scope of Research:

Before launching into a huge project as such, it is important that an appropriate coverage of the research is clearly ascertained. For Fiji's mapping programme, the following information was earmarked for collection from field. Most of these topics emanated from published and unpublished literature on Fijian culture, and previous research undertaken. As such our inventory encompasses the following subject matters:

Genealogical kinship information - Includes totems, rank, and number of extended families, clans, tribes/phatries &s; Heritage sites specific to a particular clan, tribe, village or province; Emigrational information; Traditional forms of award for bravery during war; Traditional ceremonies, rituals and practices; Traditional beliefs/ religious systems; Dialects; Names of persons, places, and sites having cultural meaning attached or significance; Traditional Medicine; Traditional Healing practices; Traditional fishing methods; Traditional Agriculture; Traditional crafts and designs; Traditional forms of performing art; Traditional food preparation methods & culinary practices; Traditional Midwifery; Traditional rites of passage - life cycle focused e.g. Circumcision &s; Traditional games; Tales, Legends, stories &s; Traditional costumes; Traditional hairdressing; Traditional forms of reciprocity, & exchange; Navigational skills.

Some of the information raised by informants during fieldwork substantiates on insertion of new topics to the list that we already have.

II] Pilot Testing:

The main objective of the pilot tests (trials) was to provide a foundation for the entire data collection process. This initial assessment was used as an exercise to gauge the extent to which the questionnaire could be modified to suit subsequent research activities. Hitherto, two pilot tests have been conducted in two different locations; a peri-urban and a rural village. The tests showed interesting results and culminated in the collection of colossal of information on the two villages.

III] Advocacy and Awareness:

An important component of any project is to make clear at the outset the purpose, objective and method of undertaking the project. In Fiji, there exists the colonial set Fijian Administration structure which assisted greatly in the general awareness of programme. The Ministry uses the provincial council meetings, district and village meetings to make the indigenous community aware of the issues raised. Other mediums of awareness include the organizing of workshops for the various village headman, with which all information pertaining to field visits are rectified, production of posters and brochures, and through the media.

IV] Research Methodology:

Upon the recruitment of field officers to undertake the mapping task, a research guideline was developed after training for the officers was held,

a. Pre-field research (archival)

It also involves prior research in libraries and archives of documented materials on aspects of ICH. This process (archival research) is essential as it will guide researchers to a fruitful and wholesome collection of information on an element of ICH known to a region.

b. Questionnaire

A questionnaire was developed based on the topics identified to assist researchers when conducting interviews. However, they are also requested to initiate unstructured questions during interviews to comprehensively gather information.

c. Participant Observation

A key component of research especially in cultural settings, the approach necessitates that the research participates in the activity of the informant to grasp fully the principles, characteristics and ethos of the particular aspect of culture.

d. Method of data collection

Information collected are in audio, audio visual, and digital imagery formats. To ensure that an element of ICH is comprehensively documented, it is advisable that the three methods be utilized.

V] Research Procedures and standards:

Various protocols were developed to ensure that local research principles and ethics are followed:

A. Prior informed consent:

A form developed to sought the endorsement and approval of an informant or a village leader is pivotal so that sanctity and value accorded to the information is respected.

B. Code of Conduct/Ethics:

The researchers are to behave respectfully at all times during their time researching in various villages. A code of conduct and values was developed so that the vanua and its protocols are followed at all times. The researchers are to remain impartial, non-biased and neutral with any decisions made, and the implementation of a task designated.

C. Confidentiality:

A confidentiality agreement was signed between the institution responsible and the researchers, and other personnel involved in the project. This is simply due to the sacredness of the information collected, the value and trust the informant has placed with the Ministry when the information was initially collected. Moreover, a core principle of the project is that any information disseminated is to be undertaken with the consent of the custodian and their physical presence to negotiate on the public dissemination of the information.

VI] Development of a database system

Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) play a crucial role in recording traditional knowledge, altering it for specific uses or to digitize it for storage in public and private banks so that it can be recalled for any indigenous and non-indigenous utilization with the custodians consent. A computer application developed by a local software company for the Cultural Mapping Programme is a classical example and will be the first indigenous knowledge databank or database ever compiled in the country through the use of software designed specifically for the project, using the Fijian language as its format, however, programming will be done in English.

Records entered into the database will be based on the topics outlined above and these will be in text and accompanying images, if necessary. Moreover, video and audio recordings made at respective cultural localities will be entered as entries in respective topics. Each Fijian village will have entries of intangible heritage present.

Besides, the system will enhance the proper storage of information accumulated from the field and ensure that each cultural expression is filed away appropriately in a coherent manner. In this way, the data will be retrieved easily and efficiently if it needs to be accessed by custodians and individuals/parties with the traditional bearer's consent. The database will also serve to enhance information exchange between indigenous people, local communities and customary users.

PROGRAMME CAPABILITY:

The Cultural Mapping Programme is envisaged to be beneficial economically, socially and education wise. Having a database with thorough entries of custodians of indigenous knowledge and associated expressions will ensure that its owners are properly recognized, identified for the customary use of their knowledge and cultural expressions, and that they are remunerated accordingly for the commercial use of their cultural expressions. Moreover, the creation of such framework will encourage tradition-based innovation and creativity for the custodians. It will also ensure the preservation of know-how, skills, practices, and techniques that are pivotal foundations for indigenous Fijians as a group of people with a specific cultural identity, as a community, and as an ethnic group. Furthermore, the identification and documentation of indigenous knowledge and expressions (ICH) will ensure that it is properly transmitted, revitalized, and promoted to ensure its maintenance and viability. This will be achieved through the education and training of young people to learn, use and transmit the know-how. Such a plan will assist government stakeholders in the formulation of strategies for cultural development in our education curriculum.

FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION:

At present the initiative is fully funded by the Fiji Government, although it is quite less than what we had requested in our budget annually.

CHALLENGES:

- Funding obligations and constraints. Although Government is committed to the project, its funding is rather limited and is budgeted year by year for a period of three years. Besides, majority of the funds is spent on administration and less on action plans that result in the fulfillment of the inventory/mapping objectives.

- Erosion of ethical principles that govern Fijian protocol and values such as *tabu* and *mana*.
- Each day that passes we forecast the loss of important information that should have been properly documented. Thus, when a custodian passes away, metaphorically, a "library is completely burnt to the ground".
- Integrity of information given by informants is sometimes questionable.
- Disputes between members of the local community regarding ownership is quite a challenge since it can affect the integrity of information provided by original custodians of information and also prolong the mapping process, as the dispute needs to be resolved first.
- Less of qualified human resources available and staff turn-over at the ministry to undertake data collection.
- The mentality (psychology) of most Fijian villagers is focused more on monetary gains rather than cultural safeguarding and revitalization. Hence, it is often difficult to convince them to take up the initiative themselves, considering an apathetic youthful population in local communities.
- The focus of Fiji Government is more on economic development and less on cultural development.
- Promulgation of an effective outreach program for communities. (How to reach out to the communities effectively?)
- Often villages are less enthusiastic about the initiative. (How committed are the communities in the inventorying and safeguarding of their ICH?) More than often there were signs of non-interest shown by communities of tradition holders for they no see economic benefit.
- Miscommunication within the Fijian administration system resulting in noncoverage of certain villages.
- Delay in approval of request from Finance and slow processes for release of quarterly grant.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE CULTURAL MAPPING ON INTANGIBLE HERITAGE SAFEGUARDING AND MANAGEMENT IN FIJI.

Fiji's Cultural Mapping Programme has brought Intangible Cultural Heritage out of the doldrums, giving it the necessary recognition it deserves. The initiative has prompted new standpoints and the facilitation of many new ICH related programs that would ensure a realistic safeguarding of ICH in Fiji:

- First and foremost the establishment of a repository for all elements of ICH in Fijian villages.
- Establishment of Living Human Treasurers Program [first award presented at Vutia Village in Rewa - District Award]
- Identification and surveying of once unknown indigenous historical sites that could be submitted to Fiji's Heritage Foundation for consideration and inclusion in the national heritage listings.
- Formulation of a Cultural Research Policy in Fiji. Earmarked to counter current system of screening local and overseas researchers who wish to undertake research in cultural localities - development of thorough guidelines and protocols.
- Instigation of the 'Revival of once-endangered heritage' workshops. This program although had commenced earlier prior to the notion of a national inventory but at a slower pace because of the inaccessibility to information by coordinators. The program is undertaken in three phases: PHASE 1 - Field Officers visit villages and gather information. They then, with the consent of traditional custodian(s) identify a heritage element in danger of disappearing. PHASE 2 involves community participation and activities, especially youths, in the form of

workshops. The bearer of the tradition becomes the facilitator of the workshop. The concluding phase (PHASE 3) entails an evaluation of the project: documentation of findings, experience gained, and report on anticipated ongoing applications and benefits. Samples of workshops conducted include pottery making, traditional house-building, traditional fishing net-making &s.

- Compulsory status of Fijian language in the School curricula.
- Digitalization of historical/heritage information, in the form of DVD's for educational purposes. Traditional custodians often request the Institute to edit footages taken in their villages and collate it as a production of cultural heritage evident and often in need of revitalization.
- Development of women's craft and their participation in cultural activities through the organization of village workshops and training sessions.

CONCLUDING REMARKS.

The Cultural Mapping Programme is a first step, and acts as a strong foundation with potential to develop documentation of ICH further. Although much remains to be done, we hope this programme will encourage Fijians to deepen their knowledge of their cultural heritage, as well as being for educational transmission and reference for future generations.

It is recommended that other countries working or about to work on initiating their fCH inventories to consider using existing social structures and existing networks already in place to coordinate the necessary research. The more partners you involve to work on the subject the better, but be well aware that the process is slow and time-consuming. The purpose of such a project, the question of *who the inventory is for*, to what audience must be carefully considered and followed through in order to optimize results and the benefits inventory making and cultural mapping can offer.

On that note I wish all countries participating in this meeting the best of luck in promulgating measures for safeguarding ICH in their respective countries.

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