

Paper

The Equal Distribution Policy: Does It Generate Economic Advancement for iTaukei?

Sevanaia Sakai*

Abstract: The iTaukei, or Indigenous people, of Fiji own 91 percent of the land and constitute 62 percent of the country's total multiracial population. However, although critical in development discourses, these figures do not quite have the same effect on the development plight of the biggest landowners in the country. As it is, the 2019-2020 Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) revealed that 75 percent of iTaukei participants were below the basic needs poverty line, the highest of all the ethnic groups living in Fiji. This recent demographic-statistic trend questions the colonial land policy and post-independence government stance on customary land policy. In 2010, after the 2006 military coup, the FijiFirst Party government amended the Leases and Licenses Regulations of the Native Land Act (1961) to ensure equal distribution of lease money to landowners. For the first time, under the new equal distribution policy, the chiefs and commoners within a *mataqali* (clan) were able to share equal economic gains from the lease of mataqali land. There were social, economic, and cultural beneficial claims made by the Bainimarama government endorsed by the iTaukei Native Land Trust Board (TLTB) to validate the amendments. In line with critical colonial discourse, this article shares the first empirical evidence from the author's PhD dissertation regarding the economic benefit claim, specifically focusing on the equitable distribution of lease income. The researcher adopted a mixed-method approach, including an administered questionnaire survey, key person interview, and focus group discussion conducted at the area of study and with key individuals from statutory bodies. While the research outcome shows a general appreciation of the fair distribution of lease monies, the equal distribution policy has mixed implications for the socio-economic and cultural sustainability of the iTaukei community.

Keywords: iTaukei, TLTB, land reforms, equal distribution policy, sustainability

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*Teaching Staff, School of Laws and Social Sciences, University of the South Pacific, Fiji

Introduction

Land issues in Fiji have influenced the society's socio-economic, cultural, and political landscapes. In fact, around 85 percent of all land in Pacific Island countries and territories is customarily owned amongst different social groups (Secretariat of the Pacific Commission 2008, 1). A decade before independence, the Spate Report (1959, 5) resonated the urgency to address iTaukei overall wellbeing with the view “Fijians are one element in a plural society which is stable at present [before independence], but which holds potentialities of disbalance,” a view that bore fruit in subsequent years when land accessibility to Indo-Fijians was politicized (Boydell 2001, 6). In a cross-country study in Canada, Hall and Patrinos (2010) reaffirmed that the most significant and recurring sources of grievances for indigenous people are those relating to indigenous rights and claims regarding natural resources. From the literacy perspective, Boydell (2005) states that many people do not know their basic human rights, let alone land rights.

In the South Pacific, indigenous land issues are central to the many social complexities and development of the region (Lea 2004, 13) as in Aboriginal and Maori land claims (Australia and New Zealand), indigenous land for development (Papua New Guinea), and land reforms (Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Samoa), as well as challenges related to land access in Fiji. Land issues in contemporary Pacific society reflect the different expectations customary landowners and non-customary tenants have on land rights. iTaukei, as descendants of Fiji's original migrants, are registered in the ‘Vola ni Kawabula’ (VKB) or Registration of Native Survival Membership with the Native Land Commission, which guaranteed their position as customary landowners (Nayacakalou 1975, 1).

In a recent dissertation, Chambers (2016, 6) expresses the view that the land problem in Fiji is a hydra-headed monster, driven by vested or conflicting interests and expectations. From a critical colonial discourse, Rokolekutu (2019) placed the blame for the marginalization of iTaukei landowners and preventing them from managing their lands for a sustainable source of livelihood on the colonial institution. Furthermore, Dodd (2012) critiqued the recent land reforms in Fiji as counterproductive to iTaukei's aspirations by overriding their land rights to use, control, and redress. Overall, France (1969a) noted that the land tenure system in Fiji is the outcome of a lengthy process of evolution, simplification, distortion, and institutionalization, often based on false assumptions formed by early colonial settlers and officials on land ownership. This article begins with a brief historical overview of land ownership in Fiji, paying attention to the nature of land ownership and Europeans' contribution to land alienation.

Literature Review

Early observers of Fijian society concluded that land tenure in Fiji was fluid and land rights were acquired mainly by accident of birth (France 1969a; Hocart 1915, 623). However, these parameters were often distorted by tribal warfare, in which the lands of weaker tribes and their chiefs were taken by victors (France 1969b, 56). In those times, traditional leadership was also not stable, and neither was a chief's authority over the land. Sahlins (1981) in “Stranger Kings,” showed that in some parts of Fiji, chiefs were not owners of the land but latecomers and installed

by the host community because of their physical qualities and ability to command and excel in wars. However, land ownership units were not homogenous throughout Fijian society regarding the degree of land transfer permissible (France 1969a).

Collective ownership and transfer of land was part of the social system, which, through reciprocity and redistribution, enabled the fair allocation of resources rather than the accumulation of wealth (Ravuvu 1983; Overton 1994, 118). Social and cultural formalities often dictate land exchange between kinship and tribal groups. Like other traditional societies, Ravuvu (1998, 127) explained that during pre-contact, Fiji society customary land usage was characterized by *kana veicurumaki*, whereby Taukei could utilize each other's land resources freely for subsistence. In a similar vein, Ward (1994, 139) noted that flexibility was also attributed to population changes as it determined the landholdings of the iTaukei social grouping. Land rights were specifically about ownership, which was also residual and usufruct. By late 1870s, changes to the customary land tenure were inevitable due to the formality of colonization.

Colonial Land Policy

Without any colonial imposition, Fiji was a British colony for ninety-six years and gained independence and dominion status on 10 October 1970. Communal land tenure in Fiji was codified by the British administration based on inaccurate assumptions (France 1969a). France (1966), the authoritative figure on customary land in Fiji, remarked that the communal land tenure system is an emotionally charged political issue, regarded by Fijian politicians, who are publicly committed to its preservation, as the foundation of the Fijian social order. As a result, iTaukei land tenure was manufactured and hallowed as a true tradition to ease the colonial land administration in Fiji and the protection of iTaukei culture (MacNaught 1982). Any perceived violation of land rights and the model on which violation rests has fueled civil unrest and political instability in the post-independence era. Furthermore, the notion of inequality amongst iTaukei landowners is reinforced by the colonial policy of favoring bigger shares for chiefs when distributing lease income since the 1940s.

Ward (1994, 66) emphatically stated that lands were unequally distributed during the pre-contact era amongst iTaukei social groups. This inequality was formally recorded during the registration of native land in the 1880s under the mataqali grouping. In the decade after clan (mataqali) holdings were registered, the differential growth, or decline, of land-owning groups led to greater divergence between the size of these groups and the areas of land held (Ward 1994). These differences significantly contributed to inequality amongst iTaukei landowners in terms of those who lease their land and receive lease income compared to those whose land has little commercial value. The colonial land policy on lease distribution protected the colonists' economic interests and guaranteed chiefs' support. Lease benefits became a political tool post-independence, with iTaukei dominant political parties like the Alliance Party, Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei Party (SVT), and Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua (SDL) preserving policies favoring chiefs.

For most of the poor in developing countries, land is the primary means for generating a livelihood and the main vehicle for investing, accumulating wealth, and transferring it between

generations (De Soto 2000; Feder and Noronha 1987, 144). Land is also a key element of household wealth. Land rights are social rules that regulate the distribution of the benefits that accrue from specific uses of a certain piece of land under different tenure systems. The development path from precolonial Fiji to colonial society and beyond was marked by a transition from a subsistence mode of production to a semi-subsistence and a full cash economy. Along this transitional path, there were different development agendas for the Pacific Islands countries (PICs), ranging from structural adjustment to sustainable development and the idea of collective action by PICs along a desired path.

The lease economy entails indigenous participation in the modern economy through a hybrid model that interweaves financial capital, customary land tenure, and wage labor. It aligns with the sustainable development goals (SDGs), aiming for the overall reduction and elimination of poverty and hunger, promotion of good health, education, and gender equality amongst iTaukei landowners who are lease recipients. Unfortunately, despite being the major landlords, the 2019-2020 Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) revealed that 75 percent of iTaukei were below the basic needs poverty line, the highest of all the ethnic groups living in (Fiji Bureau of Statistics 2021). This statistic shows the need to implement an appropriate development model to accommodate the expectation of living in a dual economy.

Land Tenure in Transition

Land transition by way of land reform is part of the colonial discourse introduced by the colonial government to integrate Fiji into the capitalist system. As outlined by the World Bank, land reform encompasses intervention in existing land ownership, control, and usage to change the structure of holdings, improve land productivity, and broaden equitable land distribution (Deininger and Binswanger 1999, 249). Using this definition, land reforms in Fiji began in the late nineteenth century through land registration under the Torren system, transition from communal to the private tenure system. A necessity of that time for two reasons: first, to provide economic security to European settlers. Second, to protect iTaukei landowners from the unscrupulous practices of some settlers (France 1968, 12).

At the time of annexation, about 20 percent of the total landmass of accessible, fertile land had already been taken over by Europeans (Howard 1991, 27). During the same period, the Spate Report (1959, 16) claimed Europeans had 1,000,000 acres (about the area of Rhode Island), over a fifth of the total area of Fiji, the majority of the ownership claims being of extreme dubious tactics. The first Land Commission recorded that only 415,000 acres of these freehold claims were valid (Spate 1959, 16). To stop the detrimental impact of the “land grab” on the economy and iTaukei society, Gordon set up the Land Claims Commission (LCC) in 1875. It investigated all the lands claimed by European settlers before the Cession in 1874. To formalize the protection of customary land, Gordon set up the Native Land Commission (NLC)¹ in 1880 under the Native Land Ordinance (NLO) of the same year to administer the recording and registration of all iTaukei land boundaries (France 1969a, 129).

¹ Now known as the iTaukei Lands and Fisheries Commission.

The first land modifications to Gordon's land ordinance came two decades later when Governor Everard Im Thurn legalized land sales from 1905 to 1908 (Spate 1959). The rationale for the amendment was economic, to encourage iTaukei entrepreneurship, to develop the colony by freeing up iTaukei to work with European settlers (Spate 1959). The new governor further justified the new act by claiming that it would allow individual iTaukei economic gain with the power to own and sell land. As a result, within two years, 104,142 acres of Fiji's best agricultural land were sold (Nicole 2012). Im Thurn's land sales policy did not persist; it was proscribed in 1909 after growing iTaukei opposition and Arthur Gordon (known as Lord Stanmore) lobbied against it in the House of Lords in England (France 1969a).

Institutional Framework

The major shift on land tenure in Fiji was marked with the arrival of indentured labors in 1879. At the time, the Colonial Sugar Refinery (CSR) acquired the largest tract of land for sugar cane farming through the leasehold system, establishing economic dominance (Ali 1980, 73). Additionally, there were increasing instances of informal arrangements between iTaukei landowners and Indian free farmers who chose to remain in Fiji at the end of the indentured system in 1921. To safeguard the interests of the landowners and tenants, the iTaukei Land Trust Board (TLTB) was established in 1940. It was created to act as the proprietor, overseeing the administration and protection of iTaukei customary land under the Native Land Trust Act.

As the institutional tool for land reforms, control of native land shifted from native landowners to the TLTB. To provide indentured farmers land access, the Agriculture and Landlord Tenants Act (ALTA), the first commercial native land law designed for leasing of iTaukei land, was enacted in 1966. While ALTA gave security to Indo-Fijian cane farmers, it was to become a political fireball between political parties when the original leases started to expire in the late 1990s (see Lal 2009). With land becoming politicized after independence, it was no surprise that the land debate led to major land reforms concerning customary land after the military coup in 2006.

The publicized 91 percent iTaukei land ownership is more of a political tool that does not reflect the marginalization of iTaukei landowners from the essential means of production. In one report, about 41 percent of native land is leased out to Indo-Fijians for agriculture and residential leases (Prasad and Kumar 2016, 122). Although crown and freehold land constitute around 9 percent² of the total landmass in Fiji, they are the best land for development and agricultural production (Kurer 2001, Prasad and Kumar 2016, 123). Freehold and crown land account for much of Fiji's land assets in the current market. What the iTaukei have is land of lower quality under customary tenure (Crocombe 1994, 32). On that note, Ward (1994, 141) warns that the danger of iTaukei landlessness increasing as more natives lease land would deny iTaukei rights to access and usage. Ratu Sukuna had envisioned leasing land not only to other communities but also to indigenous people who did not have sufficient land, so he insisted that the council of chiefs must facilitate that view through proper land legislation (Scarr 1984, 215).

² Recent quoted figures given by government since some of the crown land (Schedule A Land) had been reverted to iTaukei landowners.

Bainimarama Land Reforms

Aligned with the development discourse, the sixth pillar of the Bainimarama government's "Twelve Pillars of Reform" since 2008 has been a focus on making more land available. To this end, the Land Use Act (LUA) was signed into law in July 2010. The main vision of the LUA is to allow investors access to unused native land for development to improve the economic status of the nation and native landowners. With the reforms, the government hoped the new Act would generate government revenue through investment, including tax and duties, would lead to equal sharing of development costs with investors, and hopefully, would generate rural economic activity and slow down rural-urban migration (Dodd 2012, 22-23). Another strength of the LUA is its practice of paying the full lease value to landowning units (LOUs), accompanied by a standard ninety-nine-years lease, regardless of the type of land development.

The Bainimarama military-led government also enhanced the unimproved capital value (UCV) land rent rate for agriculture leases on customary land, raising it from 6 percent to 10 percent in 2010. A sum of \$87.3 million has been paid as Committee of Better Utilization of Land (CBUL)³ subsidies by the government under the new policy from 2010 to 2022 (Navneel 2022).

However, the recent reform received wide criticism for its top-down approach. The coalition government that took office in January 2023 repealed some of the land laws introduced by the Bainimarama government. Chambers (2016) states that while the LUA is still serving to validate customary tenure, it has invoked a major shift in the trusteeship of customary land and institutional authority for its administration. Whereas the power to allocate land under customary tenure rested mainly with chiefs and male members, the act shifted this authority to the director of land and the minister for land and away from the TLTB as the sole administrator of native land (Chambers 2016, 141). In theory, the lease economy approach adopted by the TLTB and the British colonial power from 1940 reassures that collective iTaukei land rights are protected. However, in practice, it takes away iTaukei autonomous control over their land. Furthermore, it exacerbates the marginalization of indigenous Fijians from the means of production and perpetuates dependency in a society that is increasingly framed by a development model geared towards individualism.

In a similar view, the LUA has transferred native land control to the government. Unlike laws that dictate the role of the TLTB, land administered under the LUA is subject to changing government land policies in the future with the total discretion of the director and minister for land. In another bold policy amendment, the Bainimarama government introduced the equal distribution approach of lease income.

The Bainimarama government has continued the program initiated by the Qarase government in 2003 to return Schedule A⁴ land to iTaukei LOUs. In 2023, a total number of seventy-five parcels of land, equivalent to 6,660 hectares, were successfully returned to LOUs, a development that has significantly bolstered their lease income prospects (Vucukula 2023).

³ The CBUL program was set up in 2008 by the Bainimarama regime to ensure the productive utilization of agricultural land lying idle in order to facilitate a vibrant economic base and improve the rural economy for both the customary landowners and tenants.

⁴ Schedule A lands are those customary land whose original members have become extinct.

Equal Distribution Policy

In line with the Fijian government 2013 constitution to create an equitable Fiji, especially amongst iTaukei landowners, the Bainimarama government introduced a policy decision for equal distribution of lease monies via an amendment to the Native Land Leases and Licenses Regulations 2010 that became effective on January 1, 2011 (Parliament of the Republic of Fiji 2016). The new policy reversed the old policy of lease money disbursement.⁵

As it was, the old distribution allocated a large share of lease money to the various levels of chiefs within the village social structure. This method of allocation was partly based on the colonial indirect rule to reward chiefs for their service (Spate 1959, 87; Nayacaklou 1975, 16). Under the old distribution, the TLTB received 25 percent (reduced to 10 percent in 2013). The three categories of chiefs received the largest share of the lease money: *turaga ni vanua* (village chief) received 5 percent, *turaga ni yavusa* (tribal chief) 10 percent, and *turaga ni mataqali* (clan chief) received 15 percent. Often, a single chief would receive the full 30 percent entitlement because he was holder of all three titles and belonged to the clan whose land was leased for development. The rest of the mataqali members shared the remaining 45 percent. In just over a decade of its implementation, the Spate Report (1959, 17) summed up the nature of this unequal distribution as demoralizing to iTaukei within and between mataqali.

In opposing the amendment, the Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA) in its 2014 political campaigns claimed the new policy was detrimental to the sustainability of traditional obligations fulfillment as the large shares were used by chiefs to meet these obligations. For the Bainimarama regime, equitable distribution is about empowering every iTaukei person. In another analysis, Sakai (2016, 13) argued that the old distribution policy contributed to inequality and the marginalization of ordinary iTaukei in traditional villages, and they never questioned the inequity because of the belief that it was an essential part of iTaukei culture (Sakai 2016). Moreover, the bigger share was also a personal entitlement, and chiefs were not required by law to use the money for traditional obligations although they were obliged to do so.

Spate (1959, 17) expressed that such an unjust distribution of monies derived from something supposedly communal was aggravated by the fact that the welfare of the head of the vanua was a prerogative bestowed by his people. It further propagated jealousy and inequality between recipient mataqali and those that are not.

Furthermore, the old allocation was not only a source of inequality between the chiefs and the rest of the village, but it has also partitioned the people based on gender, age, and recipient and non-recipient of the lease revenue (Sakai 2023). It has divided the different mataqali in the village and therefore the social-cultural fabric of iTaukei that binds them together. On the other hand, the view for the equal share of the lease money is supported by the fact that the majority of the chiefs in Fiji are not entitled to the lease money and yet perform their obligations successfully within the vanua framework.

⁵ In January 2024, the coalition government amended the lease distribution to reinstate chiefs' larger share, albeit with a reduced allocation.

Research Methodology

This study is based on the fieldwork of a PhD dissertation centered on native land law literacy in Fiji and its implications on the livelihoods of the land-owning unit in Narewa (see fig. 1). Map 1 shows the village of Narewa and Nakavu and two of its tributaries' settlements, Navatulevu and Yakuilau. Narewa village encompasses all four traditional customary spaces and the traditional owner of Denarau island.



FIGURE 1: Map of Narewa Village with its Tributary Settlements

Source: Adapted from google map

The study also focuses on the considerable lease revenue generated by eight hotels situated on Denarau Island, a tourist hotspot within Fiji, (refer to fig. 2). It further explores whether this financial advantage from tourism leads to sustainable community development and enhances a decent standard of living for the LOUs of Narewa.

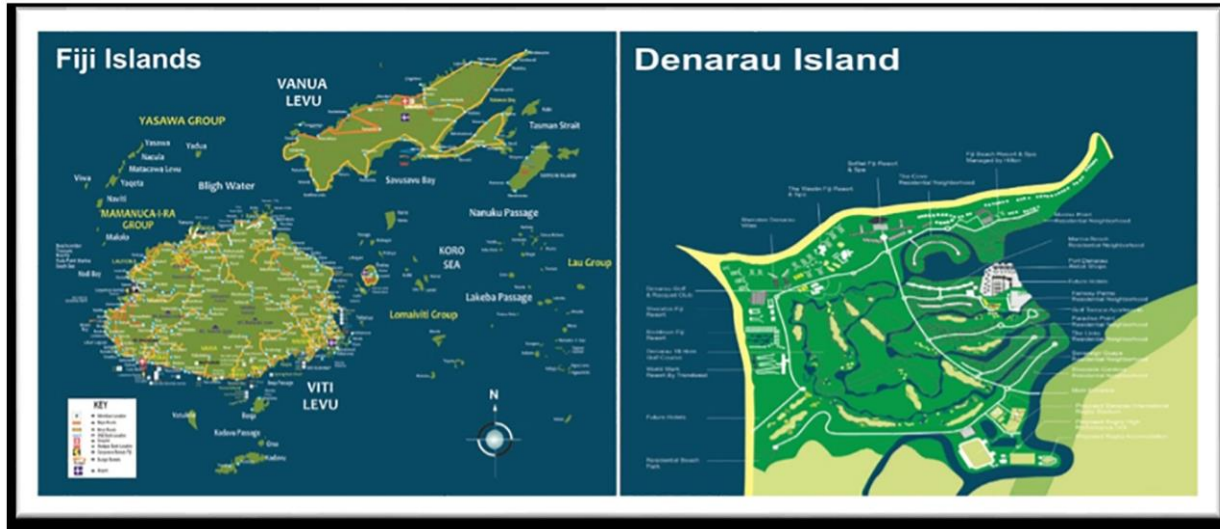


FIGURE 2: Map of the Fiji Islands and Denarau Island.
 Source: <<https://www.google.com/search?q=map>> 23 June 2021.

The discussion zeroes in on the data related to the policy of equal distribution of lease income and its economic impacts.

To ensure robustness, the study engaged the triangulation method, which involved the researcher collecting and analyzing data, integrating the findings, and drawing inferences using both qualitative and quantitative methods in a single study. The findings were garnered through a range of research methods, including administered questionnaire survey (N = 55), *talanoa* or focus group discussion (N = 23), and key person interviews (N = 9), and informal discussions (N = 3) involving a total of ninety participants. Eighty-four participants received substantial lease revenue from hotels on Denarau Island.

The demographic profile of respondents comprises individuals of all genders, including LGBTQI⁶, spanning across the youth, middle aged, and older adult age groups. Fifty-eight males and thirty-two females were part of the research sample. These insights were subjected to analysis utilizing the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The fieldwork was conducted in Narewa village spanned from December 2019 to March 2020, providing a comprehensive and recent understanding of the dynamics at play.

Research Findings

Balancing Economic and Customary Values of Land

While participants in the study highly valued the cultural aspect of customary land compared to its monetary (see fig. 3), other findings suggest an increasing recognition of its commercial potential.

⁶ Gender in this research will include LGBTQI - lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex.

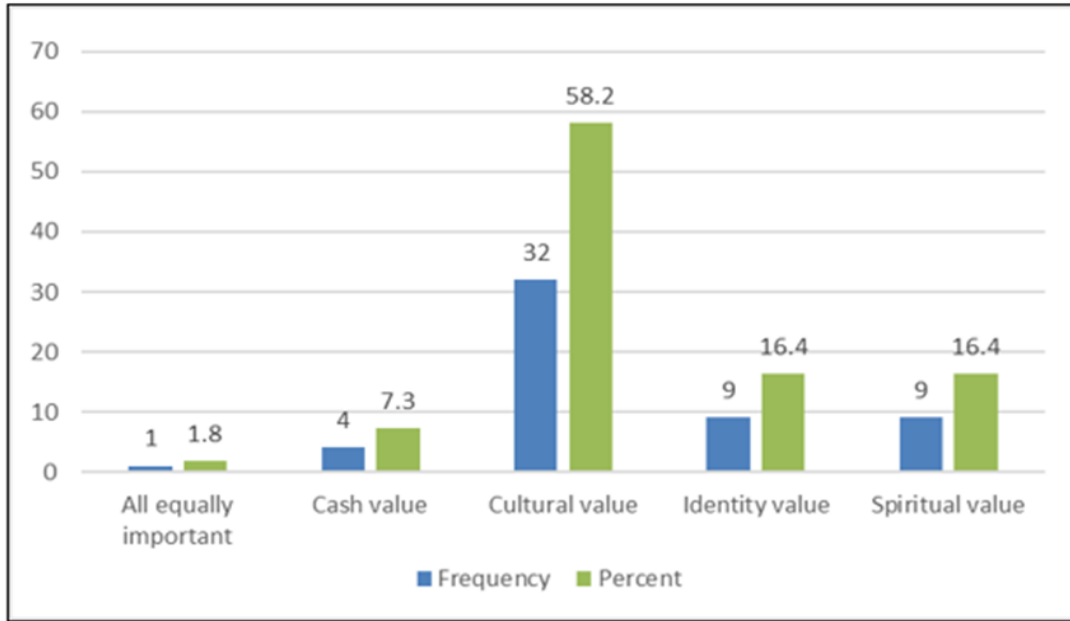


FIGURE 3: Level of importance placed on customary land ($n=55$)
 Source: Author, February 2020.

Research in Narewa village shows that majority of iTaukei landowners in Narewa place customary, identity, and spiritual values at higher importance than commercial value irrespective of gender, age, or educational level. Pacific society stands at a crossroads, where policy decisions concerning land development are of utmost importance to preserve the intrinsic value of customary land. Especially when most of the land is still customarily owned and woven into society's communal fabric, the policy decisions regarding land development take on even greater significance. This is because the prevalence of freehold land tenure has been linked to issues such as poverty, debt, and landlessness (Khan et al. 1986, 373). In contrast, in a cross-cultural study, Boydell (2010, 18) stated that most Indigenous peoples maintain an interconnected relationship with the land, choosing not to use it as a commodity.

Forty-five percent of the respondents agreed (Yes) that the customary tenure of ownership in common (OC) protects their customary land rights in Narewa (fig. 4). Another 26% of the respondents agreed that OC (Both) protect and did not protect customary land rights in Narewa as indicated by the following views. Twenty percent of the respondents disagreed (No), that OC did protect their customary land rights.

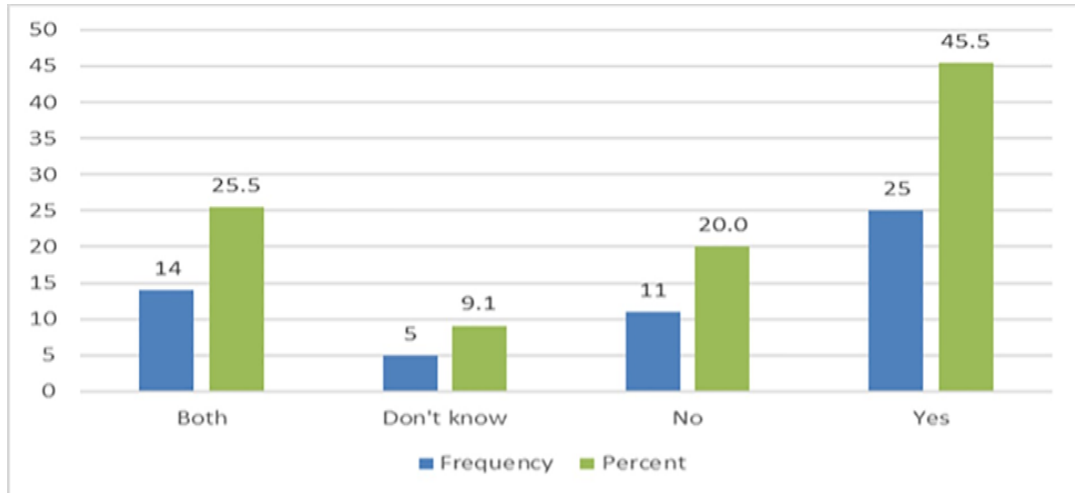


FIGURE 4. Participant perspectives on the protection of customary land rights through OC land tenure (n = 55). Source: Author, February 2020.

A 68-year-old respondent expressed “Ownership in common protects the collective interest of the community; it reflects the wisdom of our ancestors. Imagine if our land is owned through mataqali: it will be chaotic, some members will be more disadvantaged than others, some will have more lease money than others.” On the other hand, some mataqali members disagreed (20 percent), particularly those who possess bigger parcels of customary land as they felt OC has denied their full rights to their original share of land. A 54-year-old man stated, “My mataqali has the biggest share of land in Narewa, but we don’t have the [absolute] right to own and use the land as everyone else has the same rights; it’s not fair, eh?”

The majority view suggests that within the customary land framework, ownership in common protects the welfare of the village compared to mataqali ownership, especially when the majority of the lease distribution in Fiji is by mataqali and causes inequality within members of the same village (Sakai 2015, 57). In addition, as part the right approach, OC gives equal land access and economic, benefits such as in employment and small business opportunities and lease allocations to women in Narewa who are registered in the VKB. In contrast, the mataqali LOU lease approach would benefit mataqali members whose land is leased. However, it discriminates against other members who are closely related to the lease recipients based on genealogical ties that originated centuries ago (Sakai 2015).

However, other relevant results from the field study concerning customary land cast a new light that commercial value is more significant than its identity and spiritual value. Firstly, as shown in figure 5, respondents put high emphasis on the economic benefits such as lease money, employment opportunities, and entrepreneurship.

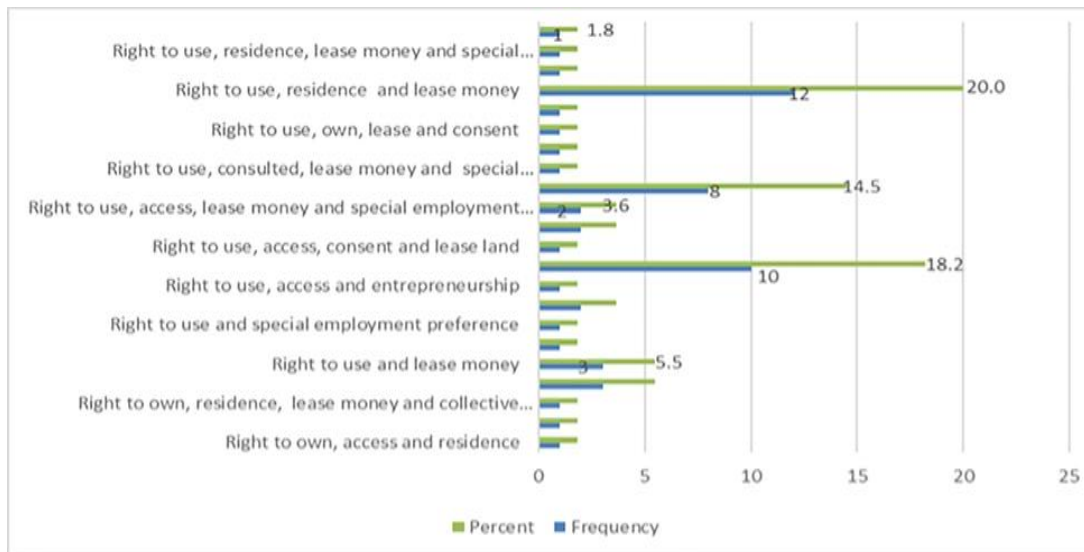


FIGURE 5. Specific customary land rights identified by respondents (n = 55). Focus on economic value. Right to use, residence, and lease money was the most frequent response, with right to use, access, and entrepreneurship the second-most mentioned.

Source: Author, February 2020.

There is less emphasis placed on spiritual and customary values. An exception is that land has been connected to Narewa identity as a way to differentiate the people of Narewa from other iTaukei in Fiji. This is illustrated in responses such as this one: “I am from Narewa, and whatever I do will reflect my identity and the *vanua o Nadi*, as different from other iTaukei social group in Fiji.” In another expression, a 47-year-old man stated that, “Our land reminds us of our ancestors, our identity. . . It (is) the source (of) life for us and our future generations.” These views reflect iTaukei sentiment when it comes to the land-identity-spirituality rhetoric.

While identity value remains important, customary land is seen as a social and physical capital to meet the current needs while at the same time safeguarding the needs of the future generation of Narewa. As a male participant remarked, “As landowners, our strength lies with our land, it holds us together, our source of living, and if we are not careful, our children will suffer... especially in Narewa, where there is a high demand from investors to lease our land.” The study suggests that respondents are conscious about the identity and economic benefits derive from their land as well as safeguarding the welfare of future generations, which is in line with a sustainable livelihood framework (SL).

The livelihood approach believes that different people in various places experience different livelihoods (Scoones 2009, 172). Indigenous people often live on lands governed by customary tenure and other community arrangements. For Indigenous people, the land is the primary capital that generates the realization of other capital since it holds cultural and spiritual values. In this context, SL sees livelihoods as encompassing the resources, capacities, and activities needed to live or subsist (*ibid.*). A livelihood is sustainable when a person or household can face and recover from shock and stress and at the same time maintain or improve their resources and capacities

without deteriorating their natural resource base (Asian Development Bank 2008). For instance, the Covid-19 pandemic shock in 2021 demonstrates how the people in Narewa overcome the economic downturn by reengaging in farming to sustain their lives. According to the village mayor, “[Covid] revives the traditional custom of *solesolevaki* (communal work) in the community. [The] people realize that our kinship is the only way that unites us not money; we seem to forget that even in the village space.”

A novel finding, though, that illustrates the economic rationale of customary land is the preference to lease the customary land for commercial ventures rather than living in a communal customary arrangement. As seen in figure 6, sixty-six percent prefer to lease the customary land for commercial ventures rather than living in a communal customary arrangement.

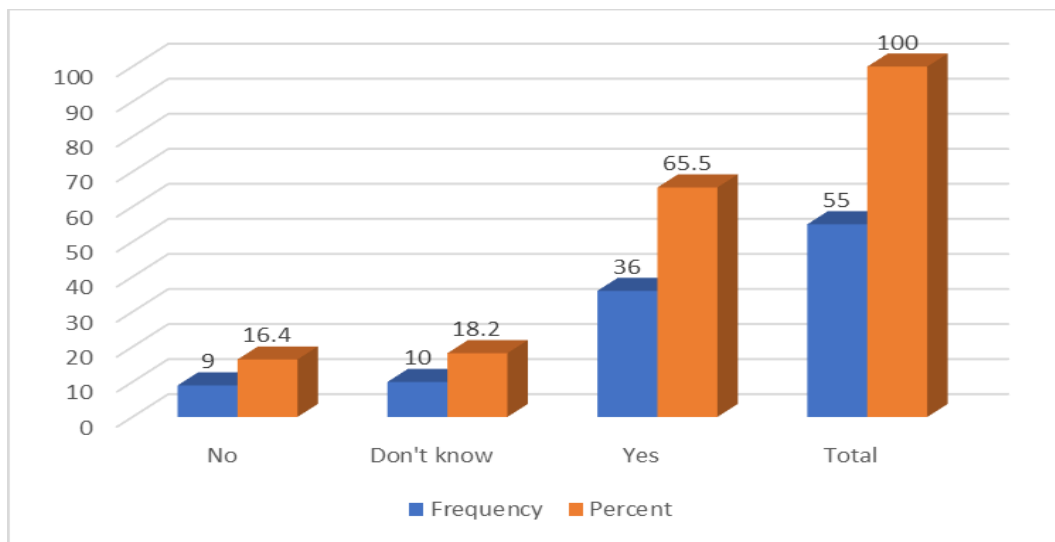


FIGURE 6. Preferences of whether to lease customary land (n = 55).

Source: Author, February 2020.

The results in figure 6 suggest that the choices made by respondents are economically driven. Leased land offers complete land control and business security for individuals and families. This implies customary landholding does not provide ownership and economic security for individual members. The same results also show that leasing one’s own customary land benefits both the lessee and the *yavusa* (tribe) through lease payments (fig. 7).

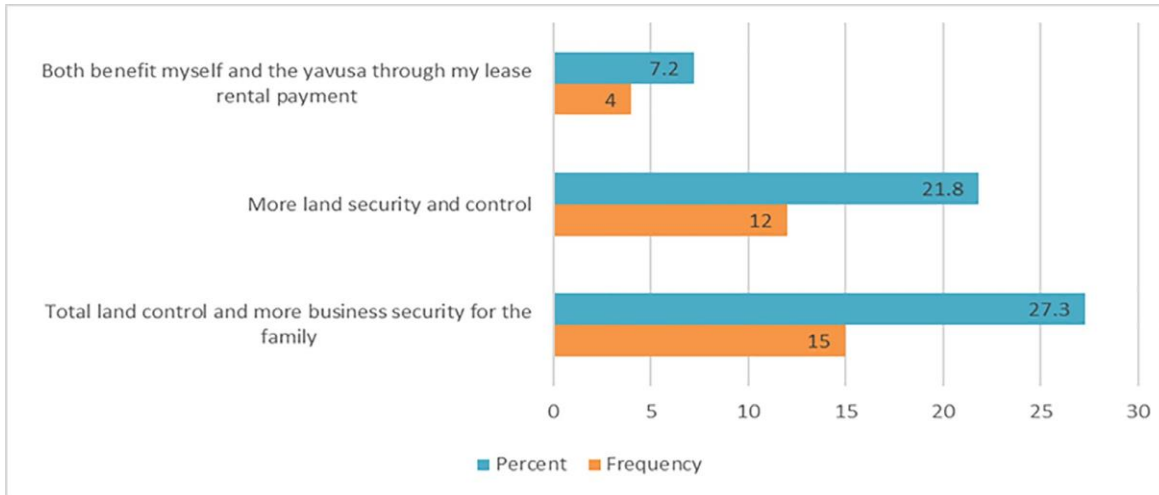


FIGURE 7. Reasons supporting the lease option (n = 55).

Source: Author, February 2020.

The clustered chart reveals that fifteen respondents favored the option due to its promise of complete land control and enhanced security for family businesses. This was followed by twelve participants who perceived land leasing as a means of greater land security and control. One female respondent articulated her preference stating, “I will love to lease land as it gives me the freedom to control my land for the betterment of my children’s future. . . . I can be my own boss, free from collective ownership and its hassle.”

For those who opposed land-leasing option, the study indicates several key points. Firstly, customary land embodies the ideal of communalism not individual ownership. Another inhibiting factor is the cumbersome village governance system one has to navigate before becoming eligible to lease the customary land. Finally, insufficient capital poses a significant challenge. A twenty-two-year-old male respondent said, “No, definitely I will not take that option. The village process alone is time consuming, and I do not have enough capital. . . . It’s good to lease it to foreign investors; they bring in more money than [local leasing].” A forty-two-year-old middle-aged man believed that the sacredness of customary land lies in that its common ownership has bonded the people together.

The contrasting views on customary land and commercial values has been the subject of debate since colonialism (France 1969a) and was complicated by the arrival of indentured sugar cane laborers (Lal 1992) and the recent land reforms (Chambers 2016; Dodd 2012). In another view, the characteristics of customary land tenure in most contemporary Pacific societies are a simple model of the original practice, altered by the colonial administration when it officially registered and commodified land as in the case of Fiji (France 1969a). Like other traditional societies, the lack of development initiative amongst iTaukei is caused by various factors such as proper work ethics, traditional obligations, capital constraints, and expressed beliefs that indigenous people must have self-belief and decolonize their mindset from Western superiority.

As Tuck (2012) expressed, decolonization is not a metaphor for other things we want to do to improve our societies but must bring about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life.

In general, Ward (1994, 11) warned against the potential danger of increasing landlessness among iTaukei, as a rise in native land leases could lead to the deprivation of their rights to access and use land. This sentiment is echoed by the Tui Nadi, who states, “There are more people living in Narewa. . . . We have to be careful leasing our land as there is not enough space. . . . Even giving leases to our members can cause land shortage.” A similar view is shared by a forty-eight-year-old man who remarked, “[While] I want to lease [the] mataqali land, I’m also mindful there is not enough land for everyone.”

Given its proximity to urban centers and socio-economic profile, the inclination towards lease ownership is a psychological response to the geographical context of Narewa Village. Consistent with a prior study conducted in the late 1950s, Ward (1965) outlined how villages situated near urban areas were firmly locked into commercial farming or other monetary activities. In such areas, the monetary value of land was encouraged through leaseholds and cash cropping, and lending to members of other mataqali was rarely practiced.

The same monetary approach applies to Narewa through tourism development. However, unlike the study conducted by Ward, in Narewa, land use and access were available to all members through the ownership-in-common system. Nevertheless, the study suggests that cumbersome internal village governance processes and a lack of capital are discouraging factors for pursuing this option. In this regard, a forty-four-year-old male explained “Going through the village governance process to lease land is time consuming, especially getting the consent from different land-owning groups, and if they [members] have personal grudges against you, it [is] better not to waste your time trying.”

The dilemma facing landowners in Narewa can be better understood by the psychological theory known as cognitive dissonance theory. The dissonance view is based on the premise that people need to maintain consistency between thoughts, feelings, and behavior (Festinger 1957, 1-2). In its basic meaning, cognitive dissonance is about inconsistency: when individuals hold two thoughts or views that are inconsistent with one another, it results in psychological discomfort (1957, 1-2). From this study, the inconsistency is placing high value on the spirituality and identity on customary land ownership and use when the empirical evidence, both quantitative and qualitative, suggests that their views, behaviors, and choices put commercial value of land as paramount. While there is emotional attachment to land, it is not reflected in the participants’ responses to questions regarding the development of customary land. Cognitive dissonance reflects the dilemma facing landowners as they mediate traditional customs and the necessity of a cash economy. Fijian traditions were codified (see France 1966) to counter the negative effects their own capitalist system. The current land laws that shaped an iTaukei economic relationship to their customary land is a testimony of the British rule.

Equal Distribution and Equality Amongst Landowners

The objective of this article is to critically evaluate the claims made by the government regarding the introduction of the equal distribution policy for the economic empowerment of iTaukei. As the following analysis illustrates, equitable lease income distribution is both productive and counterproductive to the economic sustenance of iTaukei.

The finding shows that land leases contribute significantly to the economic livelihood in Narewa, with tourism as a prime earner followed by residential leases (see fig. 8). Customary land leases were identified by 80 percent of the participants to be for tourism businesses compared to 3.8 percent identified for agriculture and residential use. This result highlights the higher impact of the tourism industry on livelihoods in the community compared to that bestowed by other leases. This difference shows the extent to which each type of lease contributes to the livelihood of the landowners.

While other studies focus on the economic contribution of tourists to the host communities in Fiji through employment, tourists’ expenditure, food supply, and length of stay (see Scheyvens and Russell 2012, 417), this study concentrates on the contribution of tourism leases to livelihoods in the host community.

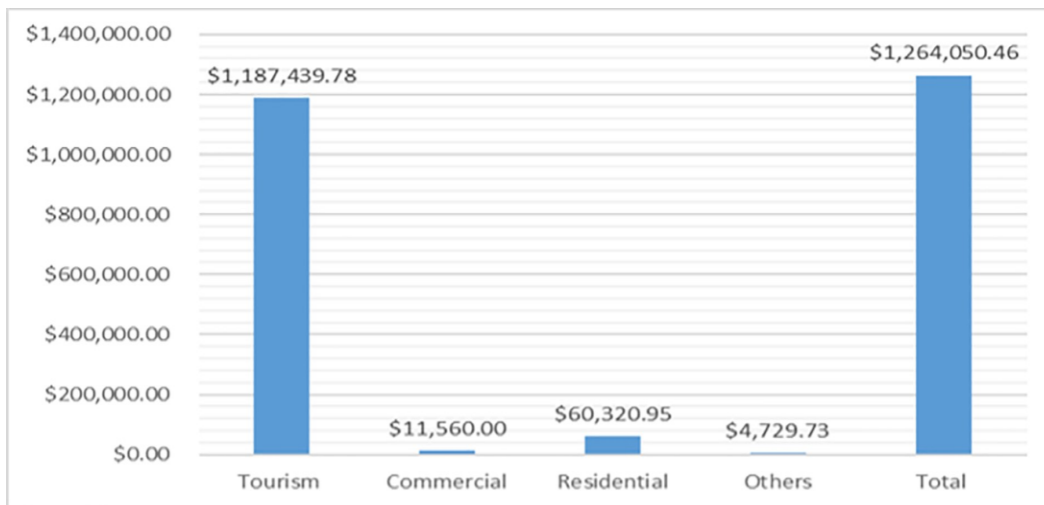


FIGURE 8. Total lease payment (FJ\$) per type of leases in 2017.
Source: Author, December 2019, Narewa Village.

The study indicates that income from tourism leases exhibits several inconsistencies in its structures and impacts. Firstly, the mode of payment differs, as tourism investors or any lessees pay lease rents to the iTaukei Land Trust Board (TLTB) based on market value, which deducts a 10 percent service fee before equally depositing the remaining share into individual bank accounts or to the assignment account of the LOU. Secondly, there is no direct contact and economic exchange between tourists and landowners at Denarau, except for those members directly and indirectly employed in the tourism industry. Thirdly, the lease revenue is nontaxable and was distributed unequally until the implementation of equitable distribution in 2011. Lastly, lease income is often perceived as a communal resource to be shared, as opposed to a private entitlement

like regular income. These characteristics of lease payments could provide some understanding of how lease incomes are perceived to be under-utilized and in need of further research.

The results in figure 9 show two correlations. First, on first glance, it indicates that the ordinary members received the majority of the shares, with 70 percent, or \$884,835.32 million, while the different title chiefs got their respective shares. Second, it gives the impression that the collective accumulation of wealth attached to communalism is more than individuals' wealth. However, in reality, this is not the case. In a population of 1,500 members⁷, there is an enormous gap between the amount each member of the mataqali receives and that of the titled chiefs.

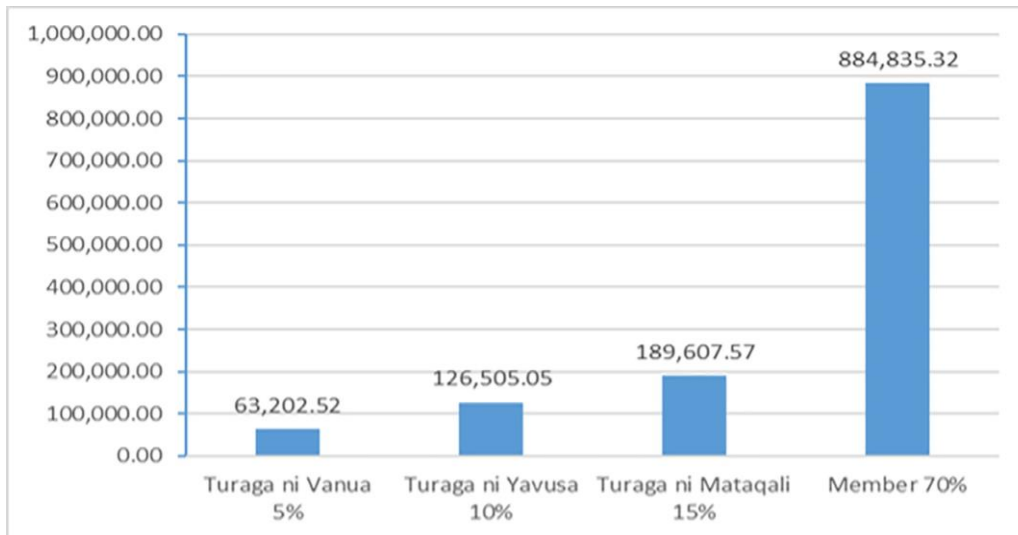


FIGURE 9. Lease share (FJ\$) in the old distribution.
Source: Author, December 2019, Narewa Village.

Following the old distribution method, the turaga ni mataqali would have \$189,607 (15%), the turaga ni yavusa \$126,505 (10%), and the turaga ni vanua \$63,202 (5%). Within the Yavusa-e-Tolu ownership in common social structure, there are three yavusa, twelve mataqali, and sixteen tokatoka.

⁷ The researcher put this as the estimated population of Narewa in 2017 as the 2019-2020 estimate population given by and village representatives and the TLTB official lies from 1,600 to 1,700, based on the available data in the VKB records.

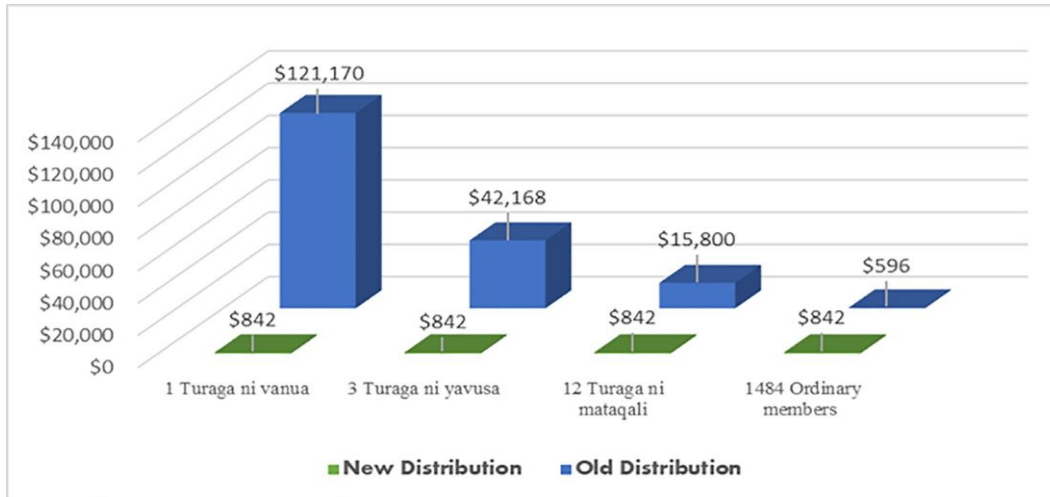


FIGURE 10. Comparison between the old distribution and new lease distribution in 2017. Source: Author, December 2019, Narewa Village.

As shown in figure 10, the unequal share based on ascribed entitlement under the old system would automatically earn an annual income of \$15,800 for each head of the mataqali while the head of the yavusa would take home \$42,168, and the head of the vanua would receive \$121,170. If the estimated registered member in the VKB was 1,500, then each member would receive \$596 annually, or \$49.66 on a monthly basis. However, this was hardly the case as young people and women would receive crumbs of the lease shares (fig. 11). Under the old distribution, the family head distributed shares, often resulting in some members receiving as little as \$20 or \$30, with male predominantly receiving more lease money. In the same breath, the paramount chief in the case of *Na momo na Tui Nadi*, (the village head chief of Nadi), holder of the three titles as head of the mataqali and yavusa Navatulevu and the turaga ni vanua, would receive the three shares for the title chiefs with the total annual lease share of \$121,170. The old distribution based on ascribed entitlement was a major source of inequality in Fiji. It is a cultural system that rewards people for their chiefly entitlement in the social hierarchy, regardless of their commitment to society.

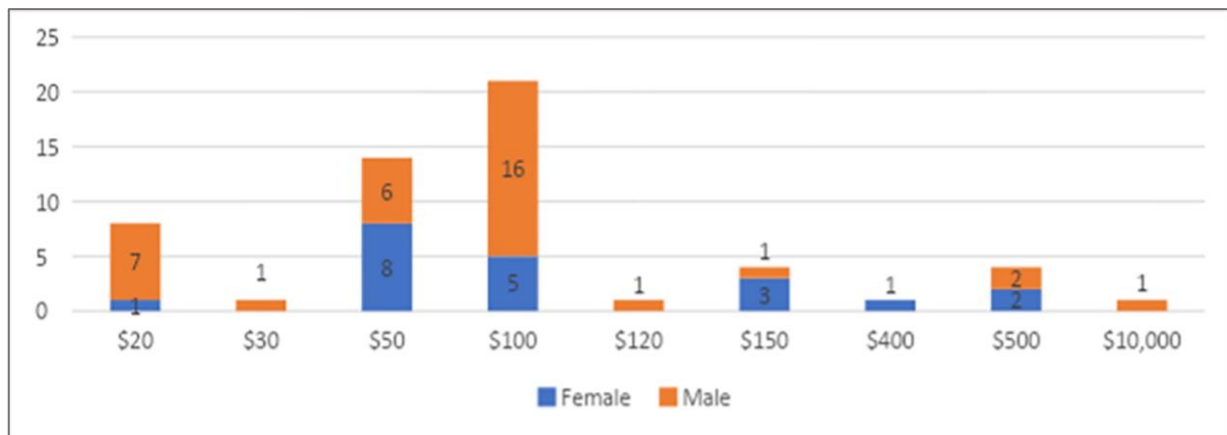


FIGURE 11. Monthly minimum lease payment under the old distribution by gender (n = 55). Source: Author, February 2020.

For too long, some high chiefs have been living in the comfort of their homes, receiving substantial lease shares, while common people are struggling. During the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) review committee consultation, an eighty-five-year-old elder in Tailevu stated, “The iTaukei people are everywhere, and what are the chiefs doing about it? We can’t [be] doing everything to the chiefs while you are staying comfortable in your homes. I’m asking you to stop it, look back at us, the iTaukei people; we serve the church, the vanua, these are some of the issues that are forcing us into poverty. Hear us. Listen to us as we highlight our needs” (Bola 2023).

In an earlier criticism, Lloyd (1982, 221) points out that the old distribution reinforced “the political role of the chiefs” and “had a disastrous effect on the economic attitude of the mataqali owners . . . [and] served as disincentive to Fijian development of the lands they own.” Furthermore, the share for the mataqali members is insufficient to induce them to make other investments rather than spend it on consumer goods (1982). A significant difference of the new distribution is that it treats everyone equally in terms of lease share: as shown in figure 10, each member would earn a total lease money of \$842 in 2017 to reflect the government’s vision of making all landowners equal. Whether the socio-economic and cultural rationalities of implementing this policy are justified in the real-life experiences of the lease recipients is discussed next.

The Bainimarama land reform, aligned with the government policy of equal citizenry, targeted the pro-chief lease distribution method, attracting mixed reaction from the iTaukei population. From an oppositional view, while the rationale of equality in reforming the law might sound acceptable, the real reason behind the amendment is conceived as political and based on the sunset clause. A sunset clause is legal provision that allow an expiration date or conditions for ending a law or agreement (McGarrity et al., 2013). Some argue that the sunset clauses are the ‘spoonful of sugar’ that enables bad legislation to be passed by parliament (ibid.). In Fiji, the FFP government was accused of abolishing laws related to iTaukei affairs such as the termination of the GCC in 2012 and by introducing the equal distribution policy of lease incomes in 2010.

On his Facebook page, member of parliament Niko Nawaikula criticized the FijiFirst government policy named the sunset clause⁸ as detrimental to iTaukei cultural autonomy. Similarly, Lal (2009, 32-33) criticized the government land reforms as undermining the iTaukei chiefly institution amongst other things. Despite political opposition to the new policy, this study indicates there is overwhelming support for the new distribution as it empowers ordinary members of LOUs with equal lease shares and human rights. The new distribution automatically guaranteed individual a share as long as one is registered in the VKB, irrespective of age, traditional status, gender, or country of residence. Additionally, one observation is that during the old distribution, chiefs’ commitment to the vanua depended on personal attributes and initiatives to benefit the vanua (Sakai 2015). The greatest wealth of an iTaukei chief is their people. Those who are well

⁸ Niko Nawaikula was referring to the master’s in law thesis of the former Attorney General Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum titled “*Cultural Autonomy: Its Implications for the Nation-State, the Fiji Experience,*” which was widely criticized by the members of the parliamentary opposition and others for being detrimental to iTaukei cultural autonomy. This thesis was also considered responsible for the drastic changes in laws concerning iTaukei affairs, such as the termination of the Great Council of Chiefs in 2012. The sunset clause

taken care of by their chiefs will reciprocate this goodwill when lease income is equitably distributed. For instance, the last Tui Vuda⁹ continued to receive a larger share by the consent of his mataqali as he had demonstrated commitment to the welfare of his people.

In another view, Boydell (2010) assumed land reforms reward military individuals who hold “real power” without the benefit of chiefly blood. Despite opposition to the new policy, there is overwhelming support for the new distribution as it empowers ordinary members of LOU.

Does Equitable Distribution Generate Wealth?

The results in figure 11a and figure 11b shed light on the economic implications of equal distribution on the livelihoods of the recipients. A significant majority of recipients (42) received a minimum share of \$30 and maximum share of \$600 (36). At this stage of understanding, recipients remain satisfied with the policy as it fully guaranteed a more equal share in their respective bank accounts irrespective of the lease income value. A sixty-year-old man stated that the equal distribution policy finally embodies the essence of ownership in common land tenure and communalism. On the other hand, the irregular and low lease payments could potentially lead to dissatisfaction with the new distribution in the future as the policy’s full realization sets in. According to the TLTB, lease deposits in individuals’ account are only viable when lease income exceeds \$20. This clarification elucidates why some participants reported different figures. Furthermore, it is most likely that some participants were quoting figures from previous years. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the \$600 payment may represent the accumulation of lease payments for several months.

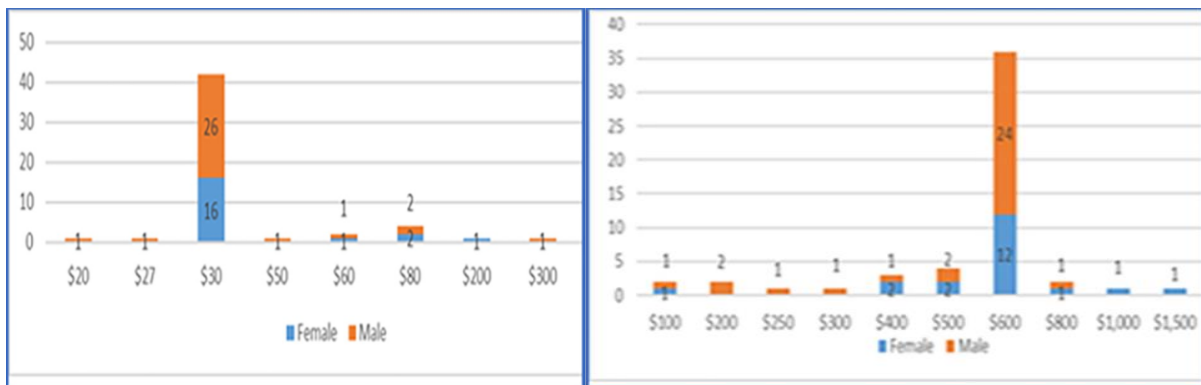


FIGURE 11a. FIGURE 11b.
 Number of people receiving the minimum (11a) and maximum (11b) lease share (FJ\$) under the new distribution system by gender in 2019 (n=55).
 Source: Author February 2020 Narewa Village.

Figure 12 indicates that the lease income from the equal distribution system lacks long-term viability for investment and saving. Over a span of four years, each individual’s entitlement stands

⁹ The Tui Vuda holds a position as one of the paramount chiefs in the western region of Viti Levu. He is also the chief of Viseisei Village, a location believed to be the first landing point of the first people who arrived in Fiji.

at FJ\$4,503. This equates to \$93.81 per month or \$23.45 per week, which is well below the basic needs poverty line (BNPL) benchmark of \$41.91 per adult per week.

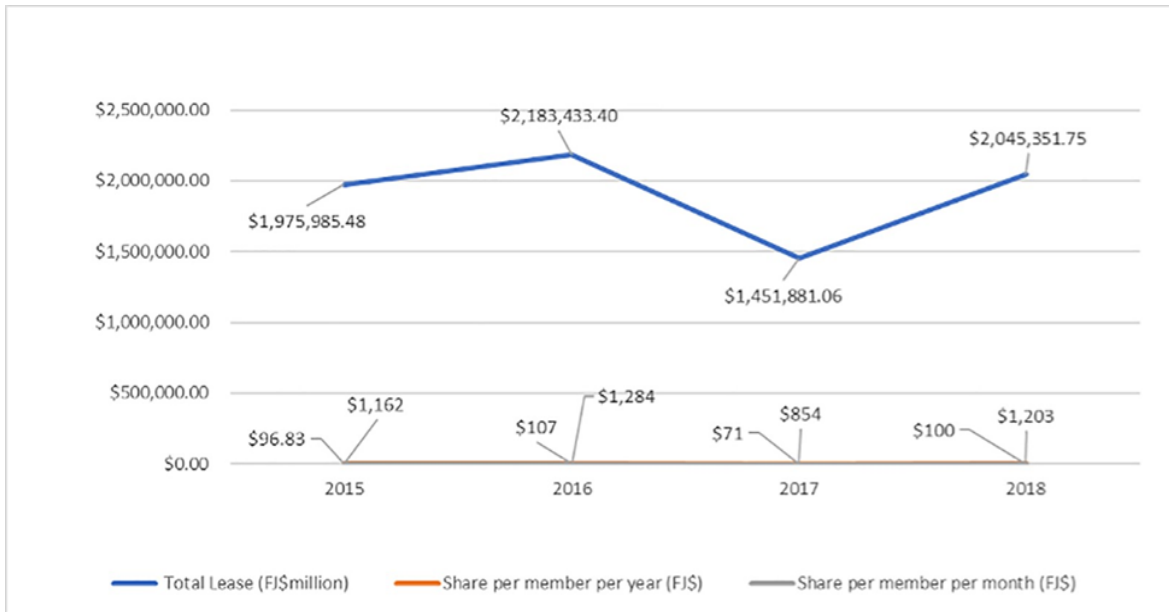


FIGURE 12. Total lease money received (2015-2019) per month, year, and 4-year total.
Source: Adopted from the Yavusa e Tolu Financial Report 2020.

According to the 2019-2020 Household Income and Expenditure Survey, ethnic-based poverty estimates indicate 192,977 iTaukei, 58,933 Indo-Fijians, and 6,143 from other communities live in absolute poverty. This means iTaukei made up 74.8 percent of those people living in absolute poverty, Indo-Fijians accounting for 22.8 percent, and other communities comprised 2.4 percent. These figures are projected to have risen even further after the Covid-19 pandemic, which demands urgent attention by the government and other stakeholders.

The current findings provide compelling evidence that equality holds paramount importance for the lease recipients, as 85 percent of the respondents cited equal sharing of lease monies as a key reason for their agreement with the policy. A prevailing consciousness across all the focus group discussions (FGDs) highlights that having an equal share is supreme, even in cases where the lease income is insignificant. A thirty-six-year-old female participant expressed this sentiment eloquently, “One cent, one [equal distribution] is not about disrespecting the elders; [it] is about respecting the vision of ownership in common. We are all equal in terms of land rights, so it’s only wise we share the lease monies equally. . . . Time is changing, and the government feels it is time to give equal share to everyone.” (FGD March 19, 2020)

In contrast, a prior study by Movono (2012, 56) in two villages along the Sigatoka coral coast of the western part of Viti Levu in Fiji demonstrated the impact of the law on membership in customary landholdings where land has been leased for tourism and its implications on lease distribution. In Vatuolalai Village, a single mataqali is the recipient of the lease income from Naviti Resort, whereas in Votua Village, a single-family mataqali is the recipient of the lease money from Warwick Resorts. The old distribution model ironically contradicts the recognized communal well-being values upheld by iTaukei culture. Spate (1959) noted that this scenario reflects the injustice of the colonial orchestrated policy that benefits the chiefly institution. The mataqali ownership structure perpetuates inequality between lease money recipients and non-recipients. In the same view, a significant illustration emerges in Nadi, where a minor belonging to one of the LOUs is expected to receive \$1.1 million in 2021. The sizable sum arises due to factors such as a single mataqali and a limited number of members who benefit from substantial commercial and tourism leases in the Nadi area (Personal communication, February 13, 2021).

Another promising finding was that while a majority (above 50 percent) of the respondents support the notion of financial equality, in real value, the new lease monies distribution is only significant for minors as they would have a decent saving when they turn eighteen years of age. This finding precisely shows the impact of the distribution policy. For instance, two of the respondents would have approximately \$14,000 in their account by the time they turn eighteen at the end of 2019. By one calculation, within the nine years after 2011, at the age of nine, each child recorded in the VKB from Narewa would be collecting their annual shares of \$1,555 in their savings account plus dividends.

According to the TLTB, as of 2019, a total sum of \$174.2 million was distributed to 51,336 registered landowners, with approximately \$32.6 million being deposited with the Home Finance Commercial (HFC) Bank for those under the age of eighteen (TLTB 2019). This allocation reflects the government's commitment to fostering a "common and equal citizenry, a common identity, and a level playing field on which every citizen can excel" (Vakaoti 2015,103).

Equal Distribution and Saving

The finding stands in contrast to the government's claim regarding the cost-saving potential of equitable distribution. Aside from the fluctuation of lease share payments, the psycho-cultural attachment to lease money hinders any long-term investment. Both recipients and non-recipients of lease income regard the allocations as communal wealth necessitating reciprocation, thereby hindering any form of saving. With fair assumption, many recipients of lease money in Fiji have the perception that lease monies should be shared freely, reflecting the culturally rooted notion of communal living and its associated obligations. This perception contradicts the capitalist ideal of individualism, where personal ownership and accumulation are prioritized.

The mentality set for lease money is comparable to a *draunidalo*¹⁰ or taro leaf texture, as it does not absorb anything even when it rains. Similarly, lease recipients tend to have a "come

¹⁰ Draunidalo refers to dalo leaves. Their texture does not absorb any particle; when it rains, water merely slide off the surface. Likewise, lease monies come and go without any savings or investment.

and go” spending attitude, not viewing the lease money as worth investing in for long-term security. A village official commented, “The winners in lease distributions are nightclubs, bottles shops, Prouds [shops], restaurants, and business owners not LOUs” (Personal communication, 20 December, 2019). This study forms the conclusion that the draunidalo syndrome facilitates a dependency mentality on iTaukei landowners. The thought that people will always receive lease money is a drawback to the ethos of hard work, entrepreneurship, and strategizing for alternative livelihood approaches. As a forty-four-year-old village official explained, “After the FNPF premium payment [in 2018], [village officials] carried out a survey to gauge the use of lease money. Out of all the recipients, only two households managed to do some house renovations. . . . Few invest in education . . . but the majority used their shares on consumption more than any other kind of investment” (Personal communication, 20 December, 2019). From this standpoint, lease money can be considered not as financial capital but mainly as a resource for consumption and obligations or for sustaining cultural capital within the iTaukei community.

Collective Economy

In response to the new equal distribution policy, the Tui Nadi, Ratu Vuniani Navunici Dawai, established the Yavusa-e-Tolu (Y3) Kofera Trust in December 2019 to manage part of the lease revenue from the assignment (fig. 13).¹¹ With the consent of 74 percent of the members, the trust was able to secure the first 30 percent lease payment of \$756,585¹² in January 2020 for commercial ventures and social responsibility to the village (Y3 Kofera Trust Financial Report 2020). Under the directorship of the Tui Nadi, the Y3 Kofera Trust was able to convene the village’s first annual general meeting in March 2021. According to the high chief, it was not easy to establish the new trust, but as the traditional leader, his role was complicated by the chiefly title dispute issue. The village’s proximity to the Nadi urban center brings new attitudes and could be problematic, especially for traditional leaders who fail to practice their duty of care for the people.

¹¹ Assignment is the percentage of lease income deducted from the total lease funds approved by 60 percent of members of a particular LOU and constituted under Section 14(3) of the iTaukei Land Trust Act as well as in the Equal Distribution Policy. The money from the assignment is managed by the trust representing the LOUs for commercial investments or any projects agreed by the LOUs (<https://www.tltb.com.fj/Landowners/Assignment-of-Lease-Funds>).

¹² The sum of the 2019 and 2020 lease assignment allocation.

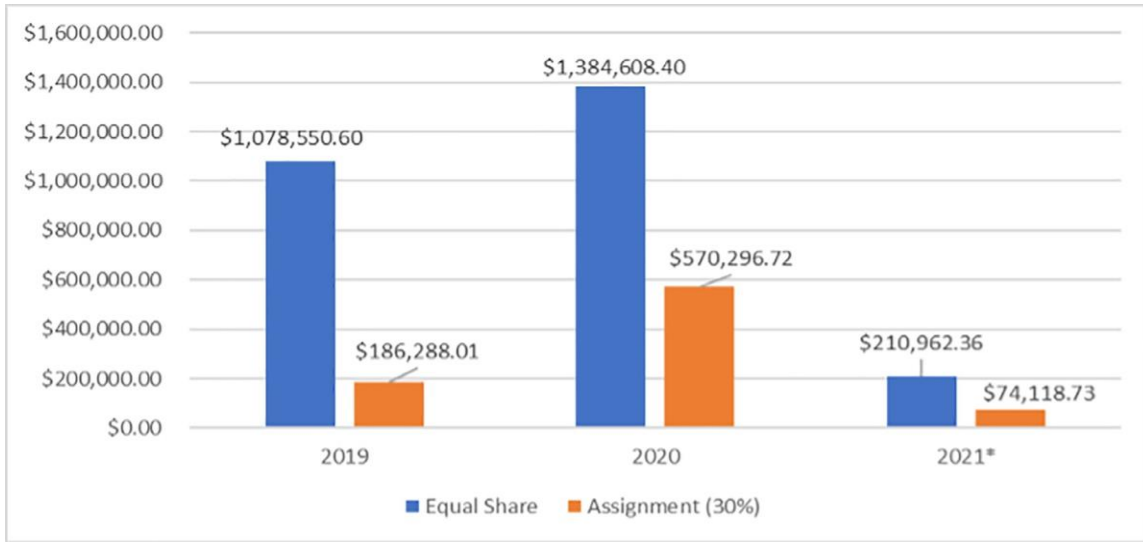


FIGURE 13. Total sum (FJ\$) of lease assignment from 2019-2021.

*The total sum of lease assignment for January-March in 2021.

Source: Adopted from the Yavusa-e-Tolu Financial Report 2020.

While there were village business ventures funded partially from the lease income in the old distribution, they were affected by financial mismanagement and abuse of authority (Key interview, February 24, 2020). Two main factors contributed to these business shortfalls. Firstly, in the old distribution, financial capital allocated to village development projects was not perceived to come from individual contributions in contrast to the new lease distributions. As a result, trustees may have felt less accountable to the people. Now, the current trustees face high expectations from the community. This is primarily due to the fact that 30 percent of the total lease income is earmarked for village development projects is meant to be evenly distributed among individuals.

Another contributing factor to the previous business shortfalls is the practice of appointing heads of the yavusa and mataqali as trustees. Chiefs often wielded their unchecked traditional authority to use business resources for personal gain, and they felt less accountable to the people since they did not individually contribute to the business ventures. Sahlins (2015) described this conflict of interests wherein chiefs became two-headed: they retained their sacred status in reciprocal relation with the vanua (community) while also adopting secular roles in non-reciprocal relationships. These dual entitlements led to poor governance, both at the personal and national level.

As a valuable lesson, the Momo na Tui Nadi appointed his own trustees, who possessed expertise in accounting, law, resource management, and business management while adhering to the principles of good governance. Under the lease agreement with hotels in Denarau, the commercial arm of the trust, DENTEN Investment Company Ltd, has been able to secure business ventures. These include a linen delivery service with Marriott Resorts and the supply of fresh vegetables, fruits, and root crops to Sofitel Fiji Resort and Spa. The commercial entity is also responsible for providing transportation services for major hotels in Denarau Island. The partnership is made possible due to the common tenure ownership, as every lease recipient

contributes to the Kofera treasury. In return, this arrangement instills a sense of business ownership among village members. During a recent visit in June 2023, the trust successfully acquired the village's first commercial building, situated at the periphery of the village boundary, at a cost of \$180,000. The community's commercial aspirations have enabled Yavusa-e-Tolu to reclaim their ancestral land that was sold during the colonial era (Village official, personal communication, June 5, 2023). The purchase likely occurred during the Governor Everard Im Thurn administration when he amended the native land law to enable sales of customary land between 1904 to 1908.

The trust has also established a joint business partnership with Pataka Taio Investment of New Zealand. As a result, twelve seasonal workers have been engaged in farm work on a six-monthly rotational basis since early 2020. Part of the trust's social responsibility to the vanua includes education scholarship, youth and women's projects, health awareness, and financial assistance to the village heads.

The communal development model ensures the welfare of the present generation and at the same time guarantees a decent livelihood for future members. For instance, providing educational assistance offers young people a career pathway for a better future, especially for those aiming to engage in the service industry at the managerial level. Similarly, the benefits provided to village heads compensate for the loss incurred when the old distribution was abolished. These financial allocations, \$400 for the clan head and \$600 for the tribal head per month, will enable traditional leaders to fulfill their traditional obligations and earn respect from the community (Village official, personal communication, February 23, 2020). Despite deviating from the iTaukei custom of paying tribute to elders, money has become a significant marker of social respect in contemporary village society.

Conclusion

While the development rhetoric by way of land reforms gives a sense of optimism in a country torn by manufactured land-ethnic politics, the iTaukei autonomous right to their ancestral land has been compromised by the colonial land policy. The prolonged inequality perpetuated by the lease policy resulted from the lack of political will by previous governments to amend land laws until the Bainimarama government came into power. The self-interests of traditional and political leaders had prevented any law amendment regarding lease income distribution. The Bainimarama government hijacked this colonial policy loophole in the guise of equality to draw iTaukei support for its own self political interest just like its predecessors.

The notion of leasing is a colonial legacy that does not encourage individual entrepreneurship since land is communally owned, with the majority of iTaukei not having the essential capital to operate any business ventures. While the new equal distribution policy creates cash equality to lease-recipients' landowners, it does not generate long-term investment. Lease monies are diverted to family and traditional consumption attributed to the inconsistency of lease payments and their insignificant value. The cultural influence of communalism contributes significantly to iTaukei spending on cultural consumption and obligations reinforced by the cultural village space where indigenous iTaukei live. In addition, the cultural currency that

perceived lease income as communal that must be shared and reciprocated reinforced the dependency mentality of iTaukei that derailed any long-term investment to generate wealth for individuals and the community. This research evidence does not support the government's claim that the new policy will individually contribute to saving, wealth, and investment.

However, the lease economy, as a hybrid system, can serve as an effective vehicle for communal development when lease funds are collectively diverted towards the common good of the LOUs through good governance. Communal development has also facilitated land reclamation for iTaukei in Narewa. Furthermore, research evidence suggests that customary land is highly perceived as a commodity than its traditionally highly acclaimed spiritual-identity value by iTaukei and applies the cognitive dissonance theory as the appropriate way to describe this view. While the participants in Narewa ranked the cultural currency of their land the highest, the attitude towards it is to use it to generate financial capital. This narrative must be shared in a transparent manner at the family, village, and national level to create consciousness amongst iTaukei that customary land is of economic significance and does not downplay its spiritual identity. Once this truth is embraced by iTaukei, the political will to pass appropriate land legislation will be easily accommodated and will ease the land-ethnic division that has caused social and political instability. The government must enact policy changes that encourage and facilitate business partnerships between local and foreign investors and iTaukei, nurturing business ethics for LOUs.

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