

# Forging Fijian Camaraderie: The cultural significance and social uses of kava (*yaqona*) (*Piper methysticum* Forst. f) in three upper watershed communities in north western Viti Levu (Fiji Islands)

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## ABSTRACT

Kava (*yaqona*) (*Piper methysticum* Forst. f) is an important non-timber forest product for many Pacific Island cultures. Three villages (Navala, Nadruvu and Nakoroboya) in north-western Viti Levu (Fiji Islands) were part of a FORENET/USP/PACE-SD (International Forestry and Environmental Network/University of the South Pacific/ Pacific Centre for Environment and Sustainable Development) sponsored, socio-economic and bio-cultural study (April to June 2011). Part of this field work focused on the anthropology of kava, using participant observation and ethnographic analysis in traditional *bure* settings. Results revealed that Navala villagers had a more intense and profound symbolic meaning and cultural understanding of kava and elders upheld and safeguarded kava protocols, stories and traditions. Nadruvu and Nakoroboya however exhibited a less cultural understanding of kava based on varying degrees of acculturation and changing traditional mores and customs. The cultural significance and social uses of kava (*yaqona*) were important in all three villages studied and contributed to forging strong social and cultural relationships.

**Key words:** Kava, cultural significance, social issues, biocultural diversity, traditional ecological knowledge, *sevusevu* and *ni tautau*.

## INTRODUCTION

### Kava and its importance in the Pacific

Kava (*yaqona*) (*Piper methysticum* Forst. f) has long been at the social, cultural and economic centre of many Pacific island cultures (Lebot *et al.*, 2007), and often characterised as a valuable non-timber forest product. Kava is profoundly important as a way of bringing people together, along with its ethno-botanical and ethno-pharmacological properties. *Yaqona* in the Fijian vernacular is also "grog dope" or "*yaqona ke nasha*". According to legend (Go-Fiji, 2012):

*"the word "yaqona" (pronounced yang -GO-na) was derived from the Fijian god Degei, whose name means "from heaven to the soil and*

*through the Earth." He had three sons, all of whom he had given two sacred crops, vuga (a type of tree) and yaqona, so that they could receive wisdom from them. In turn, the sons gave them to their other people, and the legend states that to this day, the crops grow wherever Fijian descendents" (p.1).*

Kava carries with it symbolic and ritualistic traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), that has been passed down through the generations. Depending on the culture and specific local socio-cultural milieu's, kava occupies an important place in forging spiritual sources of wisdom to seek ancestral favour (Lebot *et al.*, 1997:121) that encompasses the use of this

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<sup>2</sup>Which included its symbolic meaning and cultural understanding that sustains its central place within Pacific Islander social life, and highlighted the uses of kava (*yaqona*) as a valuable exchange item within social relationships?

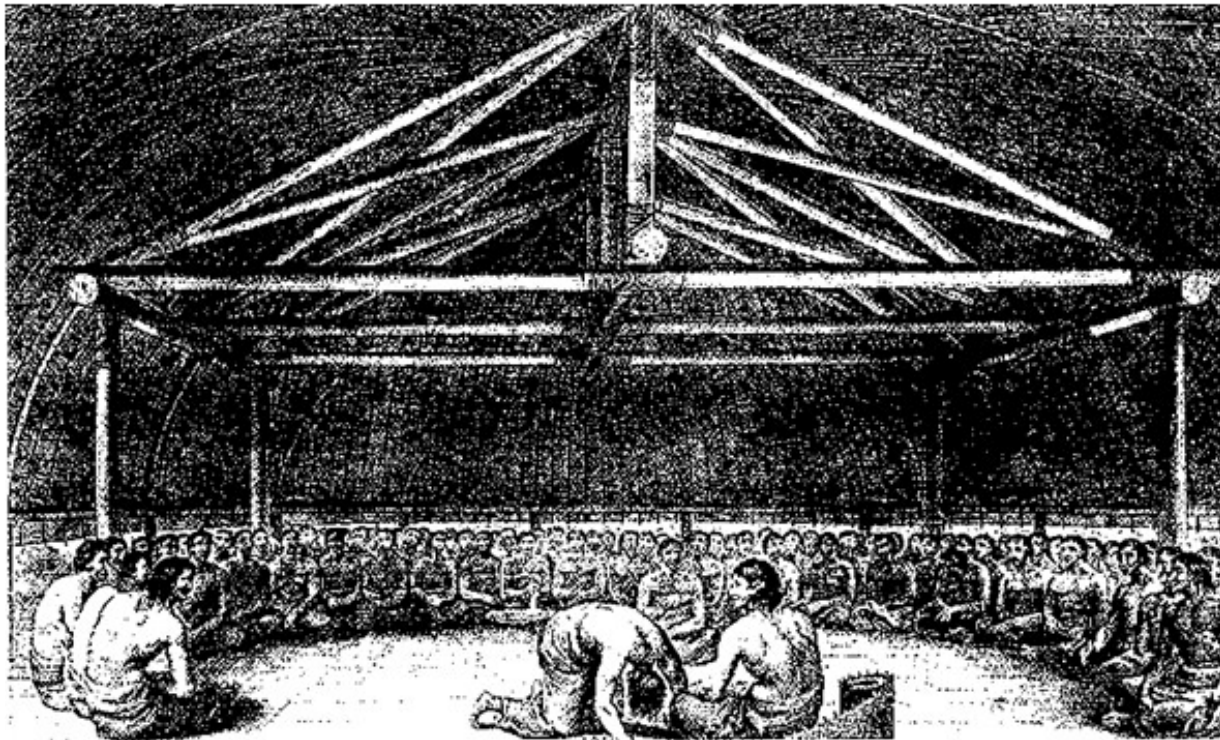
<sup>3</sup>A series of three community *sevusevu*'s and departure *ni tautau* ceremonies were conducted as well as 10 in-depth kava-sessions were completed in all three communities. The author combined visualism and collaborative ethnographic methods to be socio-cultural determinants (departure points) from which observations and conclusions were made. Prior and informed consent was agreed upon involving the village headman (Turaga ni Koro) and other men and women participants.

mildly psychotropic drug<sup>4</sup>.

Pre-historical memoirs of the discovery and settlement of the remote Pacific Islands, has been characterised by historians as speculative and dubious since the 1700's (Lebot *et al.*, 1997). The same author reiterates that it “seems clear that Pacific Island peoples, along with most of their domesticated plant and animal assemblages, originated in Southeast Asia” (p.5). Human populations first colonized Sahul; a large land area of New Guinea and Australia (then connected by land bridge), at least 40,000 years ago (Bellwood, 1978). This affirmation is also substantiated by Nunn (1994; 1998). The nearby islands of Western Melanesia were reached later in history (e.g. New Ireland circa 32,000 B.P), and the western Solomon Islands *circa* 29,000 B.P; (Allan *et al.*, 1989). Until about 4000 years B.P, human settlements in the Pacific were

restricted to these Western most Islands of Melanesia. Since then, migrants and sailing canoes have located and populated all of the remaining inhabitable tropical and subtropical islands of the central and eastern Pacific. When European explorers first arrived on the remote Pacific Islands, kava was used in many societies an integral part of religious, political and economic life (Figure 1), which transcended into its habitual and ritualistic uses in ceremonies.

As far as its origin, Kava is a Pacific plant domesticate (Yen, 1985), and suggests that “the Oceanian's<sup>5</sup> retained (or reinvented) the ethno botanical concepts of domestication throughout their geographical spread and individual paths of development (p.5)”. The plant itself is a Pacific domesticate that originated outside of Southeast Asia and New Guinea. Some suggestions by Yen (1985)



**Figure 1.** Paulaho King of the Friendly Islands (Tonga) Drinking Kava. (Source : J, Webber artist on James Cook's third voyage to the Pacific (Courtesy of Hawaii State Archives, Honolulu).

<sup>4</sup>Its active principle, are a series of kavalactones that are concentrated in the rootstock and roots. Islanders in just these psychoactive chemicals I drinking cold water infusions of chewed, ground, pounded, or otherwise macerated kava stumps and roots (Lebot *et al.*, 1997, p.1).

<sup>5</sup>The islands of the southern, western, and central Pacific Ocean, including Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia. The term is sometimes extended to encompass Australia, New Zealand, and the Malay Archipelago. (Free Dictionary, 2012. Retrieved from: <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Oceanians>).

highlight that in the northern Islands of Vanuatu is a species and as vegetatively propagated root crop. The same author suggests that kava is very young domesticate—perhaps less than 3000 years old, and that it originated from Vanuatu; carried eastward into Fiji and Polynesia and then westerward into scattered areas of New Guinea and into two islands of central Micronesia (Lebot *et al.*, 1997).

From a linguistic anthropological perspective, affinity exists between the name *malohu* in the reconstructed term *maloku* (kava) from Portal-North Central Vanuatu (Lebot *et al.*, 1997). According to Crowley (1990), “is the language ancestral to probably all of the languages spoken between Efate and the Torres in Vanuatu” (Crowley, 1990;1991). The same author reports that *maloku* also has Fijian reflexes that mean “quiet” or “subdued” ( Lebot *et al.*, 1997). This brief linguistic history or heritage could date kava’s domestication to before the breakup of Proto-North Central Vanuatu language some 3000 years ago. Recent speculation from a socio-cultural perspective that a large number of present-day kava cultivars supports linguistic clues to partially explain its antiquity in Vanuatu (Lebot *et al.*, 1997; Allan *et al.*, 1989).

### **Kavettes<sup>6</sup>**

The way in which kava is prepared and consumed varies greatly between Pacific islands such as Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea and American Samoa. In Vanuatu for example, during a circumcision ceremony, kava is prepared with the roots and root stocks and the stump is cut to smaller pieces and cleaned, then “chewers” masticate the kava and drank from three chewed mouthfuls of honoured guests. In the Western Province of Papua New Guinea, men move indoors and prepare kava (Lebot, 1997). Hosts harvest the kava plants earlier that day and “empower” the roots by yelling “*yikay*”. In an act of whooping and stomping, the men carry them to their

longhouse<sup>7</sup>, in which all members of the community reside. Men burn the leaves of a forest palm to sweeten the kava. Others chew, spitting mouthfuls of pulp into a bowl made from the spathe of palm inflorescence. Both hosts and guests contribute multiples to the growing communal pile of chewed kava. Leaf ashes mixed into the masticated kava which is then divided into servings, each in a coconut spathe bowl. Water is added and, is squeezed by hand to infuse the drug (Lebot, 1997:162). According to Holmes (1967, 1974) and Malauulu *et al.* (1974), kava preparation and consumption in American Samoa, starts with the presiding chief, who selects a kava root and hands it to one of the younger members of the *aumaga* (the younger untitled men of the village). This man cuts the kava into pieces and uses a hammer stone to pound them into pulp on the concave surface of the stone mortar. Other *aumaga* members are washing a large, multi-legged wooden kava bowl and fetching water in plastic buckets. Conversation is kept at a minimum and often workers smoke is the work of preparation proceeds. Three members of the *aumaga* carried a massive bowl to the back of the house and sit behind it. Patterns of kava consumption in American Samoa are based on strict protocol. The village *manaia*, the leader of the *aumaga*, who prepares the kava sits directly behind the bowl<sup>8</sup>. The *manaia* takes off his shirt and turns up his *lavalava* (waistcloth) not extend below his knees. He turned to his right to wash his hands for beginning to prepare the kava infusion. Kava pulp is then strained through the inner bark of *Hibiscus tiliaceus* (*fau*), and twists the *fau*, as to allow the strained kava to pour back into the bowl. The *manaia* inspects the color, cleanliness and the sound of splashing, and signifies its readiness. In response, the collective chiefs clap their hands together several times. At this point, the *manaia* wipes the rim of the bowl with the *fau* and lays his hands upon the size of the container. The *tulafale* (orators or “talking

<sup>6</sup>Lebot refers to these as “*Kavettes*” (derived from the term “*vignettes*”), that describe kava use and consumption in various island communities (adopted from Labot, 1997:155).

<sup>7</sup>Single building about 23 m long in which all members of the community reside (Lebot, 1997:162).

<sup>8</sup>In other Pacific island contexts, this place is taken by the *taupau*, the ceremonial village virgin.

chiefs"), begin kava service by conducting rollcall of drinkers (Lebot, 1997:166). In Samoa, as elsewhere in Polynesia and Fiji, drinking order is politically charged and culturally significant. The most prestigious positions in the roll calls differ from place to place, but are usually at the beginning and the end of the drinking order.

### **Cultural importance of the kava ceremony in Fiji**

Historically and according to Singh (1986:1992) and Anon.2012b, "Kava was used as a social drink for high-ranking chiefs and elders, and drank as a form of welcome for honoured guests, consumed for preparation and completion of an event or of work, to validate status, observe births, marriages and deaths, to relieve stress, remedy illnesses etc (p.2). Kava was also drunk in kinship and chiefship rituals, for public atonement of misdeeds. Many people were pardoned for their crimes after a kava ceremony" (p. 1). Kava's historical significance continues in the Pacific (and more specifically in Fiji) *yaqona* is also referred to locally as *wai ni vanua* (water of the land, people and culture). Work by Aporosa (2011) suggests that many Fijians refer to this as a ingestible manifestation of their *vanua*; a drinkable representation of the people, the land, culture and cultural practice (Tomlinson, 2009:111-112). The drinking of *yaqona* is encouraged as it demonstrates, externalizes and personifies "*Fijian-ness*" and the Fijian way, therefore further enhancing cultural identity (Ratuva, 2007:92-6, 98-9; Vakabua, 2007:103). Former Fijian Methodist Church President Talatala Ilaitia Tuwere stated *yaqona* importance in "hold[ing] the people and land together [to] save them from alienation like overseas countries" (1999:16). Tuwere (1999) comments that Fijian custom considers the drinking of *yaqona* a moral obligation (p.16) with consumption guided, informed, and founded upon the central ethos of *vakaturaga* (Ravuvu, 1987:26, 235). In essence, *Vakaturaga* (and its parallel *vakamarama*; womanly character traits) encapsulates the Fijian ideal, comprising "Chiefly" values irrespective of one's status such as *veidokai* (respect), *vakarokoroko* (humility), *kila na i yatu* (knowing ones place

in the community), *qaravi tavi* (fulfilling obligations), *veiwasei kei na veikauwaitaki* (sharing and caring), *veivosoti* (forgiveness), *veivukei* (helpfulness) and *yalo malua* (a quiet demeanour) and *ideals*. Ravuvu (1987:18-19,235) argues that this reinforces cultural identity and strengthens. Turner (1986) describes the kava ritual is a form of sacrifice, allowing the participants to communicate directly with supernatural (p. 203).

Aporosa (2011:230) further describes *yaqona*'s significance within ritual practice as "deemed to be beyond measure and quantity, therefore 100 grams has the same value and importance as 1 kilogram, and *visa-versa* (Arno, 1993:79). This author further describes that "once prepared in its aqueous beverage form, *yaqona* becomes a sacred and living entity; one that both embodies *mana* and has the ability to enhance a person's *mana*" (Turner, 1986:209; Tomlinson, 2004:669). It was also noted in Ravuvu (1983:41), that certain aspects of kava ritualistic drinking formalities are observed as an automatic response by drinkers in less formal social drinking occasions. These traditional purposes for Kava use in ceremonies still hold true today, but vary in terms of the intensity and overall significance, depending on the type of ceremony/ritual or cultural activity being performed.

### **METHODOLOGY**

Three upper watershed communities (Navala, Nadruغو and Nakoroboya) in northwestern Viti Levu (Fiji Islands), were part of a FORENET/USP/PACE-SD sponsored in-depth socio-economic and biocultural study from April to June 2011. One of the study's socio-cultural objectives was to focus on the anthropology of kava; which includes its symbolic meaning and cultural understanding that sustains its central place within Fijian social life. This study also highlighted the uses of kava (*yaqona*) as a valuable exchange item within social relationships and the spiritual and religious significance of kava consumption (Lebot *et al.*, 2007). Participant observation and ethnographic analysis were used within an informal village settings in traditional *bure*'s

**(Photo 2).** A series of three community traditional *sevusevu*'s and departure *ni tautau* sessions were conducted as well as 10 kava-sessions in all three communities. Anon. (2012a) and Lester (1941) reported that *Sevusevu* ceremonies are based similar activities and protocols and that most Fiji

communities follow these rituals. Further explanation of the actual ceremony can be found in [Appendix 1](#). *Sevusevu* sessions were used as ethnographic determinants (socio-cultural departure points) from which overall observations and conclusions were made.



**Figure 2.** Kava drinking in Nakoroboya village in traditional *bure* setting. (With permission from participants). Photo by Sainimere Veitata, Research Assistant with FORENET Project.

### Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)

There was the **needed** to incorporate free, prior and informed consent as an ethical and rights-based approach to research, especially dealing with human subjects and the analysis of livelihood strategies (IFAD, 2005). Essentially, “Free, prior and informed consent recognizes indigenous peoples’ inherent and prior rights to their lands and resources and respects their legitimate authority to require that third parties enter into an equal and respectful relationship with them, based on the principle of informed consent” (IFAD, 2005).

This approach was adopted in the introduction phase of the PACE-SD methodology ([Appendix 2](#)).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Brief socio-cultural characterisation of three upper watershed communities

[Table 1](#) and [Table 2](#) show summaries of socioeconomic services and livelihood activities, respectively, in three villages in Upper Ba watershed.

**Table 1.** Summary of some generalized baseline socioeconomic (and other services) in three (3) villages in Upper Ba watershed (Ba Province).

Village	Number of households	Government services
<b>Nakoroboya</b>	57	-School - village nurse - Tavua/Ba health centre's - water supply
<b>Navala</b>	128	- Namau Government Station:- Health Centre - Navala Catholic Primary School
<b>Nadrugu</b>	70	- Water supply - For school they go to Navala and Bukuya Primary and into town for secondary education -Health service are acquired at Bukuya/Namau or Ba town

**Table 2.** Summary of the livelihood activities of the three (3) villages.

Livelihood activities	Nakoroboya	Navala	Nadrugu
<b>Agriculture</b>	Dalo and yaqona	Taro, cassava, banana, yaqona, dalo ni tana ( <i>Xanthosoma sagittifolium</i> ), sweet potato and also native and exotic fruit trees	Taro, cassava, banana, yaqona, dalo ni tana ( <i>Xanthosoma sagittifolium</i> ), plantain, sweet potato and also native and introduced fruit trees
<b>Forestry</b>	pine	Pine, <b>vesi</b> ( <i>Intsia bijuga</i> ), <b>koka/togotogo</b> ( <i>Bischofia javanica</i> ), <b>yasi</b> ( <i>Santalum spp</i> ), <b>yaka</b> ( <i>Dacrydium nidulum</i> ), <b>bua ni viti</b> ( <i>Fagraea berteriana</i> ), <b>amunu</b> ( <i>Dacrycarpus imbricarpus</i> )	Pine
<b>Freshwater resources</b>	Prawns, eels, <i>Kulia repesttris</i> (freshwater fish)	Prawns, eels, <i>Kulia repesttris</i> (freshwater fish)	Prawns, eels, <i>Kulia repesttris</i> (freshwater fish)
<b>Village remittances</b>	Part time work at the farm, and working in Ba town	Work in resorts making bures for tourism purposes and also part time work in Ba town.	Some villagers have their children and relatives sending money from outside the village (in towns)

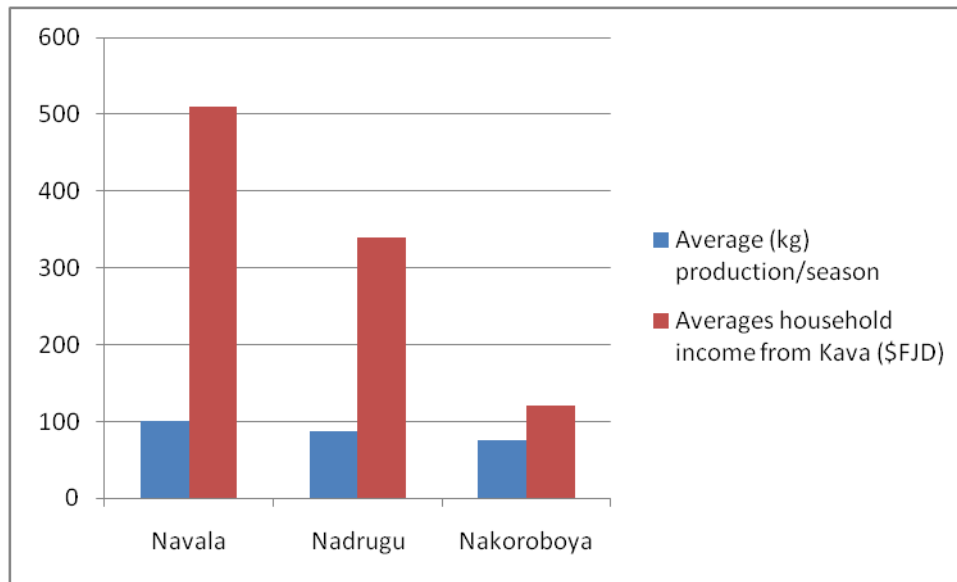
Kava (*Piper methysticum* Forst.f) is a member of the pepper family (Piperaceae), sustains a central place within upland Fijian culture and social life, based on its profound symbolic meaning and cultural understanding (Lebot *et al.*, 1997). The FORENET research team found that in all three communities

studied, Kava (*yaqona*) plays an integral part of the villagers' daily lives; either as a complementary social activity (both culturally and spiritually), in ceremonies or rituals, or as an important economic commodity (source of income to improve livelihoods). In a similar study conducted by Reddy *et al.* (2003; In:

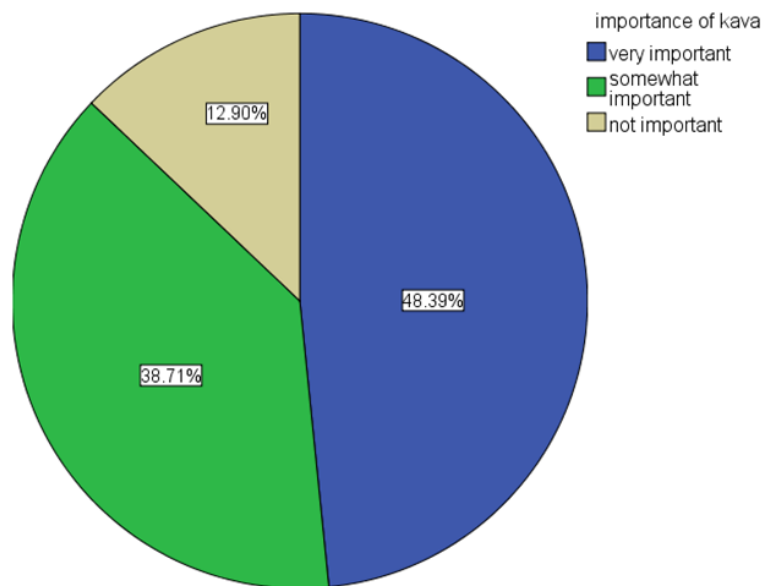
Prasad & Raj, 2006, p.13), it was found that the third highest expenditure item of urban households was on kava (after food and transport cost). These results are coincidental with preliminary household and livelihood data from the three upper watershed communities; revealing that kava production in Navala village was close to 100 kg per season; Nadругu, 87 kg and Nakoroboya,

76kg. Household incomes varied from village to village, but the average range was between \$120 FJD to \$500 FJD per month (give USD equivalents) (Figure 3).

Figure 4 summarises the importance of *yaqona* in the three villages studied. From a sample-size of 25 households in each village, about 60% the villagers spoken to in the kava sessions considered kava (compared to other



**Figure 3.** Average production (kg) and average household income (\$FJD) derived from Kava (*Piper methysticum* Forst.f) in three villages in Upper Ba Watershed.



**Figure 4.** Importance of *yaqona* in all six villages in Upper Ba watershed. Results based on ethnographic analysis and participant observation.

forms of social/cultural activities) to be very important (48%); about 38% said that *yaqona* was somewhat important, and a smaller majority (13%) said that it was not that important.

Some women and non-drinkers (comprising the other 40% of the same sample-size from each village) said that kava was not important and commented of its detrimental effects, addictive properties and overall misuse, which in turn contributed to tardiness (related to completing household tasks), laziness, as well as family disruptions and breakups.

### **Kava and its social, cultural and economic importance**

Most kava drinkers in the villages considered that its importance **rests primarily on the fact that it is a source of income (mainly because of stable market prices, availability of local markets—Ba Town or Nadi)**. Local consumption of Kava in Navala village accounts for roughly 45%, and the remaining 55% is sold in markets (e.g. Ba town being the closest urban center where most of kava is marketed and sold). Smaller amounts are sold in markets in Tavua and

Rakiraki, as well as Nadi. Similar results were obtained for Nadruvu village (30% local consumption; 70% local market mainly Ba) and Nakoroboya with a higher proportion of kava (85%) being consumed locally and the remaining 15% sold in markets; presumably because the opportunity costs of selling kava in markets (mostly Ba) was lower than consuming it locally. Respondents explained that it was more costly for them to transport to Ba market even with the high market prices for dry-kava roots. On almost all the farms in all three villages, Kava plants themselves maintain high rates of on-farm productivity. Most farmers commented on ease of accessibility to plants, cultivars and/or seed-plants (Figure 5), but complained that it was getting harder to find plants that can withstand drought or heavy rains, due to the effects of climate change. Respondents commented that due to unpredictable seasonal changes and intensity of extreme rainfall events, kava plants become stunted and necrotic (yellowing of leaves) due to excess water on poorly drained soils. Kava tends to grow slower than usual even with the same amount of care and maintenance.



**Figure 5.** Washing kava in Nadruvu village, in preparation for drying. (*With permission from participant.*) Photo by D. Orchardson, 2011.



Drought periods are becoming noticeably longer (particularly in "El Niño years") which affects the ability of the kava plant to produce strong, well-formed root systems. Slash-and-burn (or migratory agriculture) practices and deforestation causes upland forest degradation and soil erosion, which ultimately affects kava production. As an innovative adaptation strategy to the impacts of climate change, farmers in Bukuya (close to Nadruge) for example are using an N<sup>2</sup> fixer *Leucaena leucocephala* (Lam.) De Wit (referred to as *vaivai*) as partial shade between young kava to supplement nitrogen and prevent soil erosion on slopes >20% (Figure 6).

Villagers also commented the spiritual and cultural significance of *yaqona* as a socialising tool to ‘break down barriers’ and bestows upon them a feeling of “friendship and camaraderie”. Some villagers’ however don't partake in the consumption of kava, which is considered an acceptable anomaly, depending on the circumstances or whether kava is used ceremonies or other community events, or not. Other motives behind why Kava was not consumed in the villages, was considered to mildly ‘neo-religious’ (introduction of new forms of

‘religion’ (e.g. Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witness, and Baptists), which discourage intoxicating beverages or other stimulants as part of their doctrine. This “missionary” rhetoric or influence particularly with respect to the cultivation and consumption of kava, has been at the center of its symbolic meaning and cultural understanding more than a millennium and has also shaped villagers’ appreciations (or dislikes) of its many attributes.

The author considers “traditional” Fijian communities in this study as those that demonstrated a closer (tangible) association with historical, cultural, social and spiritual practices<sup>9</sup> for the past decade, through manifested oral histories, historical archives, anthropological and varied ethnographic research. The author also noted that more traditional communities like Navala village had a broader cultural respect for kava, and seem to not misuse it as much as other communities in the same watershed. This was primarily based on its deep-rooted cultural significance and symbolism with respect to the villagers’ overall holistic understanding of the plant. Elders in Navala village, for example, keep a ‘watchful eye’ on the use of kava in the



**Figure 6.** Community facilitator explaining the use of an “A-frame” for soil conservation on hillsides. Farmers are using *vaivai* (*Leucaena leucocephala* (Lam.) De Wit, as light-shade for their kava, and use an A-frame for planting on-contour to improve soil conservation on steep hillsides. Photo by Matthew Kensen.

<sup>9</sup>Mainly refers to the maintenance/practice of traditional agriculture, soil conservation, Fijian folklore, transmission of life-stories and oral narratives, maintenance of traditional folkways, use of medicinal plants, care and maintenance of crops for food security,

community. Nadragu and Nakoroboya villagers (including the elders present in kava sessions) has less regard for misuse of kava, mainly because it was acceptable to drink kava for the “sake of drinking-it”, or because it was easily available. In all three villages, special events such as funerals, births, or other festivals, were considered important, but seen as ways to indulge without too much concern for protocol; Navala village, however exhibited more rigor and rules that were adhered to in terms of kava use (or misuse). It was observed that women are permitted in the kava *sevusevu* ceremony in Navala village, and participated in the open-ended focus group discussion sessions. The presence of women in was also consistent with village protocol during *sevusevu* and *ni-tautau* sessions in Nadragu and Nakoroboya villages (Figure 7).

Regardless of religious beliefs or newfound devotions, *yaqona* was seen by Navala villagers’ as an “acceptable and accepting beverage that is used to welcome outsiders and collaborators”. Kava consumption promotes tranquility, sociability and enables peacefulness among villagers.

Many commented on its abilities of kava to calm the nerves and promote negotiations were tensions are sometimes high. Some villagers commented that kava sessions are good for negotiating land tenure, work in *matangali*’s and planning for crop or tree planting and harvesting.

Kava drinking practices have carried over to shape the ways that these villagers use alcohol (and more recently introduced drug): consumption is typically social rather than solitary; people drink quickly; men drink more than women; drinkers empty entire bottles at once, just as they drink the bottom of the comparable; and so on (Lebot *et al.*, 1997, p.140). Historically however drinkers normally sat silently, as noise and bright lights can spoil kava affects (Lebot *et al.*, 1997). In much of Vanuatu example, kava drinkers quietly listen to the effects of the drug and to the voices of their ancestors (Ashby,1984; Emerson 1903). Emerson (1903) also noted that “this idea which so prevails among Hawaiians that [kava] drunkenness is a goal of the drinker, has this tendency, when they give themselves to the use of alcohol stimulants, to make them



**Figure 7.** Assistant *Turaga ni Koro* in Navala village mixing kava with women in traditional *bure*. (With permission from participants.) Photo by D. Orcherton, 2011.

hard drinkers” (p. 3). Expectations of social and peaceful kava drunkenness from villagers in Navala, Nadragu and Nacoroboya, contrasts with what to expect from alcohol (Lindstrom, 1982). In many cases, Pacific Islanders understand that alcohol makes it drinkers unruly and violent whereas ‘peaceful kava’ invokes the coexistence of two psychoactive drugs in many Pacific societies are strengthened by these opposed expectations of their effects (Philibert, 1986). In other words, peaceful kava informs disorderly alcohol, and *vice versa* (Lebot *et al.*, 1997, p. 140). Very little influence of alcohol was present, even in habitual kava drinkers in all three villages studied.

Origin myths (Malinowski, 1948) have been at the center of Pacific societies for number of years, and myths themselves often serve as a kind of narrative deed or claim to land and other important resources; they also function as sacred constitutions for existing social groups (Malinowski, 1948). The underlying narrative structures and core symbols concerning origin myths encapsulated specific Fijian worldviews; *na Kalao* (God); *na Vanua* (including the land, people, ancestors, spirits, environment, landscape, seas, and water bodies); *Na Tamata* (human beings). Villagers commented as well on a spiritual dimension that *yaqona* helps to “bring to the surface”, particularly in *Vugalei* (where there are places or spots that are known to be *tawa* (occupied/filled with spirits). *Vugalei* believe that there is a power of darkness in their world that could be avoided if people were widely informed of one's *rai* (Baba, 2006, p. 47). One of the things that were discovered in the kava sessions was this connectedness to their spirit-world, and that *Vugalei* Fijians believe in the force or spiritual power of *mana*- the power with which most things in the *vanua* are said to have life. Most ceremonial presentations in the three villages involved giving of *mana* to people, and it is spoken of in daily life (Baba, 2007, p. 49).

Kava's origin myths are recounts of external provenience that centered on ancestral heroes and descended from heaven that

bestowed kava to the people (Lebot *et al.*, 1997). For the villagers of Nadragu and Nakaroboyo (Figure 8), and as described in the open-ended, sessions *yaqona* comes from and causes death, but for the villagers of Navala (Figure 9), origin myths are commonly associated with sugar-cane myths, due to the villages' close association with Fijian cane growing cultures, descendent from immigrant Indians. These origin myths coincide with findings from Malinowski (1948) where often these were interpreted as social charters, and as a kind of narrative deed or claim to land and other important resources. According to Lebot *et al.* (1997), origin myths also served as sacred constitutions for existing social groups (Malinowski, 1948. In: Lebot *et al.*, 1997). In terms of kava's life giving properties, respondents also told of kava's apparent medical uses and are associated with garden fertility magic and first fruits ceremonies. This coincides with Sahlin's findings that kava resembles symbolizes life giving fluids (semen or mother's milk) (Sahlins, 1981). Within the Fijian culture, rules define social status and create and nurture relationships and social status, but these relationships also regularly access to the drug. Villagers in Nadragu and Nakaroboya communities (though unintentionally) seem to misuse kava and undermine its legitimacy in a social or cultural context, which in turn destabilizes the communities public health and well-being. Some of the habitual drinkers have skin problems, breathing difficulties and other ailments that seem attributed to chronic substance abuse. There seems to a better response from Navala villagers in terms of gauging overuse, which was coincidental with more traditional uses of kava for medicinal and therapeutic purposes.

In terms of social consumption and exchange, all three communities exhibited similar characteristics; that kava ceremonies promoted tranquility, sociability and acceptance of the local political hierarchies. Many of the community-based land organizations and working relationships were divided into *matangali's*<sup>10</sup> and clan-based

<sup>10</sup>Matagal's are land-based divisions based on clan or kinship relations in communities. Many of the matagal's that are known are based on historical and cultural understanding of their land –based resources.



**Figure 8.** Village Head man (left) and wives discuss the importance of Kava as part of their daily livelihood and family economy. *(With permission from respondents in Nanoko village.)* Photo by D. Orcheron, 2011.



**Figure 9.** Stories are often told by villagers during kava sessions. *(With permission from Nava-la Village Development Committee.)* Photo by Sainimere Veitata, 2011.

kinship relations are strengthened by kava preparation and consumption, which fortified farming tasks and responsibilities. Navala village exhibited stronger traditional ties held together by both utilitarian and ceremonial exchange however in all three villages kava was used to improve and sustain social relations among family members and among village residents. The most valuable exchange tokens were the *yaqona* wrapped in newspaper<sup>11</sup> (Figure 10) but more importantly, were people themselves. These observations coincide with results from Lebot *et al.*, 1997, and Toren, 1988) where kava exchange is

ritually formalised for important social occasions (Lebot *et al.*, 1997), and is a form of conflict resolution and building political alliances.

The traditional rites of passage (e.g. weddings, funerals, male and female initiations) of Fijian societies still exists, however in recent years there has been more influence of the Catholic Church and other religious denominations in these villages that has deterred people from more traditional/ ceremonies or traditional means of exchange (Lebot *et al.*, 1997).



**Figure 10.** Jale Turaga (Forestry Department/FORENET volunteer researcher) presenting the kava root (wrapped in newspaper) at *sevusevu* ceremony (Navala Village). (With permission from Navala Village Development Committee.) Photo by D. Orchardton, 2011.

In all villages studied, the mixing of kava seemed ritualistic and according to protocol, however traditional roles and responsibilities were less defined in Nadruvu (Figure 2) and Nakaroboyo. Rhythmic hand-

clapping was common in kava preparation ceremonies which varied slightly from village to village. Elders commented that cupped hand clapping was a way to awaken their awareness and bring more “life to the supernatural”.

<sup>11</sup>The kava presented in *sevusevu* has to be dried roots (not powder). The newspaper wrapping around the roots is less significant than the cultural/spiritual gestures during the ceremony itself.

Laughing, noise and social exchange of jokes, stories and legends were also quite common in all three villages and a way of forging camaraderie and social relations (Figure 5).

## CONCLUSIONS

The study concluded that kava remains at the social, cultural and economic centre of many Fijian cultures and communities, particularly in the upper Ba watershed of Viti Levu. Kava is especially important economically for these villages, and provides an important peacemaking function. Navala village represented a more intense and profound symbolic meaning and cultural understanding of kava based on historical accounts and spiritual connectedness to the

plant. Village elders upheld and safeguarded kava protocols, stories and traditions. Nadruvu and Nakoroboya however exhibited a less intense cultural understanding of kava based on progressive and/or varying degrees of acculturation and changing traditional mores and customs. Though the economics of *yaqona* was beyond the scope of this study, elders from these later two communities attributed *yaqona's* use value more from an economic standpoint rather than emphasising its spiritual or cultural importance. The cultural significance and social uses of kava (*yaqona*) are important in all three communities studied and contribute to forging strong social and cultural relationships.

## Acknowledgements

This trip would not have been a success if it was not for the contribution from Sainimere Veitata Research Assistant with FORENET. Some work was also done by his assistant Daiana Taoba on the socioeconomics surveys and translation of vital community ethnographic information. The author also wishes to thank Mr. Rokotamana Vitinaqailevu Junior; Project Research Assistant (FORENET) for his contributions to data gathering on farms in the three communities. Many thanks to the kind people of Nakoroboya, Navala, Nadruvu villages for their free-prior and informed consent and assistance in the completion of the reconnaissance phase of this project. The FORENET team would also like to thank the many EV414 post graduate climate change students (Semester I) that kindly offered their time and assistance in gathering some relevant baseline socioeconomic and biophysical information in Navala village. The FORENET Team would like to profoundly thank the village headmen in all three villages and especially Mr. Mikaele Kubu (FORENET-Community Liaison Officer from Navala Village), who traveled with the team and carried out the traditional protocol in the villages. We are also grateful for the funders CIFOR for their project funding assistance.

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## Appendix 1

### The Fiji kava ceremony

At each fiji-kava-ceremony the following are required:

1. Pounded kava and water,
2. Kava Strainer,
3. Tanoa; a wooden bowl carved explicitly for this purpose, with a length of woven coconut coir attached to a "bulivula" (Ovula ovum) - akin to a golden cowrie seashell,
4. Kava bowls; fashioned usually from coconut shells,
5. A person to mix the kava, flanked by two others on either side of him,
6. A person to deliver the kava bowl to the main guest, and for dignitaries
7. A group to chant the kava dance mantra, for the cup bearer to dance his way to deliver the VIP's bowl of kava.

### The "sevusevu".

If the welcoming party is aware of the visiting delegation, it is customary they present their "sevusevu" first before the visitors reciprocate.

After this "sevusevu" presentation, a round of kava drinking ensues from the mixture made ready before the "sevusevu" was presented.

Alternatively, if the visitor arrives unannounced then the visiting delegation ought to present their "sevusevu" first.

After the visitors or welcoming party have presented their "sevusevu", it is received with great solemnity by the leader of the unit, or one of his nominees.

After the "sevusevu" presentations have ended, small talk then ensues which should lead into the matter to be discussed. It should be noted that at some point before the meeting is ended, both parties' kava "sevusevu" should be drunk, as fulfillment of the reception

(Adopted from: Fiji Taro and Kava, 2012 and Lester, R.H. (1941). Kava drinking in Viti Levu. *Oceania* 12: 97-124 ).



## **Appendix 2.**

### **Free, Prior and Informed Consent Procedures**

Step 1: Determined who the main stakeholders were, and why they were interested in the project.

Step 2: Requested information from the project and distributed this to key community stakeholders.

Step 3: Held discussions with the community. This was done through previous contact in the post graduate level Climate Change post graduate level course (EV414).

Step 4: Identified community facilitators or negotiators for undertaking the project.

Step 5: Sought independent advice through the USP-PACE-CCA (Climate Change Adaptation) project and other experts in community based vulnerability and assessments.

Step 6: Made community decisions (by consensus) and joint collaborative efforts locally.

Step 7: Maintained on-going communication with FORENET Project.