

**UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF
MARINE RESOURCES FOR WOMEN AND
LISTENING TO THEIR VOICES IN DECIDING
ON HOW THESE RESOURCES SHOULD BE
GOVERNED FOR SUSTAINABLE USE**

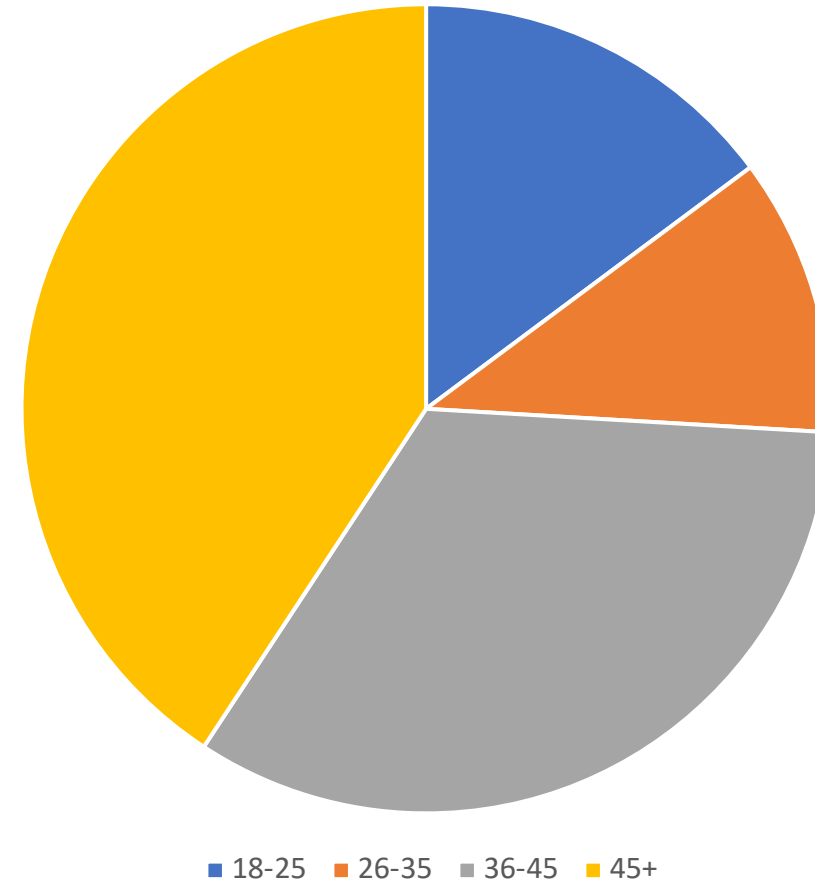
Thank you to all the villagers of Serua Village
and the *Turaga ni Mataqali* who permitted the
visit and the research

Field work in Fiji The research visit

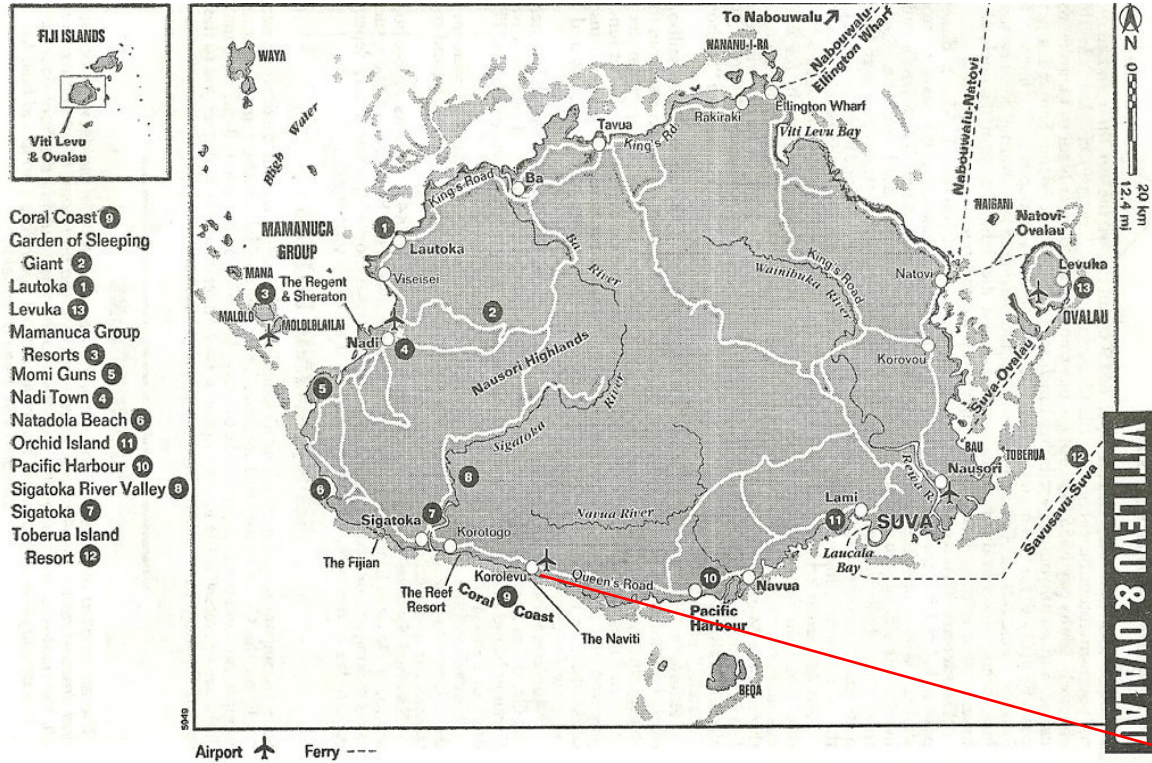
Unaisi Narawa, assisted by Joana Dradra, came to visit the village of Serua in November 2022

They interviewed 27 women participants over the course of 4 days

Age of participants



Location of field work



→ Serua Koro, Yanuyanu

SERUA VILLAGE

- The area selected for this fieldwork was Serua village, located in the province of Serua.
- It is located some ways between Pacific Harbour (Navua) and Sigatoka town.
- The village is located on an island (Serua yanuyanu) in Fiji's central region.
- Travel by car is approximately 1hr 30 minutes from the capital Suva, on the Queens Road while access to the landing to the village is another 5 minute drive off the main highway.
- The village is easily accessible from the landing on foot during low tide and by boat at high tide, although there are times when the tide does not completely go out so there is still a need for a boat during low tide.





Serua

- The village inhabitants are all *iTaukei* who are made up of four *mataqali* (*Raralevu (the chiefly mataqali), Tacini, Qaloqalo, and Lutuya*).
- There is a church on the island but no school
- Children travel by boat to and from the mainland daily to attend schools close by. The village has appointed a person to provide this service.
- There does not appear to be a market close to the island. Fish and other marine food can be sold from makeshift stalls along the highway.

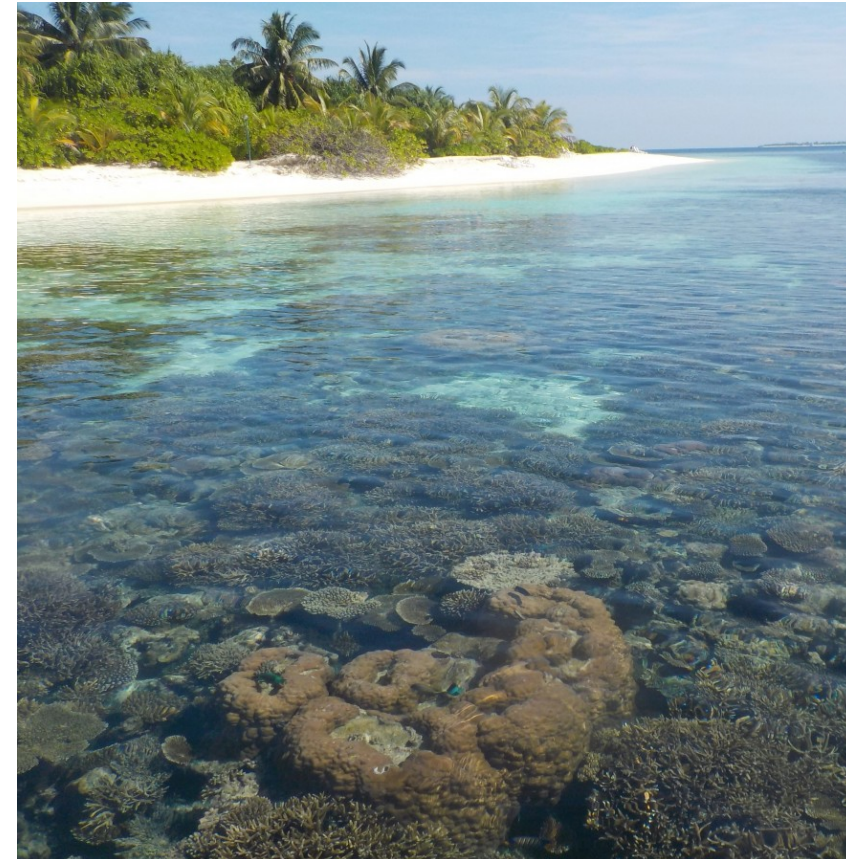


Why we chose this village and how we did the research

- Serua village was chosen as a location for this fieldwork because of its close proximity to Suva city and because of the main researcher's affiliation to the village which allowed easy access and rapport with the participants.
- The researchers asked a number of questions to learn more about the experience of women in relation to marine resources and how taking them was regulated.
- The interviews were conducted were in a traditional *Talanoa* method where participants were given the questionnaire, or it was read to them and the answers were given while having an informal discussion. The *Talanoa* methodology allowed the researchers to record their experiences without participants feeling as if their space was being intruded.
- Some participants were agreed to their interviews being recorded while others were not comfortable with this method, so their responses were only recorded in writing.
- In order to commence the fieldwork, the *Turaga ni Mataqali* was informed but because the researcher was an insider, a formal *sevusevu* was not done and instead an informal notification was made and accepted.

We asked: What were the Main Resources/Ecosystems Used by women in the village?

- You answered:
- The reef, mangroves and mudflats with all of you confirming that you used these to gather fish, mud crabs, shellfish, seaweed.
- Although all women used those resources/ecosystems, older women only utilised the mudflats, mangroves. If they gathered any food from the reef, this was usually done by their husbands or they would barter from other men/women who did go out to the reef.
- The women participants who were younger were more likely to venture out to the reef and gather for family use, for sharing and a small number of women would sell their catch.
- They used fishing rods, lines and nets to catch fish. One participant explained that they were now utilising a form of long line fishing that previously wasn't used before and they use it because it is easier for bigger fish.



What did you use the resources for?



You said:

- You mostly used the food gathered for sustainable use (food for the family) or sharing/exchanging with other families within the village.
- There were also times when they were required to contribute to community gatherings such as funerals, birthdays or weddings and then you would have to collect more than usual.
- Some of you reported that you used the resources for medicine. Some women used seaweed while others drank seawater.
- The women who sold their catch would sell these as raw fish and also as cooked meals such as lovo packs.



Who does this work?

- Most of you said that this is both women and men's work. Some women go out with their husbands or sons
- Harvesting marine resources is a matter of choice
- But there also times when the community expects contributions to special occasions.

We asked if the marine resources held any cultural significance for you?

Most of you said that ecosystems and resources were culturally significant to you as indigenous Fijian women because it was a source of food and other resources such as tools and medicine. Participants reported that the sea is an important source of their daily needs as it provides food.

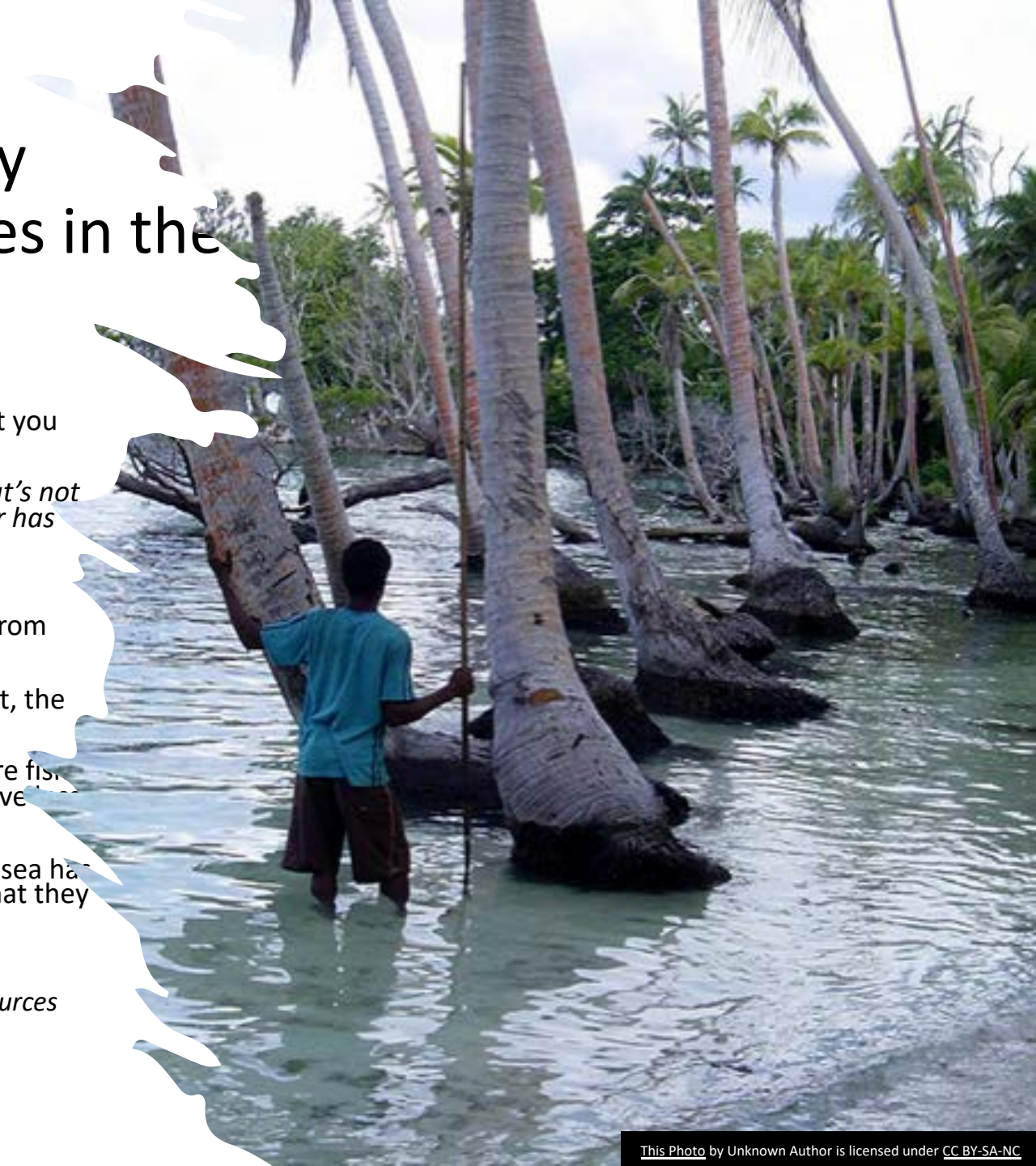
'The sea is the source of our food, our money...it provides life for us'

'For us here on the island, when there's no work, the sea provides sustenance and sustains us when there's nothing else...an example was during the covid period'



We asked if you had noticed any changes in the Marine Resources in the last 20 years

- You all reported that they have noticed a decrease in the resources that you are able to catch in the past couple of years compared to today.
- *'I used to put the net out and knew I would catch a lot of fish but that's not the same. The low tide doesn't even look like a low tide. The weather has changed and its affecting the sea and its resources'*
- The younger participants (18 – 26) reported that they would hear this from their mothers and other older women in the village.
- You reported that the fish you catch have got smaller in size. In the past, the same species of fish were a lot bigger.
- Some species of fish had completely disappeared due to things like more fish are being caught without allowing them to breed, coral bleaching, mangrove and soil erosion from the mainland affecting their breeding areas
- Older participants also stated that they noticed that over the years the sea has risen and this has coincided with the change in the species and quantity that they are able to collect.
- *'when you overfish to sell marine resources, the sea becomes poor in resources because it cannot replenish as fast as it is being overfished'*



How have changes in marine resources affected you as women?

'For us in Serua, we are known for the abundance of our marine resources, so when there is nothing we can get from the sea, we have to go to the shops and things are so expensive so we as women worry about how to feed our families'

- It takes much longer to gather food and this takes time away from other duties at home.
- *'the seasonal fish that we used to catch before don't come anymore. In the past, we used to look forward to some species because we know their season but now they don't come'*
- *'we have to wait for so long when we go fishing, before it was quick, but now we put the line out and wait for so long'*
- Some of the participants reported that their waking hours were longer because they had to balance trying to feed their family as well as taking care of other duties such as cleaning, cooking, taking care of their children.
- You often would not collect as much food to sustain their family and would have to go out more than you did previously. Participants reported that this was quite challenging.
- You are also unable to sell as much as you would like to help out with family finances such as children's school things and other food that you cannot gather from the sea.
- *'Imagine when you want to eat, you go fishing with that expectation, but because you don't catch enough or it takes so long to catch anything, you will feel let down and that's how I feel sometimes about the changes in the marine resources'*

We asked about restrictions on taking marine resources

Types of Restrictions

- Over the years there have been restrictions or *tabu* on certain types of resources including turtles, undersized crabs, sea clams, sea cucumber and certain species of fish. Turtles are banned all year long whilst the species of fish are illegal to catch during certain times of the year.
- The species of fish that they cannot catch are *kawakawa* and *donu*. The restrictions are usually applied during the breeding season of these species and was necessary to increase their breed.

Who imposes them?

- The restrictions were applied by the Ministry,
- The restrictions applied by government are made in the form of regulations issued by the Ministry of Fisheries.
- There have been restrictions imposed by the village as well and restrictions apply to both women and men.
- The village would also create restrictions to attempt to increase the supply of a certain marine resource and villages would be verbally informed on the restrictions.
- For Serua village, this restriction came in the form of a restriction on the harvesting of giant sea clams.

Regulating marine resources

Do the restrictions apply to everyone?

- Yes, but anyone can use the marine resources including those from outside the village
- It used to be the law that they had control over their *qoliqoli*/fishing area, today anyone could obtain a fishing licence that allowed them to fish in any Fijian waters.
- Participants reported that they often see outsiders (people not even from the *Yasana/province* of Serua) coming into their fishing areas. The areas even included the areas which were designated by the village as a *tabu* area, such as the area where they were growing the giant sea clams.

How do you know about the restrictions?

- If there were restrictions created by the village, these were not written, but were relayed to the villages verbally, often at a village meeting or relayed via the *Turaga ni Mataqali*.
- Participants reported that customary laws were generally not written down and enforcement was done by members of the village. There was no need for formal verification

You told us that:

- *'Sometimes people come in and take the clams and leave the empty shells. When they sell the meat, they can sell it for as much as \$1000'*
- *Sometimes even when the village has appointed village/fish wardens, the members of the village do not adhere to them because they know that the law from the government is different.*
- *'We have had a case in the village where one of the fish wardens almost go shot by a spear gun when he questioned a man who he suspected of breaching the village laws'*
- The requirement for fishing licences has also affected their ability to sell their catch so they would just pass them on to people who had the licence. *'It hurt that we couldn't sell our own catch like we did before, but we have no choice because the fisheries department are very strict'*
- *When licences were first required, not many women from the village would get theirs but since it has been free to get them recently and they've also seen the need for them, more women are now getting their licences.*



We asked you who the government would speak to if they wanted to find out about customary governance of marine resources? Would they ask you women?

- You told us that firstly they would speak to the Provincial office in order to contact the *Turaga ni Koro* who would then convey the message to the villages or to gather the village members so that the representatives from the Fisheries Department can come themselves to hold an information session regarding new changes.
- 20 participants reported that they have never been asked for their opinion on the restrictions on fishing/harvesting and that more often than not, the restrictions were applied without consultation.





Should women's voices be heard?

- All of you agreed that women know about custom and should be asked about it
- Some of you thought that women would often have a different understanding of custom from men.
- A suggested reason for this was that women are the ones who are actually doing the work and also always have to think about the family which is why they understand custom differently.
- Most of you thought that men and women had similar understandings of custom
- All of you agreed that you would be prepared to share their experiences of customary control of marine resources because they were the ones who were actively involved.



What did we learn from the women who helped us with this research?

- Women are the ones who do a majority of the work for their families, but are often not included when it comes to consultation
- Often women only learn of restrictions once they have been decided
- Because women bear the greatest responsibility for feeding their families marine resources are important to them
- They have also noted the decrease in the number, size and type of species of fish and marine resources that they are able to catch.
- They acknowledged that the changes requiring licences has affected them and that there is competition for resources from outsiders.

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- The Project was led by Sue Farran (Newcastle University, England) assisted by Jennifer Corrin (The University of Queensland, Australia)