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Statement by Author

I, Donna Elizabeth McKinnon, declare that this thesis is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published, or substantially overlapping with material submitted for the award of any other degree at any institution, except where due acknowledgment is made in the text.

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Statement by Supervisor

The research in this thesis was performed under my supervision and to my knowledge is the sole work of Ms. Donna Elizabeth McKinnon.

Signature: [Signature] Date 09/09/2016

Name: Dr. Claire Slatter

Designation: Senior Lecturer
DEDICATION

To my children Kelsie Kadisha and Kemuel, you have given me inner strength and motivation. I will continue to climb because I know my steps will make yours easier to follow. To my husband, Challus Mc Kinnon, for your love, support and encouragement. To my family, I could not have done it without you! Thank you Beldora Keiler for the legacy you left us. Whatever you believe, you can indeed achieve!
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“To God be the glory, great things He hath done!”

This study would not have been possible without God’s love, grace, strength that helped me to persevere in times of challenge. To Him I am truly thankful.

This journey has been influenced by many people to whom I wish to convey my heartfelt gratitude. Special thanks to Mr Kaiyabia Villiame of the iTaukie Affairs Board and the Roko Tui Ba, Mr. Josefa Toganivalu, for their assistance in providing logistics and initial contact into Votua Village.

Gratitude is extended to the turaga-ni-koro (headman) of Votua Village, Mr. Kemueli Tutuyakabola, for accepting me into the village and allowing me to conduct my research. I am grateful for the hospitality and support for educational advancement which they extended to me. Special thanks to my host family for facilitating me in their home, and for the cooked meals. I will always remember “kana, kana”. I am grateful that through this study I was able to experience firsthand the hard work women in Votua Village do on a daily basis and to witness the pride and love they take in caring for their families and anyone who stays in their home.

To the women and men who took part in this research, whom I am unable to pinpoint, but to whom I owe plenty gratitude, the information which you have willingly shared through your stories and which I can only hope I have aptly conveyed between the covers of this thesis will forever remain etched in my memory.

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I offer special thanks to my family for their patience and confidence in me. I am forever grateful to them for the encouragement throughout this journey. Challus, Kelsie and Kadisha Mc Kinnon, your love kept me going and your patience motivated me. Yes Kadisha, mommy is finally finished! To my son Kemuel Mc Kinnon, you have truly blessed me and shown me, especially as a woman, that present circumstances should not dictate future outcomes. Through you, I have learnt to persevere.

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I believe through this thesis I have learnt some of life’s most valuable lessons, and I have learnt to trust God and never give up!

Thank you, Vinaka Vakalevu!
This study examines women’s participation in leadership roles at the grassroots using a case study of Votua Village, Ba. Using semi-structured interviews, focus groups discussions and participant observation the study found that notwithstanding women were actively involved in domestic and family care roles, subsistence, small commercial fishing as well as community service, these roles did not translate into meaningful leadership and significant decision making roles in the village.

Patriarchal, traditional and cultural norms, which portrayed women as having lesser value, were found to be strong determinants of gender roles and thus hindered women’s ascension within the leadership and decision making structure. In addition, other impediments such as family responsibilities, low self-confidence and fear, conflict and lack of support, and village by laws were also responsible for keeping women in support roles.

The conclusion suggests strategies to promote inclusive leadership in the village and for extended research to better understand the dynamics at play regarding women and leadership at the local level in Fiji.
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAWG</td>
<td>Fiji Association of Women Graduates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILTB</td>
<td>Itaukei Land Trust Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPFA</td>
<td>Revised Pacific Platform for Action on the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality</td>
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<tr>
<td>SWPMG</td>
<td>Strengthening Women’s Participation in Municipal Government</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children Fund</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<td>UNIFEM</td>
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“Inequality in this village, men are looked up to and women are looked down upon, women want to speak but they are not heard, they want to lead but they are not given the opportunity to“
Female Participant, 2015

This is a thesis which explores women’s leadership roles in Fiji using a qualitative case study approach. The focus is on women’s participation in leadership in a rural area since traditional culture is expected, among other factors, to be a strong determinant of gender roles. The study was motivated by my desire to work with and advocate for changes for women in development related areas as part of the effort to increase women’s involvement in the management of their affairs. The study was undertaken following initial research findings from an earlier research paper I completed as a requirement for a post graduate course offered by the School of Government, Development and International Affairs in Advanced Research Methodology -(DG 400). The paper on Rural Women’s Socio-economic Role and Contribution to Community Development addressed women’s contribution to the home and to the community.

Similar to my own country of Guyana, women in Fiji, particularly in the rural areas, work very hard and make an invaluable contribution to the development of their communities. Yet, these contributions are often unrecognized, undervalued and undocumented and they are not often placed in leadership roles, instead they are relegated to subordinate roles. The invisibility of women’s work contributes to their de facto marginalization. Whilst traditional and cultural practices are not very strongly engraved in Guyanese society in general, gender roles are one of the main challenges to leadership which women face. Hence, a study of this nature is crucial at this time when there is greater need for more women to become actively involved at the leadership level in the management of their affairs. The study therefore seeks to document the contributions of women in this rural setting and to highlight some of the difficulties they
encounter which inhibit them from leading. The recommendations can be used to influence policies for women at this local level.

**STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Traditionally, women’s primary responsibility was in the home. There their major role was accepted as taking care of the wellbeing of their family and managing the home. In recent decades women’s roles have broadened with increased responsibilities necessitating their participation and contribution to their community in domains which had been previously thought to be only for men, for example politics, engineering, medicine, and law. Nonetheless despite some notable gains made over the last four decades, the idea that the woman is suited only in the home as wife and mother remains (Wilson, 2007). This is reflected in their secondary status in all areas and in all societies.

Overall, women’s representation and participation remain dismal at best. Women constitute half of the human resource base of the world (United Nations, 2007), yet they do not hold a share of leadership positions in proportion to their share of the population worldwide (Hassan & Silong, 2008; United Nations, 2007; Chafetz, 2006; Corner, 1997). There is a consistent gender gap between the participation of men and women in leadership at local, national and international levels (Domingo et al, 2015). This gender gap/disparity between men’s and women’s participation in leadership appears evident in Fiji (Kaumaitotoya, 2003). The consequence of this gender gap is that women do not participate fully in the decisions that shape their lives.

The struggle for women’s rights and representation has been long and hard. Evidence shows that there have been some slight improvements in the participation of women in decision making globally (UNDP, 2012; Wilson 2007; Chafetz, 2006). Nonetheless, the pace at which change in their representation is occurring has been slowest in countries such as Fiji which has traditional, cultural, social and religious patriarchal norms and practices which reinforce women’s subordination and disempowerment (Pacific Island Forum, 2013). This kind of system plays a critical role in excluding women from leadership positions (despite their active and dominant participation in the other sectors)
and relegating them to the home and reproductive roles. Reinforcing gender roles, in most cases, favours men in positions of leadership at the expense of women (Aderinto, 2001; Ahirrao & Sadavarte, 2010). Given such patterns as these, it is no wonder that women’s representation in positions of leadership remains an elusive goal in many nations.

International agreements such as the Beijing Platform for Action 1995 and Millennium Development Goal 3 emphasize that governments set specific targets to achieve gender balance in all sectors. They emphasized the need for both men and women to be involved in decision making and leadership at all levels. In particular the Beijing Platform states that women’s participation in power and decision making is a necessary condition for women’s interests to be taken into account, otherwise the goal of equality (defined by UNICEF as a level playing field for women and girls), development and peace cannot be achieved. These views are echoed by the Revised Pacific Platform for Action on the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality (PPFA)\(^1\) 2005-2015, 2004 pp.16-22; the Pacific Plan\(^2\), 2005; and the Fiji Government Women’s Plan of Action\(^3\) 2010-2019, all of which acknowledge that equality is necessary for there to be sustainable development, and advocate among other things, the equal participation of women in leadership and decision making.

Nonetheless, despite the efforts of the government of Fiji to fulfill its commitment to the stated agreements, gender equality is still very prevalent. For instance, 10 years ago Chandra and Lewai (2005) reported strong gender bias in gender based occupational segregation with more women concentrated in service and welfare related jobs. They also found that women were dominant in professional occupations traditionally

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\(^1\) The Revised Pacific Platform for Action on Advancement of Women and Gender Equality 2005-2015 is a regional Charter which contains thirteen critical areas identified to promote the advancement of Pacific women. The document is prepared in response to the Beijing Platform for action (2005).

\(^2\) The Pacific Plan is a master strategy for strengthening regional cooperation and integration in the Pacific.

\(^3\) The Fiji Government Women’s Action Plan is a document which identifies the directions of the government, stakeholders and development partners in fulfilling national and international obligations relating to women.
associated with females such as health care teaching and service delivery, to mention a few. Narsey (2007), Fiji Bureau of Statistics (2007) also report similar findings.

In Fiji women are underrepresented in politics and decision making bodies (Fiji Times, 23 January 2014, p.6; Reddy, 2012; Chandra and Lewai, 2005). Most villages do not allow the participation of women in formal decision making and leadership roles and their views are hardly ever considered (Fiji Times, 11 December 2011, p.3). It is still only a minority of women who assume leadership positions in government, public affairs and private sector. Except for this minority, women remain largely invisible in the corridors of power.

Increasing women’s representation in leadership and decision making continues to be a major challenge. Even though women have managed to break through the barriers to entry into positions of power, over the years, leadership and decision making roles have remained predominantly male dominated. Chandra and Lewai (2005) admit that the majority of women in Fiji are a long way from gaining equity and equality in leadership and decision making processes (p.123). At the political level, there were only 44 women candidates who contested Fiji’s 2014 elections, out of a total of 248. Presently there are only seven female members of parliament, out of fifty members.4

Traditional cultural values are deeply engraved into Fiji society. The distribution and demarcation of power and decision making roles between men and women within families often determine the position of women (Chandra and Lewai, 2005). Women’s roles are defined as homemakers, child bearers and keepers of culture while men are seen as leaders and decision makers, at home and in the community (Chandra and Lewai, 2005). Women from chiefly families do exercise leadership, particularly over non-chiefly women but whether historical and cultural norms generally preclude women’s involvement in leadership at all levels and in all spheres of society is the

4 The number of female members represents those who were elected. The speaker of the house of parliament, Dr. Jiko Luveni is also a female. She is the first female speaker of the house in Fiji.
www.parliament.gov.fj
question. Some researchers in Fiji have suggested that women are viewed as being weak, needy, and unfit for leadership and as trouble makers if they express interest in leadership roles (Fiji Association of Women Graduates, 2006; Reddy, 2012), as their culturally defined role in the home is considered more appropriate and acceptable (Chandra and Lewai, 2005).

Women in rural areas and villages have an important role to play in shaping and implementing decisions at the local and community levels. Their contribution to family life, economic development and social change are important ingredients for the development of local communities. They are key players in the livelihoods of these communities. Their increasing contribution to the home and community cannot be disputed. In spite of the forgoing, in rural villages where traditional customs and practices are more strictly followed (Fiji Guide, 2015; Ravuvu, 1983) women are seldom permitted, and even more seldom seek leadership and decision making roles, often resulting in their limited ability to influence development in their community (Fiji Times, 11 December 2011, p.3).

**Purpose of the Study**

This study focuses on **women’s participation in leadership roles at the grassroots in rural Fiji-the case of Votua Village, Ba.** The purpose was to examine rural women’s contribution, to find out whether or not rural women were represented in leadership and decision making, and to explore whether their exclusion affected development within Votua village.

**Objectives of the Study**

The general objectives of the study were to:

- examine and document the contributions made by women in the home and the community of Votua
- examine whether or not women are represented in positions of leadership and decision making and if they are not represented, explore the reason(s) for their non-representation
• identify the issues and constraints which prevent women’s participation in leadership and decision making and how these can be overcome
• explore the advantages or disadvantages of women’s inclusion or exclusion in leadership and decision making and ascertain whether the disadvantages affect the community development
• explore ways in which the community can encourage and support women’s participation in leadership and decision making

Research Questions
The specific questions which are addressed in this research include:

1. What major contribution do women make at home and in the community of Votua?
2. Are women represented in local leadership and decision making?
3. What are the main obstacles to women being involved in leadership and decision making?
4. Does women’s exclusion from local leadership and decision making affect the development of the community, and if so, why?
5. Are there health, education and security implications for women and girls as a result of women’s inclusion/exclusion?

Scope of this Study
The study focused on only one rural village out of the one hundred and seven villages in Ba. Thus, this case study represents a very minute sample of the situation of women in rural areas in the western division of Viti Levu. Due to the small unique sample used for the study, results are not generalizable beyond the specific population of Votua Village, Ba, from which the sample was drawn. As such the researcher is careful not to generalize the findings to all rural areas or the population of Fiji, or much less claim these findings to be representative of Fiji as a whole.
Significance of the Study
This micro study is significant for a number of reasons that arise from the importance of women in the development of rural communities, namely:

- For reasons of fairness, equity and justice, it is critical for women’s voices to be heard. Promoting equality by involving more women in leadership and closing the gender gap between men and women is particularly crucial since inequality and exclusion have significant implications for economic, political and social development in Fiji, as elsewhere. Achieving the goal of shared decision making between men and women in Fiji will not only help secure a more gender equitable society, but also strengthen the democratic process of governance (Fiji’s Government Women Plan of Action, 2010-2019). Furthermore, women are seen as being more open to transformative leadership than men. This kind of transformation is crucial to advance the cause of justice for women (Antrobus, 2000), while at the same time charting the course for development.

- Secondly, community development is a vehicle which rural women can effectively use to alleviate poverty, improve their livelihoods and drive progress. The involvement of women in local level leadership and decision making could enable them to contribute to the long term goal of transforming gender relations and improve the prospects for sustainable development of families and communities. According to an earlier study conducted in Votua, the community has been involved in and exposed to grassroots development projects including a Coral restoration process of 2004 and marine resource management. The marine resource management has since become an integral part of development in the area. These development initiatives were designed to facilitate the participation of rural peoples (Veitayaki, Aalbersberg & Tawake, 2001) and both may have provided an opportunity for women to participate in leadership and decision making roles.
Thirdly, society is built on a system laboured by women. They already make a valuable contribution to their communities’ in particular and to the development of society in general vis-à-vis their work in agriculture, fishery and other productive sectors as well as in the home. The leader of the opposition party SODELPA, Hon Ro. Teimumu Vuikaba Kepa, commented that “by sidelining women from the highest echelons of decision making, we are effectively annihilating the collective wisdom of 50 percent of the population” (Fiji Sun, 1 March, 2014 p.26).

Fourthly, this study of women’s participative role in leadership and development, seeks to provide an added perspective on the need for a gendered approach to leadership in Fiji. While there have been some studies which have addressed women’s leadership at the political level in Fiji (Corbett & Liki, 2015, Reddy, 2012; PIFS, 2006; Crocombe, 2001), and educational leadership (Lingam et al, 2015; Hussain, 2012), few studies have examined women’s leadership at the community level. If we overlook this dimension of women’s leadership then we risk ignoring a crucial area in which opportunities for women’s leadership are presented or denied, and according to Wilson (2007) that’s a crisis.

Summary of Research Methodology
This research was examined from a feminist lens. In particular, it draws on the framework of feminist leadership for social transformation (UNIFEM, 2012; Batliwala, 2010; Barton, 2006; Antrobus, 2000). The fundamental aim of using feminist leadership is that it considers women’s lack of access to positions of power and authority and advocates for gender equality in leadership. Further, it affirms that giving women a role in leadership and decision making would also give them access to power to influence change in the community in which they live and society in general.

The research adopted the qualitative approach to data collection since it is the approach most used in feminist research. Qualitative approach is used as a means to examine the lived experiences of the women in the study from their own perspectives. As such, in-
depth accounts of the stories shared on the experiences of the women in Votua were recorded and are reported in narrative forms. This was further facilitated by the use of the case study approach which allowed for the examination of ‘rich’, ‘thick’ information from the women.

The use of a qualitative methodology and the case study approach also facilitated a blend of methods, which included semi-structured interviews, with the women of Votua; focus group discussions, as well as participant observation. The researcher stayed in the village for a period of three weeks, and accompanied the women in different settings in order to facilitate effective observation. This triangulation of methods, proved to be the best fit for collecting and verifying data collected and therefore help to validate the records of the findings.

The research has unveiled evidence that notwithstanding women’s contribution in the home and community and other areas, these did not translate into meaningful leadership and decision making roles in the village, especially not at the apex of the decision making structure. Patriarchal, traditional cultural norms which portrayed women as having lesser value were found to be strong determinants of gender roles and thus hindered women’s ascension to leadership and decision making roles. In addition, other impediments such as family responsibilities, low self-confidence and fear were also responsible for keeping women in support roles. The conclusion suggests strategies to promote inclusive leadership in the village and for extended research to better understand the dynamics at play regarding women and leadership at the local level in Fiji.

The research methodology which details the process for data collection and methods used in this study is described in chapter three.

Limitations of the Study
One of the major limitations to this study is the fact that the researcher is an outsider whose language of origin is English. While English is the official language of Fiji and the research location respectively, the indigenous peoples of Fiji also speak their native
tongue. Bauan Fijian is the language that is most widely used and spoken by iTaukei Fijians in the rural areas. Within the villages there are also different dialects of the Fijian language. The villagers of Votua had their own dialect unique to the people of Votua. As a consequence, the researcher had to rely on an interpreter for clarification of questions and responses where these were not understood. The inclusion of a third party in the interview process has implications for accuracy of the data received. This was also significantly curtailed by the use of an interpreter who was from the village of Votua and who understood the topic being studied. The interpreter was briefed beforehand to avoid any confusion and hence had a very good grasp of the study’s aims and objective as well as the questions being posed at the interview.

Votua village comprises three different clans; Yavusa Balavu, Yavusa Nadua and Yavusa Narai, whose members reside in the village, but in separate spaces. The researcher was accommodated by one of the clans, the Yavusa Balavu, while interviewing the women from the other clans. As a consequence, while data was collected from participants from all three clans, more of the data was collected from the women of the host clan in the village as these women were more readily available and accessible. In addition, the preliminary findings revealed that one of the three clan in the village of Votua had a female mataqali (clan) head. However, she was not available for an interview at the time of the field visit due to health reasons. The researcher later learnt that she is now deceased.

Further, because the focus was on one rural area which is populated exclusively by iTaukei Fijians, the study is limited to one ethnic group and excludes those groups residing outside of the study area. The inclusion of other groups, such as Indo-Fijians

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5 iTaukei Fijian is the name used to describe the indigenous or native Fijians in Fiji. In legal terms the iTaukei is a descendant of “indigenous inhabitants of Fiji or any island in Melanesia, Micronesia or Polynesia as at s 2(7)(a) as amended by Fijian Affairs (Amendment) Decree 2010, No 31 (2 July 2010) Republic of Fiji Islands Government Gazette Vol 11, No 73, s 4

6 Indo-Fijian refers to the descendants of Indian migrants of Fiji most of whom were indentured labourers brought to work on the colonial sugar plantation. In legal terms according to the Interpretation Act (Cap 7), s 2 (7) (b), any person of “indigenous inhabitants of the subcontinent of India” is considered Indo Fijian.
could have provided a different perspective on women’s involvement or exclusion in leadership, although Reddy (2012) notes that Indo-Fijians also remain in subordinate positions because of a “culture of silence” in which women are seen as being disrespectful if they are assertive or attempt roles considered outside of their duties.

In spite of the above stated limitations, the researcher was careful to conduct the study in a way so as not to affect the findings and the final result of the study. These limitations were thus kept at a minimum by the researcher taking whatever measures were necessary.

**Organisation of the Thesis**

The thesis is organized into seven chapters. Chapter One provides background information on the study, presents the research topic and a statement of the problem. It also outlines the research purpose and questions as well as the significance of conducting the study. It briefly summarizes the research methodology, the limitations and the organization of the rest of the study thesis.

Chapter Two reviews the literature and presents the framework for establishing the importance of this study and grounds on which comparisons can be made. It describes various perspectives on leadership and leadership styles, gender and leadership and some barriers to leadership identified in the literature. This chapter also discusses participation and community development so as to provide context and inform the research findings and ground the study in the discourse.

Chapter Three describes the procedure used for the collection and presentation of data. It presents the methodology and the methods, and instruments used to collect and analyses the data. It includes methodological triangulation, instrumentation, grounded theory as well as the ethical considerations taken into account in the conduct of this study.

Chapter Four provides a background on Fiji and on Votua, Ba where the study was conducted. Specifically it focuses on demographics and population, society and culture,
Fijian land ownership and traditional administration, local government administration and rural development in Fiji generally and in Votua, Ba, in particular, and women’s development.

Chapter Five presents the findings of the data collected in the fields. It combines the results from the three methods used and presents a narration of the stories and experiences of the women in the study, as conveyed in the interviews and focus group discussions.

Chapter Six contains an analysis of the data collected. It presents comparisons and a synthesis of the research findings with the literature reviewed in chapter two.

Chapter Seven examines emerging issues from the study and concludes the discussions by making recommendations based on the findings of the study. It also makes suggestions for future research in the areas of women and gender studies, leadership and rural development.
CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

“Since women matter, why are they not in places where important decisions are taken”

Yvette Roudy, Founder of Parite, France

This chapter reviews some of the literature that highlights the discourse on leadership. The purpose of this literature review is twofold: to show what work has already been done in the area, and provide a general framework for this study and a basis for comparison with studies elsewhere.

The literature on women’s participation in leadership roles in Fiji is very scanty. A study conducted by Nayacakalou (1975) examined leadership from a traditional perspective; White (1949) examined the role of traditional leaders in “Chiefs Today”. Yet other writers examine leadership in the national political sphere (Corbett and Liki, 2015; Reddy, 2012), or in education (Lingam et al, 2015). Nonetheless there seems to be a paucity of data relating to women in leadership roles generally. In view of this, the current study draws extensively on international literature and on similar studies.

The chapter is divided into three sections which include (a) perspectives on leadership and leadership styles, (b) gender and leadership, and (c) participation and community development, so as to provide context and inform the research findings, which are forthcoming.

Perspectives on Leadership

The concept of leadership is complex, diverse and in many regards undeveloped originating, according to researchers, in the management school of thought (Day and Antonakis, 2012). Leadership is found and exercised in every level of society. Burns (1978) notes “leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth” (p.3). Nonetheless by theorizing the many definitions offered on leadership over
the years and across fields, Batliwala (2010) identifies some common threads. She notes the individual(s) as a leader is usually a man; is a decision maker; is the embodiment of character and integrity; drives the vision, mission, goals and strategy; and motivates others to follow and share these goals. He/she ultimately has the capacity to influence, inspire and direct the behaviours and actions of others (p.7). These characteristics Batliwala (2010) believes are the embodiment of leadership.

Leadership also involves relationships deeply rooted in social settings (Amondi et al, 2015; Hora, 2014). Komives, Lucas & McMahon (2006) submit that leadership is a rational and ethical process of people together attempting to accomplish positive change. While not always the case, the end product of leadership should result in the promotion of change. Put simply, the heart of leadership is change.

Leaders bring people together so that their vision and goals could be realized. Domingo, Holmes, O’Neil, Jones, Bird, Larson, Presier-Marshall & Valters (2015) suggest that leadership is effective when it translate into outcomes, whatever those might be. Effective leadership therefore is about being able to achieve positive change in the community and society in general. The success or failures of organizations-school, church or even the family- is attributed to leadership.

The common practice for leaders, whether individual or collective, is to acquire the capacity or skills for something, to do something, or to change something. Domingo et al (2015) write that it is this capacity for influence that is important in connecting voice to the effectuation of change. They note further, that leadership whether the collective or individual, permits ‘power over’ others so that the achievement of change or outcomes is possible. This view is shared by Batliwala (2010) who highlights that leadership is about power, holding power, exercising power and changing the distribution and relations of power in multiple forms and settings (p.16). That is, leadership cannot be effective without power because leadership is about power.
There is general agreement that the expression of power is related to the way in which people see and interpret leadership. This is explained as a hierarchical process where someone uses his or her authority to make another person(s) act, think or behave according to what they want (OXFAM, 2014). Society generally is hierarchically organized and command oriented. Notwithstanding power comes from all locations and positions, power and prestige though conveyed through cultural expectation, are reinforced by followers or people in society. That is, power is embedded in cultural and social norms and practices.

**Leadership Approaches: Transformational Leadership**

In recent years transactional leadership and transformational leadership have become the primary focus of leadership theories (Day & Antonakins, 2012). Transactional leadership is more charismatic and visionary in nature and leaders lead and motivate followers in ways beyond exchanges and rewards (Day & Antonakis, 2012). In contrast, transformational leadership seeks to challenge the ‘given’ or the prevailing political and normative order (Leftwich & Hogg, 2007; Antrobus, 2000). Transformational leadership is closely aligned with the views of feminine traits and according to some feminist writers, it is synonymous with feminist leadership (Batliwali, 2010; Barton, 2006).

Like feminist leadership, transformational leadership redefines gender and power relations by including the skills of both men and women. At its roots are the principles of equity, democracy, social justice, caring, non-violence and cooperation (UNIFEM, 2012; Batliwala, 2010; Barton, 2006; Antrobus, 2000). UN Women (2013) describes transformational leadership in this way:

“A visionary process that starts at the individual level and transcends the personal to express itself at the group and institutional levels. It leads to the redefinition of gender and power relations and the strengthening of leadership that is bold and innovative and builds on the skills of women and men in society. It is leadership that depends on people participation and challenges the beliefs, practices and structures of inequality,
including gender inequality, that are detrimental to women’s dignity, health, safety and well-being. It is leadership that seeks to ensure the empowerment of women - leadership that is grounded in the principles and values of equity, equality, justice, democracy, caring, non-violence and cooperation “.

Antrobus (2000) makes a distinction between transformational style and transformational leadership. She contends that transformational leadership is not only transformational in style but has economic, political, and social transformation as its goal. She describes transformational leadership as “leadership which advances the cause of justice for women, within the context of economic globalization and fundamentalism” (p.50). In other words, transformational leadership goes beyond means, ends and influence. As Antrobus explains the small minority who dare to ‘challenge the given’ have experienced transformational leadership. Part of the strategy of enabling feminist leadership according to Antrobus is building women’s self-esteem and giving them the requisite skills, resources and access to decision making. This she believes would give them the power to make a difference in their community, or what she refers to as ‘leadership for change’ (p.50).

OXFAM (2014) examines transformational leadership as a right for women. Transformative Leadership for women’s rights according to OXFAM (2014) in addition to promoting gender justice, advances women’s participation and leadership. It endorses the idea of transformation and proposes that: “transformational leadership challenges structure and ideologies that perpetuates gender inequalities and power imbalances. It seeks to ensure that leadership actions contribute to equity, human rights, justice and peace” (p.8).

The type of change which transformational leadership proposes is both fundamental and lasting and challenges existing structural inequalities. Despite some variations in the feminist theories, the underlining concern is that they all acknowledge the prevailing order of male dominance in social arrangements and advocate for change. They also
advocate for women to lead in areas where they have before been denied this fundamental right.

This current study borrows from the core intentions of transformational leadership as proposed by numerous authors (OXFAM, 2014; UNIFEM, 2012; Batliwala; 2010; Barton, 2006; Antrobus, 2000) and takes the same position of transforming for change. This research is informed by the idea that the significant contribution women make in their homes, communities and society in general, should translate into leadership roles where women can make a greater impact.

Further, despite the many challenges to leadership which women have experienced, it is possible for them to ‘challenge the given’ and lead differently in ways which would lead to changes for women, men, boys and girls. This type of transformational leadership should result in growth, independence, empowerment and change wherever it is applied, for both leaders and followers alike. Women’s participation in leadership is important to the point where equality in leadership roles for women signals progress for all (Fiji Times, 8 March 2014, p.9). Unless this is taken into account and women are given the equal opportunities to lead, their community would have lost out on the invaluable benefit of transformed communities and societies.

Furthermore, this study is not merely concerned with advocating for more women to lead but also for women and men alike to challenge the patriarchal and cultural norms which reinforce inequality and subordination, while at the same time considering how they could lead differently and accomplish change. Change is the core message of transformational leadership. The change on which this study is premised is one which sees both men and women leading. Transformational leaders are more likely to create an environment which is inclusive and fosters the potential and abilities of all members towards development goals. As Batliwala (2010), who draws on the many interpretations of feminist leadership, puts it:
women with a feminist perspective and vision of social justice, individually and collectively transforming themselves to use their power, resources, and skills in a non-oppressive, inclusive structure and processes, to mobilize others - especially other women- around a shared agenda of social, cultural, economic and political transformation for equality and the realization of human rights for all (p.14)”.

In Fiji in particular where the villages are the hub of communal life in contrast to individualism (Ravuvu, 1983), a collaborative and inclusive approach to leadership will result in meaningful changes.

**Gender and Leadership**

Significant to this study is the issue of gender and leadership. Sociologists distinguish between gender and sex. Sex refers to biological differences between men and women (Andersen, Taylor & Logio, 2015) whereas gender is used to describe the socially learned expectations, ideas, traits, roles and practices, behaviour attitudes and aptitudes and socio-cultural relationships associated with being male or female (Holmes, 2007).

Culture is responsible for designation of roles based on whether an individual is male or female. The view that gender roles are ‘natural’ has been challenged by the belief that these are social constructs (Holmes, 2007), inspired and fostered by patriarchy and stereotypes in the home, community and society (Jakobsh, 2012). Gender differences are understood as a central feature of patriarchy.

Kasamo (2012) writes that gender is not only about roles, but it is also about relations. In essence, what people state that women or men are, or shall do, is related to the question of who sets the rules and for what functions. Thus, gender roles also imply power relations. According to Eagly (1995), gender role expectations spill over into leadership roles and as a result create important consequences. These consequences create significant barriers to leadership for women. Notable, however, is that it is widely
agreed that the barriers which women face do not arise from a single factor but from a myriad of factors, which may each relate to or have implications for each other.

Several bodies of literature suggest that leadership at the highest level has been and continues to be largely a male prerogative (Hartaz & Dikson, 2012; Carli & Eagly, 2012). For example, women were not leaders outside of the family, in organisations, universities or other institutions which influence key decisions in society. This exclusion of women from leadership was as a result of interlinked political and socio-cultural factors which were pitted against them, and which varied in different social and cultural contexts.

The social conditions of women which made them subservient to males from the primal past, were maintained through primitive times and continue today in some sectors of society. Chaftetz (2006) points out that from as far back as early civilization, political and social theorists such as Aristotle and Plato noted that the stage was set for a preference for males. He notes that women were stereotyped and their role limited to the family. For example, in the political realm it was maintained that there was no place for women. Gender bias and male dominance became the dominant trend as men were the ultimate and absolute, in some cases, authority in positions of leadership (Hickman, 2014; Patel, 2013; Husa et al, 2010; Tong, 2009; Bari, 2005; Kaumaitotoya, 2003).

Given that power and leadership have been historically associated with males, it is not surprising that the qualities associated with maleness are also synonymous with leadership. Rhodes & Kellerman (2013) notes that “one of the most intractable obstacle for women seeking positions of influence is the mismatch between qualities traditionally associated both with women and with leadership” (p.6). These qualities associated with maleness or femaleness are a product of socialization.

The process of socialization which underlies human behaviour, and in particular re-enforces women’s secondary roles therefore cannot be ignored (Jokobsh, 2012). Socialization is that powerful force which directs the behaviour of men and women in
gender typical ways (Anderson et al, 2015). Men and women conform to those behaviours which society considers appropriate for them.

Males and females are socialized in most cultures for different but specific roles. Numerous studies confirm that generally, girls are taught to play passive female roles—submission, avoidance of aggression and competitiveness, reticence to take risks and generally to follow in their mother’s footsteps (Komporaly, 2007; Chafetz, 2006; Corner, 1997). They are given few opportunities to make decisions or develop leadership skills outside of the family and are socialized to accept decisions which others make on their behalf. In contrast, boys are taught to be active, aggressive, and be leaders and decision makers in ever regard (Chafetz, 2006; Corner, 1997). Thus, this conditioning is pivotal to keeping women out of leadership roles and helping to shape ideas of leadership being a male domain.

Males are normally seen as the ones in authority. As such, greater value is ascribed to males than females. This is demonstrated in some societies, particularly traditional ones, where a distinct preference for the male child is common. In some cases, preferential treatment in terms of access to food, health care and education is often given to males. This attests to the greater value accorded to males. For example, fewer resources are invested in the education and training of girls, especially at the secondary levels of schooling. While, there is a higher number of female attendees and graduates at the territory level⁷, research evidence in the Pacific indicate that in some countries, particularly in rural areas, families who have insufficient funds to send their children to school, prioritize their sons’ education over their daughters’ (A Pacific Young Women’s Leadership Strategy, 2011-2019).

According to Jokobsh (2012), sexist and patriarchal values have become so deeply engraved in the consciousness of society that they are largely invisible. An exploration of patriarchy is therefore vital. Sociologist Walby (1990) defines patriarchy as a system

⁷ The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Rajesh Chandra, at the University of the South Pacific December 2015 graduation remarked that 64 percent of all graduates were females.
of interrelated structures and practices through which men dominate, oppress and exploit women, within households, in the labour market, and through custom and culture as well as through laws and regulations. The main site of patriarchal oppression according to Reeves and Baden (2000) is housework, paid work, the state, culture, sexuality and sexual violence.

Patriarchal societies are evident in many countries within Africa, Asia and the Pacific including Fiji. Exclusion, segregation and unequal pay all work together to limit women’s access and abilities and alienate them from mainstream development activities (Kabeer, 2012; Hartmann, 2008; Reeves & Baden, 2000). Fundamentally, these gendered norms not only specify how resources are allocated but they determine who gets what, who does what, and who decides. The universality of women’s subordination and the fact that it exists in all types of social and economic arrangements and societies indicates the magnitude and oppressive nature of patriarchy (Hartmann, 2008).

Domingo et al (2015) posit that patriarchy and gender hierarchy are persistent factors which have limited women’s voice, influence and leadership. These reinforce gender imbalances at the national community and household levels. These views are corroborated by several other writers (O’Neil, Domingo & Valters, 2014; Galvanek, Giessmann & Mubashir, 2012; Reeves & Baden, 2000). They argue that these norms are so resilient that even after conflict, war, regime change or constitutional reform, the traditional gender hierarchy and cultural norms are re-established. The roots of these norms are in effect so deeply anchored that it becomes difficult, or sometimes near impossible, to change.

Moreover, culturally determined gender beliefs define rights and responsibilities and what is ‘appropriate’ behaviour for men and women. These also determine access to and control over resources, and participation in decision making (United Nations, 2009; Reeves and Baden, 2000). They reinforce male power and the idea that women are inferior, restrict or discourage their participation, and relegate them to the background (Reddy, 2012).
Jakobsh (2012) believes that women were mainly placed in a lower support position as a pillar to keep male leadership in power. As a consequence the power, prestige and privileges of the powerful, the males, are dependent on the subordination of women. Furthermore, it is theorized that women have lived and performed in a state of subjection to men whereas culture has inevitably been shaped by men to suit men (Walby, 1990). This implies that the very fabric of societal organization has been woven by males, for males, to support males. Nonetheless, while culture and tradition dictate gender practices in some societies, it is argued that since these practices are socially constructed, they can likewise be deconstructed.

Overall, in some countries for example within Africa and the Pacific such as Fiji, deeply embedded and intertwined cultural traditional and religious norms have been used by both men and women alike as a means to justify the many constraints women face to participation in leadership (Hora, 2014; Reddy, 2012; Corbett & Liki, 2015; Domingo et al, 2015, Moala, 2015). Such norms remain relatively strong (Corbett & Liki, 2015) and unchallenged in some societies despite the perceived interference or imposition of western cultural imperialism (Reeves & Baden, 2000; Domingo, et al 2015), because deeply rooted cultures have become intertwined with religion (Moala, 2015). Moala (2015) puts it “nothing gives stronger undergirding to a culture than religion. And when religion is heavily institutionalized, it becomes a major force in people’s lives.”

Men’s higher status coupled with women’s lack of representation and voice in leadership and decision making bodies have further eroded women’s chances and opportunities for leadership roles and has placed them at a disadvantage. In contrast with men, women are less availed of opportunities for leadership.

**Gender and Leadership in Fiji**

The gender bias and overt subordination is perpetuated in every level of society. Narsey (2007) in a report on *Gender Issues in Employment, Underemployment and Incomes in Fiji*, argues that in recent times, more and more women are working in Fiji, yet they are more likely than men to get low productivity, low paid and vulnerable jobs with no social protection, social rights or a voice at work in comparison to those of men of
similar educational levels. He further points out that women do 52 percent of the total work yet, they receive 27 percent of the total income.

Despite significant changes in their educational attainment, as well as the increase in the number of economically active women, their participation in formal employment among the senior and management levels is still lower than men (Narsey, 2007, p.20). He notes that in some occupations, they are highly concentrated as low income ‘Wage Earners’ (p.21). These high levels of inequality and unfair distribution of roles faced by women are due, in part, to structural and policy impediments in economic development which often work to their disadvantage and could possibly provide an explanation as to why women lag behind males in career, personal development and leadership.

A report by the Commonwealth Local Government Forum in Fiji (2010) states, for example, that in the Northern Division less than twenty five percent of local government employees are women. Sixteen percent of chief executive officers are women. There have only been three women CEOs in the history of local government in Fiji. Women’s representation at this level closely resembles the trend at the political and administrative levels. While these figures provide a glimpse of hope, sadly, they also represent the reality of women’s representation countrywide. Important to note is that local government is the level of government closer to the grassroots and more attuned to their needs, particularly of women.

Nayacakalou (1963) examined the relationship of traditional and modern types of leadership to problems of economic development. He explained that Fijian society is organized on the patrilineal system and the position of leadership or veiliutaki vakavanua falls on the person who is the most senior male by descent in any given clan or lineage; by merit through service to the military or commission, or service through selection, in the case of a union. However, he also notes that it was a matter of policy to appoint persons of chiefly rank or Ratus. Seldom would those positions be succeeded by a female. Hussain (2012) in a dissertation, cites the work of Tavola (2000), notes that in
Fiji, gender is used as a justification for blocking women’s promotion to leadership and management in education.

The aforementioned studies are useful since they offer some possible clues as to why women are excluded from decision making and leadership roles. Further examination of these issues in Votua will unearth whether there are other variables which work together to keep women in subordination. Hence, the current study aims to add insight into issues that may until now have been undocumented.

**Gender Differences and Stereotypes**

The literature on the differences in leadership styles of men and women to date is inconclusive as studies report contradictory findings. There seems to be little agreement among researchers on whether or not differences do exist. For instance, on the one hand, some authors argue strongly that there are no differences in the way men and women lead (Powell, 1990; Komives, 1991), while on the other hand, others have supported the view that there are indeed differences in the way men and women lead (Hassan & Silong, 2008; Wilson, 2007).

The argument on the left in favor of no difference between men and women leadership, proposes that leadership style is contingent on factors such as situation and behaviour. On the contrary, according to Wilson (2007), males and females display different types of behaviour and as such bring different characteristics to the table. Where these differences exist, there are significant implications for how men and women lead. For instance, various studies have found that female leaders tend to be more relationship oriented and democratic while male leaders are more task oriented and autocratic (Hassan & Silong, 2008; Wilson, 2007).

A study conducted by Fiji Women’s Forum (2014), using surveys and focus groups discussions to examine the *Perceptions of Women in Leadership*, reports that most people consulted perceived women to be more humble, submissive and caring in contrast to men who were perceived to be aggressive, stubborn and arrogant.
Women leaders are also theorized to be more compassionate and modest, inclusive, to have better communication skills and show greater support for other women, and to be focus on the big picture and broad issues, much of which is consistent with their child rearing and mothering roles (Hassan & Silong, 2008; Wilson, 2007; Corner, 1997). Eagly and Johnson (1990) and Bass and Avolio (1994) corroborate this view and add that women have a slightly more transformational leadership style than men and show a particularly positive aspect of transactional leadership. Other recent findings also support this view (Eagly et al, 2003).

Further research shows that women’s relationship-oriented role perfectly mirrors the way in which women communicate and interact with others. Women are seen to be more social and facilitative in their orientation which is due in part to their ability to communicate and connect with others on a social and emotional level (Merchant, 2012; Growe & Montgomery, 1999). These traits also correlate with transformational leadership styles. Overall, transformational leadership appears to be more congruent with women’s than with men’s gender roles.

It is important to note however, that gender difference does not simply imply that men are better leaders than women, or visa versa. Instead for example, the common thread which emanates from research on women is that they tend to be better suited for leadership in ways which are required for transformation in contemporary societies. In terms of political leadership, the literature also suggests that women and men have different life experiences, interests and perspectives by virtue of their unique and distinctive experiences (Kunz & Staton, 2014; Ballington, 2008). Thus, these shape their outlook and general stance towards decision making and leadership.

The study alluded to earlier by Fiji Women’s Forum (2014), reports that in contrast to men, women bring to the fore different perspectives and approaches. They submitted that women tended to be identified more specifically with women’s issues and financial management. Women were also found to be better compared with men, at resolving conflicts and resisting bribes. This research evidence is closely aligned with empirical
evidence around the world which report less incidence of corruption where more women are elected members of parliament (Dollar et al, 1999; Ballington, 2008; Domingo et al, 2015).

Notwithstanding that not all women have the same interests and perspective, as they are not homogeneous (women differ by race, class, ethnicity, religion), research shows that women generally share certain commonalities relating to women and gender issues with which they identify (Ballington, 2008). Moreover, women’s and men’s needs, issues and concerns differ. Women's needs, interests and concerns are not just those of women, but rather reflect their primary roles as mothers, wives and caregivers (Ballington, 2008). It is argued then that men alone cannot adequately represent the needs, interest and concerns of women.

Whatever the inference, most definitions of leadership emphasize that women bring very different qualities of leadership to the table, which some writers believe may unintentionally play into long standing gender stereotypes\(^8\). The stereotypes influence behaviours including the leadership style males and females adopt (Eagly, Johnson-Schmidt & Van Engen, 2003). According to Moran (1992) gender stereotypes exert a powerful influence and are partially responsible for the difficulty women have in attaining leadership positions and for society’s struggle to accept them.

Gender stereotype also portray women as lacking the very qualities commonly associated with leadership and decision making that society expects them to have thereby creating the false perception of women’s ability and capacity to lead. For instance, it is argued that women have been socialized in traditional patriarchal societies; as such, the gender stereotypes have been so engraved that they lack self-confidence to participate in leadership (Kasomo, 2012). Besides, there is a positive relationship between cultural factors and the stereotypical views about women’s ability generally and

\(^{8}\) Gender stereotypes are representative of a society’s collective knowledge of customs, myths, ideas, religions, and sciences. It is within this knowledge that an individual develops a stereotype or a belief about a certain group. Stereotypes then are how people see ourselves and others outside of the group to which they belong.
particularly their ability to lead. These have also been linked to the patriarchal ideologies which provide contexts in which women play roles and accept their subordinate position (Kasomo, 2012; Holmes, 2007).

Previous research findings corroborate the aforementioned views and add that because of the internalized oppression which women have experienced, they have been conditioned to act against themselves and to accept their situation as normal or, in some cases, block any attempt to change (Domingo, et al, 2015). For these and other reasons women generally are less confident in their ability to make decisions or lead.

A consistent and well documented finding is that even when women enter positions of leadership they are expected to assume masculine characteristics if they are to survive in the ‘male territory’. Society expects and even demands that women conform to the commanding and powerful masculine role as leaders (Wilson, 2007), in order to be acknowledged and respected. When they act in accordance with female expectations they are labeled as not being ‘tough enough’ and therefore cannot command authority in leadership roles (Catalyst, 2007).

The measure of equality in this case is defined by male standards. At the same time, to the extent to which they do so, they will also be perceived as having failed as a woman or as being unfeminine (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992; Catalyst, 2007). Additionally, Corbett and Liki (2015) highlighted a common perception of women entering politics in Fiji and the Pacific as corrupt, since being an influential politician implied that one must be ‘underhanded’ (p.331).

On average women have to constantly prove themselves as being worthy of leadership roles. Women are criticized for being too assertive or too soft, too stringent or too accommodating (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992; Carli, 2006). They are often held to much higher standards and judged more harshly than males, and must continually prove themselves as being fit for leadership roles while at the same time conform to the female stereotype. In terms of female performance, Corbett and Liki (2015) found that
the women had to work harder than their male colleagues to gain respect and to prove that they are making a contribution to society. Thus, some of the women in Corbett and Liki’s study reported that it was hard to portray an image that is ‘tough enough’ (p.340).

Other studies also found these and other factors responsible for women’s low participation in leadership (Ozor & Nwankwo, 2008). These pressures create a ‘double bind’ which in turn can create resistance to leadership (Carli, 2006; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Corbett & Liki, 2015). It is no wonder that some women are disinclined to seek positions of leadership for fear that they may not ‘live up’ to the expectations, the very reasons that have reinforced their subordination and have kept them in support roles. There can be no doubt as to why women sometimes find it difficult to break these barriers.

Notwithstanding the challenges and stereotypes faced by women, as Carli (2006) posits it would be surprising if women did not lead somewhat differently than men. He is of the view that the type of leadership that women display does not in any way undermine their ability to lead but instead leads to greater effectiveness in their leadership compared with men. It also helps to dispel some of the underling conflicts created by the double and sometimes triple bind.

**Domesticity and Family Care**

The assumption and belief that roles are uniquely male or female remain deeply rooted and universal. Overall there is a strong convergence in the literature that domestic, family and care roles also represent a formidable barrier which preclude women from leadership and decision making roles (Domingo et al, 2015; Markham, 2013; Human Development Report, 2012; Holmes, 2007; Rhode & Kellerman, 2006) Some studies conducted in Fiji confirm that women are constrained to participate in leadership roles outside of the domestic sphere (Corbett & Liki, 2015). Domestic work is usually unpaid and involves a wide range of activities and subtasks.

Women continue to have greater domestic and family responsibilities than men as they shoulder more of domestic and child care responsibilities (Markham, 2013; HDR, 2012; Holmes, 2007; Rhode & Kellerman, 2006). Women remain the major workers, the sole
breadwinner in some cases, and the sole home and family managers (ILO, 2010). In some societies in the Pacific, which is also true of Fiji, women are obliged to take care of their extended families (Ravuvu, 1983).

Domesticity places cultural expectations on women to downgrade other forms of work as with other roles identified as masculine, for the care of their family. Domingo et al (2015) write:

*Women’s roles as wives and mothers, while providing a focal point for both formal and informal forms of collective action, are often the largest impediment to their participation given (1) the time poverty that the fulfillment of gendered roles entails and (2) the rigidity of social norms that confine women to those roles. Poor women are often rendered especially mute by time and resource constraints* (p.68)

Studies conducted by the Commonwealth Local Government Project (2010) on *Strengthening Women’s Participation in Municipal Government* confirm these and other factors as barriers. They cited lack of support for taking on roles outside of the normal family and household roles as women were stopped from doing work outside of the home either by their husbands or families and lacked time to do additional work outside of their household duties.

Corbett and Liki (2015) found that in addition to family pressures, lack of financial resources and prevailing societal views resulted in women’s reluctance to run for political offices. They note that women worry about the impact of their political involvement on their family, in particular their children. Corbett and Liki (2015) also pointed to cases on the contrary, where women were supported by their husbands and partners. Although these and other surveys allude to domestic obligations as a reason why women shun leadership and decision making roles, all of these studies point to substantial gender differences.
Recent research findings suggest that it is still the women who do trice as much work as men (United Nations, 2012, Domingo et al, 2013). ‘Triple burden’ refers to the situation where women responsibility for three different modes of work- women’s double burden usually refers to combining paid work (outside the home) with the ‘second shift’ of homework after hours, whereas ‘triple burden’ include working outside of the home for wages as well as doing domestic duties, and subsistence production (as in fishing or going to the plantation or teiteiin between or at the weekend).

In virtually all societies, women work longer than men for smaller rewards. Many of these women accept and sometimes even defend the systems that ensure their dependence and exploitation (ILO, 2006). Narsey (2007) pointed out the women who work outside of the home or are economically active spend about 26 hours per week doing domestic chores and 76 percent of their time is devoted to housework. In contrast, he points out that males only spend about 9 hours per week doing household chores. Corbett and Liki note that women admitted to feeling guilty about the impact of their involvement in political life on the family as a whole.

Overall, women often have to balance work and family life with relatively little or no supporting mechanisms such as child care facilities (Holmes, 2007). Tiredness, ill health and depression are routine experiences for women managing the ‘double burden’ and ‘triple burden’ (Holmes, 2007). No doubt these multiple responsibilities ultimately undermine women’s desire for leadership and decision making roles as women often forgo other involvements to attend to their families.

Despite the limitations women face, some studies make a positive connection between women’s involvement in family roles and leadership. For instance those interpersonal skills such as respect, understanding and motivation which women bring to the fore from their learned experiences in the home are hallmarks of transformational leadership (Catalyst, 2007). New evidence suggest that since leadership today demands an orientation of teamwork, collaboration, insight, motivation and good communication, the transformative qualities which women so oft exhibit, will consequently be an asset in
leadership in the workplace (Markham, 2013; Catalyst, 2007; Eagly and Carli, 2003) The same could also be assumed for women who assume leadership roles in Fiji.

Chandra and Lewai (2005) offer some other insights into the obstacles women face in Fiji. They posit:

“men have resources to campaign freely, sit around the grog bowl and discuss issues authoritatively, and ‘politeck’ at all levels and with all different groups of people. Women, however, are considered not adept at it because the social and cultural system does not allow it (p.123).”

This view was corroborated by the findings of Corbett and Liki (2015) as women in their study admitted that campaign conventions such as late nights, cost, and the alcohol and kava routine limited their choice of campaign style. Though these findings relate to women in political leadership, they reflect the prevailing culture of Fijian societies and therefore have significant implications for women and leadership roles elsewhere.

The above studies provided a useful framework for investigating the impact that some of the aforementioned factors have on the women in Votua. The research, is particularly interested in investigating whether these factors encourage or deter women’s participation in leadership and decision making roles; if/how they may provide a means through which women seek to lead and community; and where these pose insurmountable barriers, what policy attention and action may be required.

**Importance of Women in Leadership**

Several arguments have been proposed to justify why women should be included in leadership and decision making. Among these arguments is the position that women, like men have a right to participate in leadership and decision making since they constitute half of the human race. This entitlement is grounded in both human rights and in ethics. Women’s rights are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and ratified in several other agreements, for example CEDAW, 1979). The United Nations states that "...the full and complete development of a country, the welfare
of the world and the cause of peace require the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields”.

Thus it is recognized, globally, that women’s enhanced participation in leadership structures is one of the essential prerequisites to redress the gender inequalities in society (Markham, 2013; Wilson, 2007; United Nations, 2007; Antrobus, 2000; Corner, 1997). If leadership is dominated by males the persistent gender bias in distribution and control of resources will remain. Women will continue economic poverty and social marginalization (United Nations, 2007, Kabeer, 1994). Simply, women’s participation in leadership is integral to poverty reduction, promoting economic growth and addressing gender imbalances.

It is also crucial for society to build on the wealth of experiences, skills and abilities of women which could be achieved through their participation and representation in leadership. Increasing women’s representation can also enable more inclusive decisions to be made, more progressive legislation and policies enacted and different solution being created (Fiji Sun, 4 October, 2014 p.39). This view that when women lead not only does it provide them with a voice, but it gives them an opportunity to shape policies is widely supported (Opare, 2005; Mairanda, 2005; Beaman et al, 2007; Hassan & Silong, 2008). Furthermore, as Wilson (2007) notes we limit choices through gender alone.

No doubt, once women are able to lead and make decisions spillover effects into other spheres of society will become evident such as positive impacts on health, education, social and security as well as environmental issues affecting the community. Improved health, education, security and environmental conditions comprise a set of critical benchmarks necessary for positive change for women in development (Corner, 1997). Essentially, when women are disproportionately represented in leadership it inhibits their ability to either benefit from or contribute to meaningful change.
Furthermore, evidence suggests that promoting women’s access to leadership and decision making opportunities has transformative implications for different aspects of women’s lives and contributes to the overall improvement and growth of their communities (Markham, 2013; Hassan & Silong, 2008; Wilson, 2007). Opare (2005) posits that engaging women in community helps to dispel the prejudices about their capacity to lead.

Furthermore, the benefits of women’s presence in decision making at the grassroots are reciprocated in fulfilling the mandate of the state and responding to the needs of the people. Simply put, when women are involved in decision making, regardless of the level, everyone else benefits (Markham, 2013; Opare, 2005).

In contrast, some findings have suggested that having women in power or leadership does not always translate into change. For instance, the Report of Online Discussions (2007) on *Women in Leadership Roles*, with participants from the developing and industrialized countries alike such as Canada, Philippines, South Africa and Ethiopia found that women were seldom able to assert their opposition to gender based policies that are discriminatory. They noted for example, that some women did not have control over large budgets or these were blocked or not approved, thereby negating any efforts by them to penetrate in the key development areas.

Notwithstanding their many challenges such as those aforementioned, overall, women leaders act as role models for other women and young girls in the community. Sai (1995) argues that when women reach management positions in an industry, manufacturing, academia and other fields, and occupy positions of leadership and authority, it motivates other women, young girls and students to follow in their footsteps. Recent research finds that women’s presence in leadership positions in parliament is crucial is shifting public attitudes about women’s capacity for leadership (Alexander & Jalalzai, 2014). Other studies however, note that there are insufficient good female role models needed to exhibit successful and effective female leadership (Patel, 2013). In the context of Fiji, promoting women and young girls to leadership
would help to dispel the notion that “women should be seen and not heard” (University of the South Pacific, 2007 p.18).

The studies examined pointed to notable benefits to the community and society when women are included in leadership. The current study seeks to discover examples of women in local leadership and decision making and uncover the developmental advantages to the Votua community as a result of women’s inclusion in leadership and local governance. The study also seeks to unearth the disadvantages to the community where women do not participate in leadership.

**Participation and Community Development**

Participation according to Chambers (1997) could either be used as a label to make whatever is proposed look good; as a cooperative practice to mobilize local labour and reduce cost, or as an empowerment process where the local people are encouraged to take their own initiative, take command, gain confidence and make decisions (p.30). Midgley et al (1986) asserts that participation requires the voluntary and democratic involvement of people in: contributing to the development effort; sharing equitably in the benefits derived there from and in decision making in respect to setting goals, formulating policies and planning and implementing economic and social development programmes.

Like Chambers, Sen (1997) writes that participation in itself is a weak concept compatible with a multiplicity of conflicting ends. She explains that participation can create an environment that is conducive to empowerment when the ultimate end is to involve people, in particular the powerless, in formulating strategies and policies, making decisions about programmes, and monitoring and evaluating them.

Notwithstanding its several usages, as in helping to frame this study, when participation is used to empower perceived weaker groups of people, it can be a means to give voice to the voiceless while at the same time empowering them to make decisions which
concern them. Participation thus allows disadvantaged segments of the society to become involved in the governance of their affairs.

Empowerment is seen as a process through which people gain power, control over their external resource and likewise growth in their inner self confidence and capabilities (Sen, 1997 p.9), and can potentially change themselves, their household and their communities (Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

For women, empowerment is usually measured in terms of their ability to control household resources, with which they are able to negotiate and make decisions (Domingo et al, 2015). Yet, control of household resources does not necessarily result in women’s ability to exercise greater decision making and influence. In contrast, as it relates to men, empowerment is often measured by their position in leadership.

Empowering women is an important end in itself. According to Domingo et al (2015) as women acquire the same status, opportunities and social, economic and legal rights as men, and as they acquire the right to reproductive health and the right to protection against gender based violence, human well-being is also enhanced. For example, some studies point to empowerment of women through microfinance programmes which have resulted in their elevated status and position in the community as well as their increased participation in community development and society as a whole (Domingo et al, 2015). The same is also evident when women are empowered through their participation in leadership and decision making roles in the development of their communities.

Empowerment therefore leads to development for women. Empowerment and development are terms used synonymously by Batliwala (1993). Chambers (1997) believes that development promotes social inclusion in institutions as the key source of empowerment of individuals and at times tends to conflate empowerment and participation. Empowerment enables women to do more for themselves and the community. In other words, it allows them to develop their capacities in a way that leads to growth. Women’s empowerment through participation is pertinent to this study.
Todaro (1994) views development as a multidimensional process involving many (a) changes in the social structures, popular attitudes, and national institutions, as well as the acceleration of economic growth, (b) the reduction of inequality, and (c) the eradication of poverty. He also notes that through the three cores values of development mentioned people are able to provide for their needs; increase their self-esteem and consciousness, and make choices freely.

Whatever the definition, any development effort should promote individual and social betterment, development of indigenous capabilities and improvement of living standards for all people, in particular the rural poor. As Hook (2004) points out this should ultimately include the presence and participation of everyone.

In the rural areas, participation requires grassroots people or communities to determine their development priorities. Gasteyer and Herman (2013) term this concept ‘community power’. This can only be achieved when people, men and women, successfully participate in the decision making processes. The United Nations (1975) views this type of development as a process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community.

A development best practice which has emerged overtime is one which is led by the local people, specifically the poor and marginalized, as part of the broader community efforts to promote change (Gasteyer and Herman, 2013). This implies giving people at the grassroots the opportunity to think and plan their social and economic future, a goal that can only be achieved through combined and collaborative efforts of community members and effective leadership (Gasteyer and Herman, 2013). In rural communities, the participation of the people (villagers) is the means used to strengthen the community, and leadership is the anchor which holds them together.

Scholars and development practitioners alike admit that many development efforts in the past failed because they did not recognise women, neither were they considered in positions of leadership (Todaro, 1994; United Nations, 2006). Further, it is widely
argued that development efforts in the past disempowered and further impoverished people in rural communities (Gasteyer & Herman, 2013), and severely impacted women’s ability to participate in decision making. Simply because they were bypassed for leadership, inhibited women’s ability to either benefit from or contribute to meaningful change.

For example, in a study on *Environment and Pacific Women* by Va’a & Teaiwa, (2000) found that among the many weaknesses in the development of rural areas in Fiji, is the fact that often the people consulted are the landowners, the chiefs, or elderly people in the community, which invariably excluded women. They note that women are hardly consulted. Instead they are placed on the sidelines while final decisions are made by men. The women’s views are never heard (p.9). By ignoring the contributions and abilities of women, and disregarding their potential to provide good leadership and initiate community action, the community and society is denying itself the soul of community development.

The studies examined point to the importance of participation, particularly in leadership roles, to development. As the literature suggests, like men, women’s participation is important for growth and development of the community. The literature also suggests that women’s participation, and more so in leadership and decision making, was not considered. As noted also in the literature a myriad of factors over the years have worked against women’s ascent to leadership.

Overall the studies examined showed that overall women are excluded from leadership. The question for this study is whether- this is the case in Votua, and if so, why are they not included in local leadership, and what are the implications for their exclusion? This study also explores what benefits could be derived from women in leadership and decision making, in light of the growing literature in the field. While the findings of this study may not be representative of rural areas in Fiji as a whole, it will provide a useful case study as well as a possible framework for examining women in leadership at the national level. The fight for gender equality will only be over when the statistics on
women’s participation and representation in positions of leadership and decision making in all spheres have significantly improved.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has examined a range of relevant literature on leadership, gender and leadership and participation and community development to provide a broad theoretical basis for the study. A discussion on leadership and transformative leadership was presented as well as a discussion on gender and leadership, highlighting leadership differences and stereotypical perceptions of males and females in relation to leadership and their relatedness to leadership. A discourse on the importance of women in leadership was also summarized. The chapter also presented a summary of the literature on participation as a means of empowering women and its impact on community development. The next chapter will present the methodology and methods used in the study.
CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION
The research aimed to examine women’s participation in leadership roles at the grassroots in rural Fiji. This chapter focuses on how the research was conducted. The research methodology and methods employed in finding out the stated objectives (see chapter 1). It describes the procedures used to gather information for the literature as well as for the collection and presentation of data. It includes methodological triangulation, instrumentation, grounded theory and method of ensuring credibility and dependability as well as the ethical considerations taken into account in the conduct of this research.

Methodological Approaches
Social research is about finding answers to questions in an attempt to understand the world around us. It is about research on, and with people in the real world (Walter, 2013). The researcher goes within the context and observes the customs, culture and habits of the other people and provides a report of the representation of those being studies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). They further note that research provides the foundation for reports about and the representation of “the other” (p.1).

This research was a planned methodological activity, which was built around the issues of women’s contribution to the Votua village and their representation in leadership and decision making using a qualitative case study design. Its’ aim was to investigate and seek to understand the reasons for and issues surrounding women’s participation in leadership and decision making at the grassroots.

The most formidable body of literature on qualitative research posits that its’ main concern is about establishing truth. Leedy and Ormrod (2010) posit that “qualitative research is the study of a phenomenon in its natural setting with all its complex and multifaceted dimensions”. In other words, the researcher studies the phenomenon under real world conditions, to make sense of it, make it visible and interpret it. The final result
reflects the meaning(s) the participants give to it. In this sense qualitative research is a situated activity which locates the researcher in the world of the researched in order to find truth. This view is in contrast with quantitative methods which on the other hand, emphasize measurements and analysis of causal relationships between variables.

Qualitative research privileges no single methodological practices over the other, instead it is used in many research disciplines and paradigms and draws on and utilizes the methods and techniques of several theoretical lenses for insight and knowledge (Nelson et al, 1992). While critics have argued that qualitative research is fiction and the researchers have no way of verifying their statements, proponents contend that qualitative research not only represents the world of lived experiences where individual beliefs and actions intersect with culture (Nelson et al, 1992, p.8), but it gives a voice to societies’ underclass (p.16). One of the aims of this study was to examine the contributions women made in Votua village. These included women’s role at home on a daily basis as well as their contribution in the community as a whole, most of which may be unnoticed, undervalued and unrecorded.

Several characteristics of qualitative studies are identified by Creswell (2009). These include:

- Natural or contextual setting
- Researcher as key instrument
- Uses multiple sources of data or evidence rather than relying on a single source alone
- Inductive data analysis
- Participant meaning
- Emergent design
- Theoretical lens
- Interpretive
- Holistic account

(Creswell, 2009, pp.163-164)
This study significantly mirrors those factors identified by Creswell. It examined women’s participation in leadership roles through feminist lens. Barton (2006) describes feminist lens as a political and social way of thinking, a “radar” or “set of antennas” used to identify issues of oppression at a personal, group or institutional level. According to Creswell (2009), in general researchers tend to use theoretical lens or perspective in qualitative studies which provides an overall orienting lens for the study of questions such as gender, race, class or marginalized groups. These lens in turn become an advocacy perspective that shapes the type of questions asked, informs how data is collected and analysed, and provides a call for action or change.

Walter (2006) explains that there are a number of feminist paradigms rather than a single perspective. As a consequence there is no single approach to social research. Nonetheless, the feminist paradigm has been used as a theoretical frame for many researches. A feminist perspective therefore is more likely to inform the research questions posed and how the topic is defined.

Thus this research drew on the paradigm/perspective of feminist leadership for social transformation (Batliwala, 2010; Antrobus, 2000; Rao & Kelleher; 2000). Feminists examine women as agents of social change, women’s involvements in movements for social justice and the representation of the rights of marginalized women (Barton, 2006). Feminist leadership considers women’s lack of access to positions of authority and power, and advocates for gender equality in leadership. Feminist leadership also affirms that giving women a role in leadership and decision making would also give them access to power to influence change in society. This type of leadership is more horizontal and bottom up instead of male dominated and focuses not only on individual leadership but on shared leadership. The intention of feminist leadership for social transformation is not just to capacitiate more women for leadership but to encourage them to lead differently to benefit men, women and children.

This current study was mainly concerned with examining women’s participation in leadership roles as a means of social transformation or positive change in Votua village.
Hence, feminist leadership provided a useful framework for the study. Feminist researchers examine social conditions of women by exploring context and reason for women’s experiences. A qualitative study was used to examine women in leadership and community development because it is the approach most commonly used in feminist research (Creswell, 2009).

The data for this study was collected in Votua village where the participants live and work. Hence, qualitative study was deemed useful because its focus is contextual. In other words, it is situated within the contextual conditions of the women in the rural community of Votua Village, for there is where the participants’ beliefs and actions intersect with their culture. Using this qualitative method therefore allowed the researcher to go into the domain of the women to collect their in-depth stories and experiences, notwithstanding that qualitative research is harder, more stressful and time consuming than other methods (Hughes, 2006).

The findings which emerged about women’s contribution, as well as to the nature of leadership, and the issues and problems which exist and which prevent them from assuming leadership at the village level represent the ideas and issues of the women who live in Votua Village and not the perceptions, meaning or values held by the researcher (Yin, 2011). This component is synonymous with the writings of Remler and Van Ryzin (2014) who likewise believed that in many instances the best way to find out the answer to a pressing problem is to go directly into the field, observe conditions from the ground and ask the people involved, in their own words for their interpretation of what is happening and why. Comparatively, a qualitative method was preferred over quantitative methods because with the latter the researcher remains blind to the conditions of the participants’ reality.

Because qualitative studies rely on the spoken or written language as well as symbolic contents (images and photography) of both the researcher and his/her participants, language provides a unique window into the thoughts, experiences and motivation of the participants. Many qualitative researchers agree that language is a direct reflection of the
culture being studied (Remler and Van Ryzin, 2014; Yin, 2011). That is, language and
the context within which it is spoken is a representation of the participants’ reality.

Many qualitative studies are grounded in an in-depth study of cases. Some writers of
research methods (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2014; Bryman, 2004) agree that most
qualitative research could be defined as case studies. On the other hand, Yin (2011),
Creswell (2007) and Hancock and Algozzine (2006) propose that the case study
represents one variation of qualitative research. Yin describes case study as “an
empirical investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its natural context using
multiple sources” (Yin, 2009, p.18).

Yin (2003, 2011) proposes that a case study method should be used when: (a) the focus
of the study is to answer “how” and “why” questions; (b) you cannot manipulate the
behaviours of those involved in the study; (c) you want to cover contextual conditions
because you think they are relevant to the study; and (d) the boundaries are not clear
between the phenomenon and the context. This research sought to find out if the women
in Votua village played any leading roles and where they were excluded from leadership
and decision making the researcher examined why they were excluded and how their
exclusion affected other issues in the community, while taking into consideration all
other variables which accounted for women’s participation or non-participation in
leadership and decision making.

Researchers (Yin, 2011; Creswell, 2009; Hancock and Algozzine, 2006) have also
identified some key characteristics which distinguish the case study:

- it addresses a phenomenon
- the phenomenon is studied in its natural context and is bounded by space and
time
- it is richly descriptive- grounded in deep and varied sources of information
- it is more exploratory than confirmatory
- it creates opportunities for the researcher to explore additional questions
The case study approach was deemed suitable to address the problem being investigated as the characteristics identified were synonymous with this research. The study explored women’s representation in leadership and decision making. In this instance, it focused on a particular group of people, that is, the women in Votua village and explored whether they were confronted with a specific problem. It was also used as a means to unearth in-depth, ‘thick’ revelations of women in Votua community using a marriage of research methods.

The aim of using the qualitative case study was not to generalize findings to the population of Fiji as a whole, and as such does not claim to be representative of the wider population. Instead, it was done to engender patterns and linkages of theoretical importance and to obtain deeper insights into women’s participation/non-participation in leadership in a rural setting, although Merriam (2000) suggests that insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, procedures and future research. As such, the use of this case study presented a unique opportunity to examine women’s leadership roles in the village which could inform other cases of women’s inclusion or exclusion elsewhere in Fiji. It also created the opportunity for other researchers to pursue other research on similar or new issues identified in the study.

Furthermore, the qualitative method and the case study approach supported the exploration of a phenomenon using a variety of data sources and instruments. The use of different data sources is the hallmark of qualitative case study research (Yin, 2003). This strategy ensures that the issue is explored through multiple lenses. As a consequence, different facets of the phenomenon can be revealed and understood (Yin, 2003, 2011) and the data credibility is further enhanced. This strategy was also considered useful for examining women’s participation in leadership roles at the grassroots as triangulation of methods was utilized to extract data.

The following section presents the methods of data collection and the instrumentation adopted in the study.
Methods of Data Collection and Instruments

Triangulation is the combination of two or more methodological approaches, analytical methods, theoretical perspectives, investigators or data sources to study the same phenomenon for the purpose of increasing the study’s credibility (Yin, 2011).

Methodological triangulation occurs either at the level of the research design or at the level of data collection and analysis. Yin (2011) categorized the two distinctions as the between- and within- method type of methodological triangulation. The the within method is used when multiple complimentary methods within a single paradigm are combined. This research is guided by methodological triangulation within methods since three different methods were used in the qualitative study.

Triangulation also involves the use of several data collection strategies such as focus groups, interviews and observation which form the major data collection method in qualitative studies and were therefore applicable in this study. For this reason, triangulation ensured that the phenomenon being explored is examined from multiple perspectives. Collecting data from multiple sources, in multiple ways helps to illuminate different facets of situation and experiences and portray them in their complexity.

The use of different methods in concert in this study compensated for their individual limitations and exploited their potential benefits (Guba & Lincoln, 2011). Further, Guion, Diehl and Mc Donald (2011) and Guba and Lincoln (1998) propose that triangulation of methods in social science research helps to increase the credibility and dependability of findings in qualitative studies and adds depth to results that would not have been possible had a single strategy been employed.

While triangulation offers these benefits, in framing this research, the warnings of (Yin, 2011) were deeply considered. He notes the danger of collecting data from a multiplicity of sources is that the researcher can become “lost” or “saturated” in the data and suggest that in order to counteract this occurrence, data must be carefully managed and analysed. As a consequence, strict measures were taken to organize the data collected so that at
best, the results reflected a synthesis of the findings. For example, when the researcher felt overwhelmed and or saturated she took short breaks which allowed for recapping and refreshing of thoughts before additional information was examined.

**Instrumentation**

Yin (1994) offers six sources used to collect data for qualitative case study. These include: physical artifacts, direct observation, archival records, documents, interviews, and participant observation. This study utilized the later three methods as a means of data collection.

Secondary data was initially reviewed using a range of data sources. Documents were collected from the University library using both print and electronic media. These included books, journals, newspaper articles, thesis and dissertations accessed through Jstor, ProQuest, Open Journal Access and Sage publications. To aid the search a table of key terms was developed and used. This information provided context for the research and grounded it in the discourse on leadership, gender and leadership and participation and community development.

**Interviews**

Interviews are a way to generate empirical data about the social world of informants by asking them to talk about their lives, as portrayed in their stories, in order to gain access to their experiences, feelings, and social worlds (Merriam, 2000). In other words it is a form of conversation between the interviewer and his/her participants. Interviews are a very common form of data collection used in case study research (Hancock and Algozzine, 2006) and have become fundamental tools in qualitative studies. Two forms of interviews were utilized. These were semi-structured and focus group.

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

Semi structured interviews are less structured and particularly well-suited for this case study research (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006) because it allowed the researcher to
understand the participants in “their own terms and how they make meanings of their own lives, experiences and cognitive processes” (Yin, 2011, p.135).

The semi-structured interview was designed to allow the women to control much of the interactions, obtain information about them, while giving them a chance to tell their stories. Contrary to structured interviews where the questions are closed ended and rigid, semi-structured interviews were more conversational and allowed for two way interactions (Yin, 2011), allowing them to tell their stories in ways that are more meaningful and to use their own words rather than select from a set of responses predefined by the researcher. In this regard semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to invite the participants to express themselves openly and freely about the issues concerning their contribution and leadership in the village. This aim suited one of the fundamental purposes of this research which was to depict stories and experiences of the participants from their perspective.

**Focus groups**

Focus group research is a “way of collecting qualitative data, which essentially involves engaging a small number of people in an informal group discussion (or discussions), ‘focused’ on a particular topic or set of issues” (Wilkinson, 2004, p.177). This means that the researcher uses group interaction as a means to collect data. The environment of focus groups is helpful for participants to discuss perceptions, ideas, opinions and thoughts in a group where they have a common identity and therefore felt safe to share information (Onwuegbuzie et al, 2009).

In this research, a very important feature of focus groups was that it allowed group discussions with the women in an interactive setting. These interactions yielded important data and created the possibility for more spontaneous responses as well as for valuable solutions as the women were able to express freely their feelings and hear other participant’s views on topic being researched. Furthermore, the focus groups also prove to be an economical, fast and efficient method of obtaining data which was used to substantiate the information collected by the other two methods used in this research.
Another reason for engaging participants in the focus group interviews was to validate the information collected by the semi-structured interviews and participant observation. These were also designed to allow the researcher to gain further insights into the study’s fundamental research questions.

Although group interviews provided the benefits outlined, there were also some limitations associated with its use. All the participants were not articulate, outspoken or insightful. In these instances, the women who were seemingly quiet at times were encouraged to speak. Care was taken to probe but not to coerce the women into answering questions. When prolonged silence occurred other topics or questions were raised. The entire process required particular research skills and aptitude which the researcher was learning as the process progressed.

**Participant Observation**

Participant observation was used as a means to learn about the naturally occurring routines, interactions and practices of the participants. Using this method allowed the researcher the advantage of observing the behaviours and attitudes, culture and norms of the rural women in Votua village during the fieldwork. The researcher was guided by the fact that observation provides more objective information related to the research topic.

Participant observation provided a unique advantage because it gave the researcher a chance to learn about the things the participants did daily during the normal course of their lives and to understand their verbal and non-verbal responses. Observational techniques, in comparison with other methods, are particularly useful when the intention is for the researcher to understand experience from the point of view of those who are living it as well as from the context in which it is lived (Alder & Clark, 2011; Merriam, 2009). More specifically, through observation greater insights were gleaned into the work the women did, the environment and conditions under which they work, and the custom and culture of the villagers.
In addition to the aforementioned, Merriam (2009), posits that participant observation allows the study of participants’ behaviour firsthand, revealing hidden behaviours and the concealed under-life that would not have been discovered had a survey method been used. Alder and Clark (2011) also corroborated this view by positing that observation offers a relatively unfiltered view of human behaviour.

The downside of participant observation is however acknowledged. Observation proved to be a time consuming and intensive task especially when the researcher trailed the women wherever they went to observe their work. The researcher had to be alert so as to continuously make on the spot decisions as to what to observe and what not to observe. An observation guide adapted from Creswell (2002) was also used. Notwithstanding, not all observed activities were written down as it was not always possible to do so (for example at the market) however alternatively the researcher took photographs or video recordings, as well as stored data by memory and recorded it at a later time. This in itself was problematic since not all data could be recalled in the exact manner it was observed.

The Researcher as an Instrument

The research is only as good as the researcher. The researcher is seen as the prime ‘human instrument’ for data collection and analysis in a qualitative research (Yin, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). He/she must spend a significant amount of time in the environment of the participants under study. Spending time in the field allows the researcher to decide when and where to position him/herself so that the best data can be collected to answer the research questions. Thus, the five senses become the main mode of measuring and assessing information in the field. Yin opines that some real world phenomenon such as culture, common in qualitative studies, cannot be measured by external instruments but rather can only be revealed by making reference to behaviours which were observed or by talking directly to people (Yin, 2011).

Given such patterns as those identified by Yin and other scholars, and as the ‘human instrument’ in this study, the researcher spent a period of three weeks in the research environment of Votua village which facilitated access to the participants at times most
convenient to them and in their space. It was pivotal for the researcher to experience the
culture and norms of the women and to observe firsthand how they lived, the work they
did and their connectivity to the roles they play in the village. In this way also it was
necessary for the researcher to remain open minded, use sensitivity and relinquish any
preconceived ideas and notions.

As the key instrument, the researcher is also forced to be aware of potential biases such
as personal background, motives for conducting the study and categories of filters that
might influence his/her understanding of field events and actions (Yin, 2011). In this
regard, reflexivity was the researcher’s weapon to be leveraged.

Reflexivity is defined as self-conscious awareness by the researcher of their impact on
the research and research process (Walter, 2013 p.317). Reflexivity was necessary since
as a researcher it was not possible to disconnect the experiences, background, or
memories which were intricately woven in the research process and could have
influence the researcher’s actions as well as the actions of others. As a consequence, the
researcher needed to take stock of her own life experiences.

In addition, and also as a result of those female traits and stereotypes which so often
define women, the researcher reflected on the experiences and interacting with the
women which were seemingly being played out. As a woman and an outsider she could
not always divorce herself from the reality of the participants and how they were
consciously and unconsciously reshaping her truth, her experiences and her knowledge.
The researcher constantly took a check of her actions and thinking and reminded herself
of the ultimate goal and focus of the research.

The researcher was also cognizant of the warnings of Yin that it is not always possible to
avoid using his/her own lens in the final reality since the researcher has a human
personality and cannot perform as “a faceless robot or machinelike recorder of human
events” (Yin, 2011, p.13). Consequently, the researcher was also aware of the multiple
interpretations which existed and ensured, as far as possible, that she avoided
inadvertently imposing her interpretation onto the women’s. In this regard, the researcher clearly articulated the findings to provide a clear framework reflective of the realities of the participants.

The Participants in the Research

The participants for this study were twenty (20) iTaukei women drawn from three clans in Votua village. In addition, a further seven (7) women took part in the focus group. Together they were twenty seven female participants. All of the women were residents of Votua Village. The women were initially chosen for the study using the *purposive sampling technique*. As noted by Palys (2008) “Purposive sampling is virtually synonymous with qualitative research” (p. 697).

There is no set number when determining the sample size for a study (Bernard, 2002). However, while Nastasi (2013) concurred that there are no specific rules for determining sample size, he proposes that a sample size of 20-30 people in a qualitative study would yield enough information for analysis before saturation point is reached. Furthermore, the sample size in qualitative studies should not be so large that it makes extracting rich, thick data difficult (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). It was upon this basis that the sample size for the semi-structured interviews was determined for this research.

Krueger (2000) recommends about six to nine participants in a focus group. He posits that group with more than twelve participants tend to “limit each person’s opportunity to share insights and observations” (Krueger, 2000, p.78). Focus groups must be small enough for everyone to have their voices represented but yet large enough to capture the range of voices. As far as possible it is advisable that the optimum size of the group be reflective of the characteristics of both the participants and the topic being researched. For example, Bloor et al (2002) argues that small groups may best suit certain research topics or participants especially when dealing with experts or people in authority. Furthermore, they argued that if small groups are common with interactions for women, then these should be preferred. They nonetheless cautioned that like large groups these have potential downsides such as limited discussions, cancellation of discussions if
members fail to show up, or shy or reticent participants which in turn can affect the data collected.

While a small group of women were interviewed, in retrospect, it was also pivotal for the researcher to interview the men in the village. As such a focus group was also conducted with 12 men from Votua village. While the research was examined from the feminist lens, the perspective of the males, especially the male leaders in the village, was pivotal in attaining a holistic understanding of the nature of leadership and decision making in the village. Additionally, from some of the initial finding in the field it was necessary to hear the perspectives of the males and to ascertain whether or not they were willing to allow the women to assume positions of leadership and decision making at the apex of their decision making structure.

The next section describes the data collection procedure.

**Data Collection Procedure**

Data collection is the soul of the study (Fink, 2010). The validity and “truth” of all research depends on accuracy of data. As such the researcher was careful to plan and execute this process in a manner which yielded the requisite data to answer the research fundamental questions.

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2010), in order to conduct ‘productive interviews’ some fundamental guidelines should be established. The researcher was also guided by the information advanced by Hancock and Algozzine (2006) on how to plan and conduct an interview. Special note was taken to heed these suggestions before, during and after the interviewing process.

A semi-structured interviews protocol containing thirty nine questions was developed with mostly open ended questions. These questions were designed to allow the researcher the opportunity to gain insight into the fundamental research questions (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006) stated in chapter 1. Prior to going into the field to collect
the data, the researcher accessed the validity of the data measurement by having experts in the field vet the items contained in the interview protocol for relevance to content. These experts consisted of two university professors who were given the question via email. Following suggestions from the experts, some questions were revised where needed.

Since the questions were not rigid but allowed for flexibility within the discussions, where the need arose, some questions were refined while additional questions were examined. These questions led to a more focused line of information gathering in order to achieve in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. In this case, concurring with qualitative designs which are flexible and responsive to context (Creswell, 2009; Alder & Clark, 2011; Yin, 2011).

Two focus group interviews were carried out. The first focus group was conducted with seven women of mixed ages from Votua village and lasted for one and a half hour. Well-designed focus groups usually take between one and two hours (Onwuegbuzie et al, 2009). Fifteen open ended questions were developed for these discussions using an interview protocol. These questions allowed the participants to respond to the same issues which were examined in the individual, one-on-one interviews. The focus groups were conducted in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect.

**Conducting the Fieldwork**

At the level of the village permission was sought through the village headman (Turaga-ni-Koro) to enter and conduct the research in Votua. A formal process of presenting ‘Sevusevu’, a traditional customary protocol, was observed in a meeting with the Turaga-ni-Koro and his representatives.

The second step was to explain to the village headman the purpose and importance of the research and to obtain his permission to enter into and conduct research in the village. It was also necessary for him to encourage the women to participate in the study. This was an important milestone in the data collection process.
Identifying and gaining access to the participants was another crucial step in this research as the selection of participants directly influences the quality of information received (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Further, they cautioned that while availability of participants is important, it should not be the only criteria for selecting them. Instead, the researcher should identify those persons in the research who may have the best information with which to address the research question and who are also willing to take part in the interview. In view of this, the first two participants were chosen from the home of the host and two were referred to by the leader of the village. The remaining women were either referred to by the participants themselves who had been interviewed or willingly came to the host house to participate in the interview. The male participants were invited to the focus group by the head of the village.

The interviews were conducted at the participants’ homes as well as in a private space at the home of the host. Hancock and Algozzine (2006) opined that although interview in the natural setting may enhance realism, the researcher may also seek a more private, neutral and distraction free setting to increase the comfort of the interviewee and the likelihood of attaining the best quality information.

The interviews were done during the day and night, at times most convenient to the participants. Some were collected between 9:00am and 12:00am while others were collected between 2:00pm to 5:00pm and 9:00pm to 11:00pm. The focus group discussions were conducted in an informal setting, over a bowl of traditional Kava (grog). These discussions were also conducted at night between the hours of ten and eleven. Observations were made throughout the fieldwork.

Prolonged engagement proved useful as it allowed the researcher to be better placed to conduct the research in a manner that was responsive to the participants setting. The researcher stayed in the village for the duration of the fieldwork. The researcher’s extended time in the field helped to improve the trust of the participants and provided greater understanding of the participants’ culture and context (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007)
During the interviews traditional customs were observed. Before entry into the house where the meetings were conducted, the interviewer had to ask permission of the host in the traditional Fijian tongue “dua, dua, dua” during the day and “bogi-sa-bogi” during the night. Permission to enter was granted by the host response “dua” or “bogi” respectively.

Before each session the objectives and purpose of conducting research was clearly outlined to the participants. Their permission was sought to participate in the interview. The participants were also informed of their rights to opt out of the interview if they so desired. At the end of each interview gratitude was expressed to the participants for the invaluable information which was shared. Creswell (2007) advised that a final thank-you statement to acknowledge the time the interviewee spent during the interview should be done.

During the data collection process, there was respect for existing village hierarchy, local customs, norms and values. As far as possible, these were strictly observed throughout the research process. For example, the wearing of a ‘sulu jaba’ which is a customary requirement for all females entering into and living in the villages in Fiji was strictly observed during the fieldwork.

**Questioning and Use of Probes**

The interviews were mostly conversational. Questioning was used as a means to illicit good and honest responses as well as to verify statements made by the participants. It was also used to probe for additional information. An initial question was asked as an ‘ice-breaker’ at the beginning of the interviews. The interview protocol was used as a “prop” during the interviews. Participants were likewise able to glance at the content and be assured that they were part of a more formal inquiry (Yin, 2011), while contributing to the study’s findings.

During the questioning the researcher remained nonjudgmental in tone and body language so that the women would express openly and freely their answers. The
researcher allowed the women to asked questions so as to ensure the interview remained conversational. It was also pivotal to establish a good rapport with the participants to allow multiple perspectives to be collected and understood.

Probes helped to guide and structure the discussion and to unearth hidden issues. Most importantly it helped to reduce the occurrence of undesirable responses during the interviews (Baxter & Jack, 2008). For instance, “say more about that”, “please can you explain that”, “can you give me an example of that” were some common probes used throughout the interviews in order to help guide the responses.

It was also imperative for the researcher to spend time listening to the participants to allow them the opportunity to offer their perspective. Listening carefully to key phrases and remarks was a key component throughout the fieldwork. Comments were kept at a minimum except when there was the need to probe. Alder and Clark (2011) advise that one useful skill in questioning is knowing when to keep quiet, as interested and active listening can help to obtain complete responses.

The researcher was also forced at times to suppress the urge to ask questions so as not to interrupt the flow of responses. In these instances, the researcher nodded gently, smiled or used “uh-huh” or asked “why so” to indicate to the women that the conversation was still active. When the women had finished given the desired response, the lingering questions were posed.

**Note Taking and Recording**

Field notes describe the researcher’s experiences and observation as well as his/her reflections and interpretations. These also represented the raw data collected through observation. The process of selection and interpretation took place during interviews since the researcher had to make quick, sometimes unconscious decisions about what was to be noted down and how it was to be phrased. In view of this, notes were taken in addition to the tape recording which directly aimed at answering the research questions.
Another form of note taking which was also used by the researcher was sketching. This became necessary as some of the observed phenomenon could only be described using a visual picture of the layout. For example, the description of structure of leadership in Votua was sketched as well as various sitting arrangements observed. According to Yin (2011) field notes can include drawings or sketches since they are highly desirable supplements to writing and they do not required communication with participants.

While handwritten notes could be sufficient in some cases as Hancock and Algozzine (2006) advised, the lack of details associated with this approach could result in loss of valuable information. According to them, the best way to record interviews was to audiotape the interaction. Recording offered a complete representation of what the participants in the research related.

While audio recording was done throughout the fieldwork, notes were taken only for the semi-structured interviews and during observation, as it was not practicable to take notes during the focus group sessions.

**Transcribing the Interviews**

Transcribing is a long, tedious procedure which often follows the recording of data for interviews. Transcription was done solely by the researcher in an effort to safeguard the identities of the participants and maintain the level of trust that was established during the fieldwork.

The recordings were transcribed verbatim. Verbatim transcription of the participants’ own words in the interview was important in this research to privilege the women’s voices in the analysis and interpretation of the findings. Furthermore, as Merriam (2009) puts it, verbatim or “word for word” transcription of recording from interviews furnishes the best database for analysis.

For each forty five to one hour interviews, the researcher spent three hours listening and re-listening to the recordings. Special attention was given to the words and phrases and
the manner in which these were spoken during the interviews. For example, in the Fijian culture, silence, or laughing when responding to a question could be easily be read as a respect since as they indicated “silence” is a form of respect. Where these were recorded, care was taken not to lose the meanings that could be attached to such responses.

**Technique for Data Analysis**

The process of data analysis begins with putting in place a plan to manage the large volume of data collected and reducing it in a meaningful way (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Other writers believe that data analysis is a continuous process which begins from the time the first data is collected and progresses throughout the study (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) adds that “data analysis is one of the few facets, perhaps the only faucet, of doing qualitative research in which there is a preferred way” (p.171). This meant that data needed to be analysed as it was collected rather than wait until the end of the fieldwork, as is done with quantitative methods.

Data analysis in qualitative studies requires the researcher to review, synthesize and interpret the data in order to understand the phenomenon being studied. This involves identifying patterns of meanings and interpretations. In this study this was a continuous process. For this to be done the data was broken down according to Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) three stage Grounded theory.

Coding of data and making comparisons were crucial components to this process. The transcribed data were placed into general codes under the different categories based on the research purposes and questions. They were then broken down into specific thematic areas to allow for comparisons and ease of analysis. The information provided by the three data collection sources was compared so as to corroborate the records of the findings. These were further condensed and summarized in order to address specific areas in the research and to situate the new data into pre-existing data. Inferences were made and explanations given for patterns.
Detailed description and direct quotes from the women in the study were reported in the findings to enable the reader a sense of the setting and to give greater insights into the perspectives and thinking of the women interviewed. According to scholars in the field, this strategy represents the heart of qualitative work (Creswell, 2009; Alder and Clark, 2011; Yin, 2003, 2011; Bloomberg and Volpe, 2012).

The process of writing up the findings of the study was made easier since a collection of documents, notes and ideas were made during the data collection process (Walters, 2006).

Method of Ensuring Credibility and Dependability

Research should be sound and the findings trusted. Without rigor, research is worthless, becomes fiction, and loses its utility (Morse et al, 2002). Writers such as Lincoln and Guba (1985, 1998) have provided specific strategies by which researchers can incorporate various measures to deal with questions that arise regarding the credibility and dependability of their studies.

Since credibility is one of the most important factors to be considered in establishing trustworthiness, where appropriate, these were applied to this research. The adoption of research methods that are well established were considered. For example, interviews and observations as discussed earlier, where utilized which represent the hallmark of qualitative studies.

While it was not possible to visit the research area before the study was conducted (because of distance) the researcher developed early familiarity with the culture of the participants before the data was collected by consulting documents and speaking with professionals, both academic and administrative, who had conducted research and other development related work in the study area.

The fact that participants were given a chance to refuse to participate if they wished and to opt out of the research at any time represent tactics to help ensure honesty in the
informants. Only those women who were genuinely willing to share their information were interviewed. In one instance, after arriving at a potential participant’s home, and waiting for more than half hour, it was surmised that the participant had no interest in the interview. Consequently other participants were sought.

Another strategy used to ensure credibility of this research was peer scrutiny of the research project. A research presentation of the findings provided useful feedback from colleagues, peers and academics and general practitioners with interest in the topic. The feedback helped to strengthen the arguments and conclusions of the research.

A diary was kept with notes of all important steps taken during the data collection and detailing steps taken to record and interpret the findings of the study.

**Ethical Considerations**

Research requires collecting data from people about people (Punch, 2005). Creswell (2009) maintains that when researching people researchers need to protect their research participants, develop a trust with them, promote the integrity of the research, guard against misconduct and impropriety that might reflect on the institution or organization and cope with new and challenging problems. This therefore means that the researcher has the responsibility to protect the needs, values, rights and desires of the individual women (informants) in the study. Similar importance is stressed by many writers in the research field (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2011; Alder & Clark, 2011; Henn, Weinstern & Foard, 2006; Denzim & Lincoln, 2005).

Ethics in research is therefore a set of moral and social standards that includes both prohibitions against and prescriptions for specific kinds of behavior in research (Alder & Clark, 2011). Ethical consideration was vital from the start to the finish of this research.

In indigenous communities, in particular, research ethics involves both establishing and maintaining and nurturing reciprocal and respectful relationships (Denzim and Lincoln, 2005). Therefore, heed was taken in gaining and protecting the trust of the research
participants. The final outcome reflects a collaborative effort of inquiry between the researcher and the researched. Informed consent was gained following two critical procedures.

**Permission to Use the Village as a Research Site**

Firstly, at the level of the village permission was sought through the village headman (*Turaga-ni-koro*) to enter and conduct the research in Votua. A formal process of presenting ‘Sevusevu’ was observed, as explained earlier.

**Informed Consent**

Informed consent means that respondents demonstrate that they understand the study, what is expected of them, and how the information will be used (Alder & Clark, 2011). The research process entailed enlisting voluntary participation of the women. As a consequence, the purpose, aim of the research and how the data was going to be used was outlined to all participants. Each participant was invited to participate in the study. The women were advised of their right to opt out of the study at any point if they felt uncomfortable with any of the questions. This was done during face to face contact with the participants. Permission to record and use the data was also sought from the participants. Permission to use direct quotes from the interviews with the participants was also sought and granted which reflects the level of trust and support in the research process.

**Conclusion**

In sum, this chapter has presented the methodology and methods used in the conduct of this study. A qualitative case study was used as the best fit for this study. Related literature which supported its use was discussed. This chapter also explained the triangulation of methods used. Data collection and instruments as well as detailed description of the procedure of data collection and analysis were recorded. The chapter also described the methods used to ensure credibility and dependability and the ethical considerations followed. The subsequent chapter will present the background to Fiji and Votua Village where the study was conducted.
CHAPTER FOUR

A BACKGROUND TO FIJI ISLANDS AND VOTUA VILLAGE

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides background to the Fiji Islands and Votua Village, Ba where the study was conducted. It describes in brief the history of Fiji, the demographics and population, the society and culture, family relationships, traditional administration and Fijian land ownership and women’s development in Fiji. It also provides a background to Votua as the case site.

Understanding the environment in which the women in the study lives provide important information about those variables which influence leadership and decision making. Background also provides context for the study.

Demographics and Population

The Republic of Fiji Islands is strategically located among the islands of the South Pacific. It covers an area of 1,000 kilometers. The former British colony which gained independence in 1970 is comprised of the Yasawa chain, Vanua Levu and smaller islands, the islands in the Lomaiviti group, the main island of Viti Levu, the Lau and Moala groups, Kadavu and Ratuma. Together they make up 323 islands (Donnelly, 1994).
The iTaukei Fijians or Kai Vanua “land people” are the original settlers of Fiji. They account for more than half of the population. The iTaukei Fijians are mostly from the Melanesian and Polynesian origin. Fiji is predominantly a Christian nation. There are also other religions such as Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2007). The population census of 2007 recorded a population of 837,271 people of different ethnicity, spread across the islands (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2007), and over 800 villages. Up until 1996, the majority of the population lived in rural areas which now accounts for 49.3% of the population (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2007).

Ba province is located on the North-West of the largest island, Viti Levu, in Fiji. Ba covers an area of 2,630 square kilometers. The total population of Ba according to the 2007 census was estimated to be 232,760 residents of which 96,852 are iTaukei. The total rural population is recorded as 110,762 (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2015). There are
21 districts in Ba province and 107 villages. Ba also includes the town of Tavua, Ba and Nadi and the city of Lautoka. The tikina of Nailaga is comprised of six villages. Votua is the second listed village as part of the tikina of Nailaga. Votua falls under the leadership of the chiefly village of Nailaga. Nailaga district is headed by the Tui Ba who resides in Nailaga Village. She is addressed as “Nawaivituri na Marama na Tui Ba”. The villages are predominantly populated by the indigenous iTaukei Fijians who are either registered owners of the land or were accepted by the villagers as part of the village. Settlements of Indo Fijian settlements can be found on the outskirts of the villages.

Society and Culture

Fiji is a multicultural society. Ishtar (1994) describes Fiji as “a patchwork of crowded townships, thatched villages, canefield ploughed by bullocks, rice paddies washed by wide rivers, women carrying babies and produce to the markets, men carrying pigs...” (p.121)

However for the iTaukei Fijian, the culture and practices are in some ways distinct. The society, traditions and customs as well as their religious practices are inextricably linked to their “land” and “God”. These culture- customs, language and certain norms varies from one community to another and changes continuously. Ravuvu (1983) writes:

“Traditional Fijian society is based on communal principles derived from village life. People in villages share the obligations and rewards of community life and are still led by a hereditary chief. They work together in the preparation of feasts and in the making of gifts for presentation on various occasions; they fish together, later dividing the catch; and they all help in communal activities such as the building of homes and maintenance of pathways and the village green. The great advantage of this system is an extended family unit that allows no-one to go hungry, uncared for or unloved. Ideally it is an all-encompassing security net that works very effectively not only as a caretaking system, but also by giving each person a sense of belonging and identity.”
The iTaukei Fijian society in particular, is defined by their chiefly system, communal life, land ownership, language, ceremonies, kava drinking entertainment, hospitality, and a system of traditional representatives or envoys, handcrafts, traditional medicine and the handing down of folk stories and history. These are passed down from parents to children, one generation to the next. According to Ravuvu (1998), culture is the vessel which carries the Fijian heritage from one generation to another.

The individualistic lifestyle is not a common to the iTaukei, especially in the villages as people still operate under the traditional system. According to Paia (1981) tradition based institutions which define the place of each individual in society do not accommodate the concept of individualism, private ownership, and competition. He adds that they promote communalism and anything other than this is considered suspicious, untraditional, and rebellious. These patterns are more common with iTaukei Fijians and outsiders residing outside of the villages.

When the descendant of an iTaukei Fijians is born he/she is born into a social system which is traced through the bloodline of the father’s mataqali, sub-clan or lineage. The male child inherits rights and privileges such as land ownership of that mataqali as other members. There is very strong emphasis on the importance of the male as the male is seen as an authority figure (Chandra & Lewai, 2005; Tuivaga, 1988; Ravuvu, 1983).

Traditional division of labour by sexes is accepted as normal. Males are the protectors and providers of the mataqali (Ravuvu, 1983). The husband is seen as the traditional head and decision maker of the family and the home. He has considerable authority over his wife, who is expected to respect and obey him. The husband is expected to provide for the needs of the family. Women are expected to respect and obey the authority of the males doing otherwise is seen as a sign of disrespect for which a woman can be reprimanded. Males and females are socialized accordingly (Ravuvu, 1983).

The wife is the subordinate, helper of the man, responsible to the husband. Women and wives in particular are expected to look after the interest of their husbands and
child/children. Additionally, they are also expected to tend to the welfare of their husband's *mataqali* and *tokatoka*. According to Ravuvu (1983) writes:

“*Apart from looking after the husband personally, the welfare of his group becomes one of her main concerns. To stay away and not get involved in serving the husband’s family is the hallmark of a worthless wife, considered good only as a sexual partner for the husband* (p.3)”.

Women’s role and status in society is determined based on the social rank into which they are born. Women of higher ranks have more roles and a higher status and therefore enjoy more privileges over those of lower ranks. Like the chiefs, those women of high ranks are treated differently by society. However, generally women have lower social status than men (Tuivaga, 1988).

In the villages it was not common for men and women to commune together at ceremonies and other village activities. Men and women have their own unique sitting arrangements apart from each other. For instance, men sat at the upper end of the eating mat (*ibe ni kana*) while the women, young and old, sat at the lower end. Men are also served first by the women. Women are usually the last to be served and the last to eat. Further, since men are the ones in authority, they are expected to do all the talking while the women sit and listen. Women are not allowed to speak, except in very rare occasions or in the case where the woman is of chiefly status (Bolabola, 1986; Ravuvu, 1983).

At the community and village level men are the leaders and decision makers and women remain unheard except in the cases where women of high social rank may be involved. Men make the final decision about family or community activities. Women are seldom at the forefront of decision making. Instead, they are often the ones who supported the males or worked behind the scenes (Chandra and Lewai, 2005; Bolabola, 1986; Ravuvu, 1983). According to Ravuvu (1983) women’s subordinate status is evident as only men take part in traditional ceremonies and rituals of importance while women perform a
silent role. Their views were usually conveyed by their husbands or male member(s) of the family.

Women were recognized and admired for their subordinate roles and they learned, from childhood to carry out their roles without question. It was by their submissive positions that they were identified in the community. Any deviation from this norm was attributed to outside influences and interferences. Ravuvu (1983) writes:

“Women who know well and accept their positions in their own society, willing carry out their family duties and other demands and obligations relating to the community. They are recognized and admired for their efforts. They are respected for displaying specific female qualities in accordance to the values and beliefs of the people and are greatly appreciated for playing the role appropriate to her defined position within the family or community hierarchy. It is only when one is aspiring to a different way of life made possible by the presence of alternative lifestyles and freedom of choice, that one begins to make a low estimation of the position and contribution of the women in Fijian communities...” (p.2).

In the rural areas villages are known to be the hub of the Fijian culture. According to Ravuvu (1983) the villages are the hub of Fijian way of life and the centers for Fijian communal activities. It is in that setting that the village people live and work as a community. They work together to fish, hunt and perform religious and other ceremonies and village activities. The women care for their children as well as assist in caring for those children living around them. It is in the village also where the people share each other’s sorrows and happiness in the same way as they share their wealth and success (Ravuvu, 1983).
Family Relationships

Ravuvu (1983) points out that there are observances of specific rules of avoidance or tabu in the Fijian culture. The *tabu* he explains applies to all who are related to one another as 'brothers' and 'sisters', both paternal and maternal according to the principles of classificatory and extended kinship (p.7).

As the children matures and approaches adulthood free play is discouraged as one is expected to behave with decorum and respect for his/her siblings. According to Ravuvu, the severity of this *tabu* increases at marriage and when people have their own children (Ravuvu, 1983). In the traditional context, a brother cannot have close or face to face contact with his sisters. A similar relationship exists between two adult brothers, even if they are unmarried. During adulthood sisters and brothers communicate through a third party for instance, when entering her brother's house to seek assistance, a married sister communicates to her brother only through an intermediary, usually her brother's wife.

Eye contact between the siblings is avoided as much as possible. Out of respect the sister will be seated at the far end of the house, away from the portion reserved only for men and other important visitors. The same is expected of the sister’s children. They cannot talk freely to their mother’s brother, especially when approaching adulthood. Sleeping in the same room or same house (*vale*) is considered improper and as far as possible is avoided. No physical contact is allowed and using each other’s belongings is unacceptable (Ravuvu, 1983).

When children are born of the same family, that is same mother and father, they are expected as grown adults to work together and contribute to the family. They must provide for the young and elderly. This idea of working together is also extended to children of the father's brothers. The children of one's father's brothers are parallel cousins (*veitacini*) and are all regarded as brothers and sisters. These also observe the rules of *tabu* or avoidance. Accordingly, brothers who hail from the same parents care for all children as their own and are treated likewise. For example, if a child misbehaves,
any of the father’s brothers present at the time can inflict punishment on him or her (Ravuvu, 1983).

Parallel cousins of the opposite sex treat each other as brothers and sisters. They are usually members of the same mataqali or clan. Junior brothers are expected to behave with respect and obedience towards senior brothers while senior brothers love and control junior brothers. When they are older their relationship becomes tenser to the extent of avoidance for each other. Casual conversation is limited and more formal. Conversely, children expect similar behaviours to that normally displayed by their own parents. Furthermore, it is not uncommon to find the same kinship system extended outwards where distant relatives are ascribed the same treatment and on the same terms as the immediate family circle (Ravuvu, 1983).

Although not a practice common today, boys and girls who were related as cross cousins (tavale) were expected to wed each other as these relationships were considered ideal. Nonetheless, the traditionally defined social and economic relationships between cross cousins are still maintained in varying degrees, depending on the context (Ravuvu, 1983).

These relationships are the very essence and foundation by which the people affirm and perpetuate their bond of relationships. Children are socialized to conform to the wishes, norms and beliefs of their parents and elders. Much of their group interaction and discussions revolves around relations with parents and other kin, and how they can be improved (Ravuvu, 1983).
Social Organization of iTaukei Fijians

Figure 1: Classical Fijian Social Structure

Figure 1 depicts the classical iTaukei social structure. The divisions are responsible to
the community for communal tasks, each having a leader/headman or chief. A number
of family units form a tokatoka. Several tokatoka forms a mataqali, several mataqali
form a yavusa (clan). A yavusa consist of a number of people who are subdivided into
vearious social groups according to blood or other kinship ties. They normally reside in
a defined physical territory known as the koro (village). Many yavusa make up a vanua\(^9\)
(tribe). The vanua is the largest grouping of kinsmen structured within a number of
social units which are related to one another. A number of vanua which are socially

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\(^9\) Vanua means land but it also represents the social (people and how they are organized) and cultural
values, beliefs and common ways of doing things) aspects of the physical environment identified within a
social group. Vanua is the largest social unit in the iTaukei administration.
related or politically aligned are grouped to make a *yasana* (provincial unit). The units which make up the *yasana* are divided into districts or *tikina* (comprised of a number of koro or villages) (Ravuvu, 1983).

Fiji is predominantly patrilineal in decent (Bolabola, 1986). Those who are born of the chiefly line (seniority of decent in the male line) are immediately recognized as leaders. For example, the first born son of a chief is normally chosen as the next chief. A leader who has vacated his position, (usually by death) is succeeded by his eldest son, the next eldest, to the youngest son. The position is then reverted to the eldest male heir of the eldest son (Bolabola, 1983). The family name, land and properties are inherited through the male lineage (Tuivaga, 1988) and so are the rights and privileges.

**Local Government Administration**

In Fiji as with the rest of the Pacific, local government arrangement consist of a mixture of customary governance and western type institutions (Osborne, Sahib & Naidu, 2014). There comprise the two intersecting administrative bodies which govern iTaukei Fijian affairs. All nucleated traditional iTaukei villages are governed by the provincial council administered under the Fijian Affairs Board Act (Cap. 120, 2006). A different arrangement exists for town and city areas. The provincial administration and municipal authorities are separate forms of local government and come under separate ministries of the central government (Osborne et al, 2014). These have been shaped by the colonial administration. According to Osborne et al (2014), the village, district and provincial council at the local level and the Council of Chiefs at the national level were established by the British as a system of direct rule.

The iTaukei villages are administered by the Provincial Councils through the Village Act. These are part of the administrative structure of the iTaukei Affairs. An iTaukei Affairs Board administers the 14 provincial councils of country. Village councils are found at the bottom of the formal administrative structure. Village matters and concerns
are discussed at this level. The Turaga-ni-Koro or village headman usually channels matters through the district (Tikina) to the provincial council (Osborne et al, 2014).

**Traditional Structures**

The traditional structure of the iTaukei Fijian administration is organized according to their customary forms of government and relates to their rights to land ownership. According to Nayacakalou (1975) and Ravuvu (1996) the organization of the iTaukei administration was necessary so that the indigenous peoples would have a part to play in the administration of their own affairs.

The iTaukei are governed by two sets of administrative structures which run parallel to each other. On the one hand there is central government represented by the village tikina and provincial council which address development related issues, while on the other there is the vanua\(^{10}\) which is represented by the traditional authority of chiefs and deals with traditional protocols or authority (Osborne et al, 2014). Diagram below depicts the dual structure.

\(^{10}\) The vanua overseas the preservation of traditional culture and way of life of iTaukei villages, in matters such as instilling discipline and maintaining order in the village setting (Osborn, et al, 2014).
Figure 2: Dual Hierarchies in Authority Structures for iTaukei Villages

(i) Formal Authoritative Structures  (ii) Informal Structures

Source: Osborne et al, 2014

Figure 2 depicts the dual structures of iTaukei villages. At the apex of the formal administrative structure is the iTaukei Affairs board which comes under the directives of the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs. Administration is led by a chairman at the provincial level. He/she is elected by various districts representatives. The Roko Tui is the intermediary between the government and the provincial council. At the district (tikina) level there is a chairman of the council. At this level also the go-between the tikina and the provincial level is the district representative. At the lower end of the hierarchy, the village headman (Turaga-ni-koro), is the representative of the village to the district council.
The *vanua* is organized in a hierarchy of authority. That is, the higher you are on the hierarchy the more power and authority is bestowed. At the highest level is the *yasana* is the *Bose Vanua*, the meeting of various district chiefs (or elected chairman) headed by a paramount chief of the province. From the provincial level matters go down to the district (*tikina*) level, which is made up of village chiefs and is headed by a village chief. The village level is led by a village chief, other members are heads of the clan (*mataqali*). At the base of the hierarchy is the family unit (*tokatoka*) head. (Osborne et al, 2014).

The chief is usually a man to whom honour and respect is given as a leader. Chiefs over commoners, male over female and elders over youth (Bolabola, 1986) are visible distinctions which further define authority and relationships.

Ravauvu (1996) submits that the hierarchical order of the groups ensured effective subordination of the lesser groups to the larger groups which included them. Norton (1977) points out that the system of government of the village Fijians through the chiefs and their commoner allies had no parallel in the colonial world for the thoughtfulness of their organization.

While the structure of administration and leadership was accepted by the iTaukei for many years some writers contend that as far back as the 1950s the Fijian administration was an obstacle to the development of the people (Spate, 1959; Nayacakalou, 1975; Durutalo, 1986; Ratuva, 1999,). Many of these writers felt that the system of administration was in fact a tool used by the hegemonic elite and therefore in essence only benefited the relatively small elite group of chiefs and politicians. This system of administration is described by Governor O’Brien as “governing of the natives through the chiefs and for the chiefs” (Knapman, 1987, p.37)
Land Ownership

The rights of iTaukei Fijians to land was given legal protection under the British Colonial administration following the deed of Cession and the Native Lands Transfer Prohibition Ordinance of 1875. In times past the iTaukei Fijians were recorded owners of 82 percent of the land (vanua) in Fiji (Paterson et al, 2013). However, following the return of Crown land in 2015 the iTaukie Land Trust Board recorded the total iTaukei Land\textsuperscript{11} owned as 91 percent (TLTB, 2015). In the pre-colonial era the chiefs controlled the lands and distribution of rights to it, while the people sought permission to use it. The system of land ownership is still the same today. Land is generally owned by communal kinship groups or clan and controlled by the chief or leaders. However, in some areas such as the city for instance, individual, Freehold\textsuperscript{12} and Crown land is common.

The male child/children who are normally regarded as following their fathers, are registered owners of the land by way of succession. Although in recent times, both names of male and female land owning groups are registered by the iTaukei Land Commission, Bolabola (1986) recorded that it is the males who are registered as the owners.

According to Nayacakalou (1978), the land or vanua is an association or confederation of yavusa or clans under a Tui or paramount chief. Ravuvu (1983) explains that in Fiji land or vanua is an important part of every aspect of the Fijian life. It has physical cultural and social dimensions attached to it and these are interrelated. That is, vanua refers to the social and cultural aspects of the physical environment identified with a social group. Socially, land represents the people and how they are socially structured.

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{11} iTaukei Land includes community owned land, state Freehold proclaimed as native reserves and State Lands (CSR freehold lands purchased by the government)
\textsuperscript{12} Approximately 8\% of land in Fiji is freehold land registered under the Torrens system of land registration, by which titles to land are guaranteed. Freehold land can be purchased, transferred, or leased, subject to the conditions of the Land Sales Act, which among other things restricts the quantity of land which can be purchased by individuals who are not resident in Fiji, and by companies not wholly owned by Fiji citizens.
\end{footnote}
and related to one another. Culturally, it represents their tradition, customs and beliefs. It is a symbol of harmony, solidarity and prosperity which represents Fijian life and livelihood. These are bounded together as a whole, and no part is separate (Ravuvu, 1983, p.76). Bolabola (1995) puts it this way:

“For the Fijian community, their land is an extension of themselves. It is part of the Fijian soul, and the concept of the "vanua" - the land and the people - lies at the heart of Fijian identity. Land represents life and sustenance, race and culture, and Fijians cling fiercely to their ownership of it (p.4)”.

Women and Land Ownership

Women land rights in Fiji are usufruct. According to Bolabola (1986) customary land rights of women in Fiji are not the same in every place. They vary from place to place and are dependent on such factors as age, seniority and marital status, sibling position, the social status of the woman or her husband, and/or whether she resided in the area where her rights were to be exercised. Traditional systems privileged men since women did not own land neither were they involved in anything that had to do with land and land ownership. Land was instead owned by men who either cleared and cultivated virgin lands or acquired the right to use it from its original owners.

Land rights are transferred to women’s children from their father. At birth iTaukei women are registered owners of land based on the mataqali into which they are born. This is predominantly traced through the father’s lineage. Since the name, land and property of the family are inherited through the male line, the male child was often preferred over the female child (Chandra and Lewai, 2005).

According to Bolabola (1986), in the villages where the land is owned communally, women have the right to a home through their father or husband as a subordinate partner but not as an individual. In very few instances do women become owners of freehold or Crown land (Bolabola, 1986). Nonetheless, women’s rights to native land are bound
under statutory and customary laws and the latter differs from one village to another. Generally, according to Bolabola (1986), “land tenure policies, customary or otherwise, privilege men through father-son inheritance practices while on the other hand, women have limited legal rights” (p.2).

Synonymous with their limited rights to land ownership is their rights to make decisions or take on leadership roles. Women do not make decisions concerning land. In rare cases, women who are senior for instance (the eldest child in a family), might be allowed to participate in decisions about land and the use of produce from it. Nonetheless, as Bolabola (1986) notes, the degree to which women were allowed to participate in decision-making generally does not relate to their ownership of land since they had limited property.

**Women’s Development**

The government has placed some emphasis on the advancement of women in rural areas. In this regard, the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation through the Women’s Action Plan sets out an inclusive framework. It continues to play an integral role in the development of women through the Department of Women. This Department pursues its role as the primary advisor to the government for women’s development and gender issues in Fiji. Five areas of concern for women under WPA are identified:

Formal Sector Employment and Livelihoods
Equal Participation in Decision Making
Elimination of Violence against Women and Children
Access to Basic Services:
Health and HIV & AIDS
Education
Other Basic Services (Water & Sanitation, Housing and Transport)
Women and the Law
Together with other stakeholders, the Department of Women sets out to promote gender equality for the advancement of women. To this end, women in rural villages have benefited from various economic programmes such as income generating projects and grants. Further through WPA, the government supports the strengthening of basic services such as health, education, training, water supply and sanitation in rural areas. In the area of representation, and in keeping with its mandate, efforts were made to elevate women’s social status through the inclusion of a mandatory requirement for women to be involved in/represented in the Village Committees.

Additionally, as a two-fold strategy for closing the gap between the urban and rural women, a “woman in development approach has been taken to improve areas such as access to water and sanitation. The second strategy which includes gender mainstreaming aims to integrate women’s concerns into government systems through a process of analysis of the different situations of men and women with the eventual aim of making the development process more gender equitable.

This approach gave birth to the Fiji National Gender Policy 2014, which seeks to promote gender equity, equality, social justice and sustainable development. However the national review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform For Action 2014 notes that the representation of women in decision making bodies remain a major challenge. Furthermore, the report submits that there are no quick fixes or temporary measures in train to accelerate equality between men and women and that general stereotyped attitude and practices continue to profoundly restrict decision making in favour of men (Government of Fiji National Report, 2014).

The next section provides a background of Votua village.
Case Study - Votua Village

Map 2: Map of Viti Levu Showing Votua, Ba

Votua Village is a very large coastal village located on the banks of the Ba River in the northwest of the main island of Viti Levu. It spans an area of about one km from the mouth of the estuary. It is one of the largest rural villages in the Naitauba District.

In the 2007 census the village comprised 141 houses, and 1044 people. There were more males residing in the village than females. They accounted for 542 while the number of females was 502 (Bureau of Statistics, 2007). During the fieldwork for this research, the headman reported that the village has a total population of 686. This figure is a significant underestimation of the actual population reported in the National Census (2007) conducted almost nine years prior to the current research.
Table 1: Votua Population By Age and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4-9</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-19</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70+</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>542</td>
<td>502</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Bureau of Statistics 2007

Most of the villagers are the descendants of the original owners of the land. Others are either married to villagers or were accepted into the village. All villagers, male and female, registered with the landowning unit are owners of the land. They are owners and users of the land. The villagers are called whenever required to make decisions regarding the use and distribution of land. However, it is the men who have the final say regarding how things should be done regarding their land.

According to the headman, Votua Village has one of the largest maritime areas in Fiji. It’s extensive customary fishing rights area (Qoliqoli) extends from Ba Bridge in the nearby township of Ba and includes the mangrove flats located at the mouth of the Ba river to the seas of the Yasawa Islands. Permission is given by the villagers in the form of one-year licenses to non indigenous Fijians to conduct fishing activities in the area. This is consistent with traditional management practices which are still being followed as part of the customary system. These traditional fishing rights area are defined and owned by vanua or tikina which regulate their use and exploitation.
The villagers rely heavily on activities of the sea for subsistence, livelihood and as a source of steady income. Most of the women also claimed that “in this village we do fishing”. However, fishing is done by individual households. The District Administration is responsible for deciding, in consultation with villagers through its leaders and the Fisheries Department, which commercial (licensed) fishermen are allowed to conduct fishing activities in the area demarcated as owed by the villagers.

A similar process is followed in the case of the leasing of village land by the land owning unit to non-land owners, namely the Indo Fijian commercial sugar cane farmers. A fee is collected (usually $200-$300 per annum), the proceeds of which goes back to the registered owners through the iTaukei Affairs Board. As indicated by the head of the village, in order to lease village land, there must be at least 60% consent within the mataqali before permission is granted. In recent times, the land owning unit has reclaimed some formerly leased land which is now being cultivated and harvested by the owners of the land.

**Figure 3: Houses in Votua Village**

Source: Interviewer
There are one hundred and forty one houses in the village. Of that number, fifty one are constructed from cement, forty eight from wood and forty one are built from corrugated iron. Only one is made of thatched bure. Water is accessible from the Water Authority of Fiji. However while some villagers have access in their houses for example in the kitchen, bathroom and toilets, others use standpipes in the yards to access water. In addition, the village has one large storage water tank. While electricity supplied by the Fiji Electricity Authority is also available, from observation a few houses did not have electricity at night and thus had to rely on the alternative of kerosene lamp. From observation too, cooking by the fireside or ‘open fire cooking’ in makeshift kitchens is commonly used along with the kerosene stove. While some gas stoves were observed in some houses, these were not actually being used.

The road leading into the village is easily accessible and a regular flow of transportation was observed from the village to the Ba Town where the market is also located. For example, the public bus service plies the route every hour, beginning from six in the morning and runs until six in the evening. There are also carriers and taxi services available.

The village has a dispensary with a nurse who works on a daily basis and provides needed medical care and drugs. In emergency cases, the villagers are taken to the Nailaga Hospital or the Ba Health Centre.

While there are about six denominational churches, Votua has a predominantly Roman Catholic population. There is one Catholic primary school in the village which caters for children’s education starting from level one through to level eight. In previous years, children were accommodated only up to year six. Two additional levels were built with a donation to the tune of $130, 000 and constructed with the assistance of local workers. Students who have competed primary education matriculate into Xavier College. As of 2015, the village opened a Kindergarten which caters for the education of younger, preschool children between the ages of four and five. This was an initiative of the women’s
group and later made possible by an in-kind (retirement fund) donation by a retired head-teacher in the village.

In 2007 a government survey recorded the educational attainment of the village as 364 kindergarten, 527 secondary, 30 post-secondary, 3 diplomas, and 12 others. There were no degree level attainments at that time (Bureau of Statistics, 2007).

While the village was found to have two clubs, one for older women and the other for younger people, the youth club according to the women has been inactive for some time. Participation in these clubs is voluntary.

The village is organized according to the traditional social structure. While the chiefly structure still exists, at the time of the study the village did not have a chief. In fact, the researcher was advised that the village of Votua had been without a chief for some time. Votua Village has three clans: Yavusa Balavu, Yavusa Nadua, and Yavusa Narai which occupy separate spaces in the village. The Yavusa Balavu has two subgroups. For each mataqali there are also two tokatoka.

Because the village has three clans it also has three leaders of those clans that are of chiefly rank. There are two male headmen and one female head lady. The leaders were chosen by descent from the birth line of their fathers. The ultimate head of the village is the Turaga-ni-Koro or village headman. This position is nominated by the villagers, males and females registered as owners of the land. The current headman is chosen from among the three heads and final authority for the administration of the village is vested in him. The headship is a rotated position. Each headman serves for three years. The present leader has been in leadership from 2012.

The three leaders have oversight responsibilities for their clans and must therefore give their consent on matters relating to their clan. Duties and responsibilities regarding welfare of the village for example, consultation about land issues such as allocation, is dealt with by the head of each clan. It is their duty as the clan representative to contact
the relevant government department on matters pertaining to land. Other functions regarding administration of daily welfare of each clan are divided evenly according to each clan. Additionally, each head of clan has the responsibility of holding the members of his/her clan together. However overall, the headman has an oversight role for the entire village. All decisions regarding the village and its members are decided upon by the heads in a meeting called by the headman. These meetings are usually attended by the villagers registered as owners of the land.

The headman is the leader to whom all transactions and affairs must pass and who gives outsiders permission to enter into and conduct business in the village. He does this by first informing the other heads and when necessary including them. There must be mutual agreement by the heads and the registered villagers on matters pertaining to the affairs of the village. According to the reports from the interviews, before a decision is made the three leaders of the clan (yavusa) normally gather together discuss and decide on a course of action. The ultimate decision lies in the hands of the headman.

The community hall is the common meeting hall where all meetings and ceremonial activities occur. Like every village in Fiji, Votua Village has norms and customs, as well as by-laws\(^{13}\) that are passed down from one generation to the next. Though these may conflict with the constitution and international laws, they govern how the people live and conduct their affairs in the village. For instance, the headman explained that women are required to be properly attired in “long skirts” once they are in the village. The males are also not expected to consume alcohol and “make noise” in the village. The villagers are expected to be “soft spoken” as this is a form of respect to the elders and leaders of the village. Everyone living or staying in the village are made aware of what they are expected to do. Likewise unacceptable behaviour is made known and discouraged. In other words, villagers must follow and abide by the system of governance already in place in the village.

\(^{13}\) By-laws are customary laws which aim at ensuring that Fijian protocol is being followed in the villages and that all decisions taken at the village level are being respected and observed.
When conflict arises in the village, it is first addressed by the headman. If need be, the headman calls the other leaders as well as the villagers to a meeting in the village community hall. Disputes or conflicts and other matters are usually addressed in the village hall. For example, if there is a matter between two parties, the headman usually serves as a mediator until a resolution is arrived at. However this is only done if the matter is a minor offence. Otherwise in the case of, for instance domestic violence, it is reported to the police or relevant authority.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a brief background of the demographics and population of Fiji, the social and cultural aspects of the iTaukei Fijians and an explanation of family relationships. It has also highlighted both the formal and informal levels of iTaukei administrative structures. Additionally, it has provided a general background of Votua Village relating to its location and management. The next chapter will present the research findings.
CHAPTER 5

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the findings from the fieldwork conducted in Votua Village, Ba which aimed to examine women’s participation in leadership roles at the grassroots in rural Fiji.

The data is presented from the findings of the semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and participant observation as part of the qualitative methodology using a single case study in this research. The findings are presented under themes derived from the data collected in accordance with the specific objectives and research questions as follows:

- women’s contribution to the home and community
- women and village leadership
- the obstacles to women’s participation in leadership
- other issues
- the effects/advantages/disadvantages of women’s involvement/non-involvement in leadership
- the desire for change

The textual description of the participants are itemized and verbatim quotations are included using the following codes:

- SI - semi-structured interviews,
- FGW - focus group women
- FGM - focus group males

The page number attached to each of the code is used to identify the reference page number of the transcribed noted.
Separate focus groups were conducted with seven women and nine males respectively. Three of the women who were interviewed individually as well as four other women were included in the focus group with the women.

The first objective of this research was to examine the contributions made by women in the home and the community of Votua.

The first component of the semi structured interviews sought to obtain bio-data on the 20 women who participated in the research to establish their status in the home. Figure 3 represents the bio-data of the participants.

**Table 2: Status of Women Participants**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Level of Ed</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Chiefly Rank</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>23</td>
<td>UNI</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
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<td>24</td>
<td>Form 3</td>
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<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>UNI</td>
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<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Form 6</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Father’s Lineage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Form 6</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Form 7</td>
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<td>Father’s Lineage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Form 3</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Form 6</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>UNI</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Mother’s Lineage</td>
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<td>39</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>45</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Father’s Lineage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Mother’s Lineage</td>
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<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Mother’s Lineage</td>
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<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Mother’s Lineage/Marriage</td>
</tr>
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Table 2 represents the educational level and marital status as well as the chiefly rank of the women interviewed. The ages of these participants ranged from 23 to 61 years. Most of the women were within the reproductive age as defined by the 2007 census. The figures also revealed that only eleven of the women in the sample completed secondary level educational attainment. A slight majority of them had been educated above class five. This pattern was more evident for the younger women. Three of the women interviewed had attained post-secondary or university level education at the diploma and degree levels. Similar patterns were discovered from the focus groups.

The data shows that of the twenty women interviewed, eight were of chiefly status, either through their mother or father’s lineage or by marriage. More than two thirds of the women interviewed were married. Only a small number of them were single. Most of these women also indicated that they had a child/children. Some indicated that they took care of their care of grandchildren solely or provided assistance to their children. The overall average number of people living in the household interviewed was 6.4

**Women’s Contribution to the Home and Community**

**Domestic and Family Care**

The interviews revealed that the women held responsibility for productive work as well socially reproductive work and child care on a daily basis. The latter included washing,
cooking, cleaning the house, fetching firewood, taking care of their spouses, children and the elderly.

The women aptly drew attention to the fact that they solely are responsible for managing these tasks, as one woman puts it “yes, I always see everything is in order, how the food is cooked, what to cook, that the house is clean, children go to school...” In very few cases did their husbands or males in the home assist with these chores. These are considered a normal part of their duties as wives and women in the home. One woman explains:

“what a normal housewife would do like cooking, washing, cleaning and looking the children..., domestic...we don’t work [formal work], and I stay at home but we farm..., we eat what we plant” (SI, p. 15)

Many of these women begin their course of work from four o clock in the morning and spend all day doing these chores until late at night. For example, the women were observed preparing children for school in the morning, washing what appeared to be two to three days clothes for the family, cleaning, and cooking on an open fire during the day. They were also seen retiring to bed at ten and eleven at night. Women’s voices were heard early in the morning calling out to their children to prepare for school. The average number of hours per day that women were observed working was fourteen hours.

Sometimes if their time allowed it, some of the women stated they were involved in making craft items for example, making purses from recycled plastic wrappers. The wrappers are taken from household materials such as soap powder, bongo, biscuits to mention a few. These were sold in the local market for a ‘small price’. In other instances and from observation, the women also sold groceries, or grog and cigarettes from their houses to supplement their income.

A few of the women indicated that in addition to household and care duties, they also worked part-time outside of the village, either at the local bakery, restaurant or with
short term government projects. These jobs were done three to four times weekly or as the need arose. One woman related that she had a full time job.

**Fishing**

In addition to the normal roles the women undertake at home, a majority of them also reported that they go out to the sea and the reef to catch fish, sea mussels, prawns, shells, kai and other sea products. The women’s small scale subsistence fishing is specifically for consumption in the home as part of their meal as well as for small scale commercial sale as observed, where the catch is sold in the local Ba market. Some women related that the sea was their main source of income as one woman puts it “women fish their income”.

> “in this village eh, most of us go to the sea, some go to town, us aw, by doing men’s work, what the men should do, us women are doing it, ... going early morning to catch the mussels from the sea, catch crabs” (SI, p. 27)

**Figure 4: Women Selling Kai and Crab at the local market Ba**

Source: Interviewer Ba, Market 2015
Figure 4 shows women marketing their ‘catch’ of kai and crab at the local market in Ba, Fiji. As explained by the women, they sometimes have to dive to the bottom of the sea to catch crabs and other underwater products which they take to the market to sell.

“...fishing like that eh, mussels, kai, crab sometimes I go shelling, go diving. We have to look for it in the sand and we collect in our bags and then we go to the market to sell it...” (SI, p.4)

These sentiments were similar to what the women in the focus group recounted. According to them catching crab is not an easy task since they often have to dive deep in the sea and they sometimes put themselves in dangerous positions to get them.

“...we (the women) were catching crab, dive for fresh water mussels, we dive with the sulu... catching crab is very hard work. We have to climb in the mangrove... we go and dive, most of the village people rely on the sea... that is what we sell...”(FG, p. 51)

In many cases women were the only ones working while some men just stayed at home, as pointed out by one:

“... everyday they (women) suffer for any money eh. Plenty in this koro, men, just stay at home, only ladies have to struggle everyday... in this village only the mothers struggle, the men, no, the fathers, no...”(SI, p.35)

The fishing activities the women engage in in the sea is dependent on the weather and the tide as “if it is low tide or high tide, or hot or cold”, they are not able to go to the sea as explained by the women.
Figure 5: A Woman in Votua Fishing by the Nakoka\textsuperscript{14}

Source: Interviewer Votua Village 2015

Figure 5 show a woman in Votua village fishing with local household materials at the nakoka. Fishing for prawns is also done at the nearby nakoka. As was observed, the women leave at sundown with their baiting materials which include fishing net, flour, coconut husk and matches, and journey through the bushes to the culvert to fish. There

\textsuperscript{14} Nakoka is the Fijian name for Koker or flood gates
they set their nets, light a fire using the sticks, coconut husk and matches and wait three to four hours to catch prawns. When the water was not disturbed by other fishermen or women, and on a good day, as was related by one woman, they collect a ‘good catch’, however on other days they only catch small amounts. When the catch is good they can make up to $20 per parcel. One woman speaking on behalf of the women in the focus group said: “it’s hard sister its hard eh, this work that we women do, it’s hard”.

Some of the women mentioned that they fished during the week and stored whatever they catch in ice until Saturday when it is taken to the market for sale. At other times and as observed these are sold live.

**Financial Contribution**

The money earned by the women from fishing or part-time work is used in the home. In most cases this is the only income and the woman is the sole bread winner and in other instances women’s fisheries earnings supplement whatever is earned by their spouses or males in the home. The women explained that apart from purchasing food items for the family, much of what they earn goes towards the education of their children. It was related by the women

“...in this village it is very hard my sister, it is very hard, even if the fathers and mothers are working... because plenty people in the village, they live by the sea...from there we sell it, then we keep some of the money to send our children to school. Sometimes we have a small business, like selling grog, if we don’t catch [fish], we can’t live on that...” (SI, p. 33)

Taking care of and sending their children to school was paramount to the work the women did as indicated in the above illustration. One woman mentioned “when you have children, everything goes to the children”.
The women admitted that although they do most of the domestic work, it is often their husbands, fathers or grandfathers who made the decisions about the home, especially when it came to the use of funds, “*sometimes I make decisions, sometimes no, sometimes my husband makes most of the decisions, he has the final say...*”.

**Community Work**

For the purpose of village management the community is divided into four zones. The women in each zone are responsible for cleaning of their respective areas. From time to time, the women in the village are summoned by the village headman to conduct “*clean up campaigns*” or other tasks related to the upkeep of the village and their customary activities. In such times as those women are required to clean up the environment, clean drains, plant flowers, and decorate the village. When there are ceremonial functions the women are also required to prepare the meals, such as the ‘*lovo*’ and the like.

“...the men in the village, they have to let us come and do cleaning, digging around the koro, but they (the men) just stay looking at us and they share some joking like that, ... they should have to come and we help each other, we (the women) have to set the village, clean and nice, headman is always telling us everything to do, but even the head of the family, they always just don’t bother about that... we ladies ... just have to do something together, but we people, we have to get knife and do cutting grass, everything in the koro, digging, clean the drains like that, we ladies, even the headman says they (the men) have to do but they never do what they should do” (SI, p.36)

The above illustrates that women conduct the community activities with little or no support from the men. As one woman noted, the men were sometimes watching on and even in some instances joking among themselves while the women undertook the ‘clean-up campaign’. Some women mentioned that even though women do most of the cleaning, in some cases some of the men also assist in the cleanup campaign. Mostly young and older women as well as children were observed raking, fetching stones,

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15 *Lovo* is an ‘underground oven’ or the system of cooking food in the earth using hot stones.
cleaning drains and painting stones in preparation of a function which was to be held in the village. From the appearance, the community was visibly clean and well kept.

**Figure 6: Picture Showing Votua Village**

Source: Interviewer

The women also pointed out that the older women assumed more responsibilities for the management of the household and the village and they ensured that the younger women follow without question, "*when they just say this is right, we say yea and just follow it, especially the old ladies*".

Some of the women recounted that when they were called to work in the community sometimes they leave their work at home to ensure they participated and then return to complete their household work. One woman recounts "*...for community functions like that, only then I can’t get to clean, I do some of the work ...when the headman call, I go, then come back and finish*". As observed for special functions the women gather together to prepare and cook the traditional dishes for the lovo. At this time all the activities revolve around the preparation for the function. Huge pots could be seen boiling atop open fires. While some women did the preparation others were observed
doing the cooking. The children were also observed helping with little tasks such as fetching firewood.

Fundraising, which is done on occasion, is another task which the women are involved in solely. The proceeds from this activity go to the village, church or the school. Handicrafts and things they have sewn are among some of the items which the women produce for sale.

The women are actively involved in the work of the church. They play a number of key roles in the church such as giving Holy Eucharist, doing Novenas for Divine Mercy, and cleaning the church. Young girls were also observed reading from the Holy Scripture during mass. Women also lead in the congregational singing and other activities for the Sunday Mass.

The second research objective was to establish whether or not women were represented in leadership and decision making in Votua Village.

**Women and Village Leadership**

The women were asked whether they were represented in leadership and decision making roles in the village. The women stated that there was a female leader who was the head of one of the clans (*mataqali*). She is responsible for the decision making in her clan. In addition, there was also a women who was heading what they referred to as the ‘women’s group’ in the village. The women noted:

“women are represented, one is the leader of the clan, the matagali, the head of the unit is a lady, she is the one who is in charge of the unit, she has to endorse things for village for her clan, …wife of the head of the clan on the other side is the leader of the women’s group, she is in charge of all the women…” (FGW, p.49)
However when asked if there had ever been a women in the position of the ‘headman’ in the village, the women all responded in the negative. They pointed out that while there was a female leader in one of the clans, she has never been nominated as the leader of the village. The following recounts what one woman pointed out

“In the women’s group, yes, but in the village like leading, no, unless he or she is of chiefly rank, then she can be respected, if she is the daughter of a chief... but not in this village, only the men are heard ...” (SI, p. 40)

Other women also echoed similar sentiments that the men are dominant in assuming leadership and decision making roles. They related that the men always voiced that they are first in everything and therefore they should be the first in the ‘headman’ position in the village. According to the women if a woman were to be chosen to be a leader the men would openly voice their disapproval “men they never give chances to the women to be leader...they’ll say no, no she can’t be leader...”

Several women who were interviewed individually echoed the sentiment that they are not treated equally in the village “men they always push us down”. Even if they want to lead the women claimed, they are not allowed to do so since there is “inequality in this village, men are looked up to and women are looked down upon, women want to speak but they are not heard, they want to lead but they are not given the opportunity to”. One woman expressed the view that “for us women we have the right to stand up, especially in this village, we are hard-working. Women have the right to stand up”. These views were also corroborated by most of the women in the focus group.

Women’s Group: The Gusunituba Women’s Club
The women noted that they only have the opportunity to speak out their issues in their own group. The women identified the women’s group, the “Gusunituba Women’s Club” as a body which normally meets on a monthly basis. They indicated that the group is headed by a committee and has a leader.
The women stated that at this forum and as a group they sit, discuss ideas, problems and the needs and interests of women in the village. The leader of the group makes representation on their behalf and takes the issues and problems to the male leaders. They explained that “only in the women’s group we gather and put some decisions there and the leader takes it up to the headman eh”. One woman stated:

“like only when it’s time for group, madam, we are allowed to talk, but when the chief is talking we can’t talk there, we just talk in our groups, like we respect them eh” (SI, p.16)

For many of the women, their input into how the village is managed was made indirectly through this forum. However their decisions are limited to those issues that directly relate to women. Furthermore, it is only a few women as stated by some of the women, mostly older ones, who are members of this group.

The women reported that it is the males who have the authority and consequently lead the village meetings. They said even though women are present, they do not speak. Women are frowned upon or looked down on if they speak, especially if they attempt to speak without being given permission to do so. One women related that if a woman speaks she is looked at as being disrespectful. In some cases however, several of the women in the focus group admitted that some women are given the opportunity, but it was mostly older or chiefly women who are allowed to speak or make representation. The males who participated in the focus group all echoed similar sentiments. One man related “we have village meeting like that, one lady they come up, in this village there are some weak areas, they come and tell us”. The ultimate decision however is made by the men. The women explained “it’s the men’s word, whatever they say, it’s respected”.

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The Constraints on Women’s Participation: 
Patriarchy, Traditional and Cultural Practices

While the women admitted that a few women are more active in decision making at lower levels in the village, for example in school committees and youth groups or have served on the women’s group committee, tradition and culture was the main reason why women are not in leadership and decision positions, especially as the head of the village. This was the sentiment of most of the women interviewed.

“tradition yes, yes, definitely. Like the men always sit on top, men are respected, men sit at the top and ladies down below, its tradition eh, its always like that, and it’s the men’s word whatever they say, its respected. Men are leaders, as in the meeting in the house, women always sit down at the door, that’s how the tradition eh, that’s how we look, and that’s why they are regarded as you know. Whatever the saying [whatever we say], we are not heard, only the ones on top are to be heard and they are respected, that’s what I see, women are not included at the top unless they are chiefly” (SI, p.41)

As indicated in the illustration above, the men and the women have different sitting positions away from each other and the twain do not meet, unless the status of the woman is chiefly. Additionally, the women explained that they could not walk or crawl in front of the men as one woman pointed out we cannot “cross the males when they are sitting on top”16.

These entrenched customs were also observed during the fieldwork whenever a group assembled for family meals, recreation or when the women and men were consuming grog. In many instances the men sat away from the women. The leaders and older men sat mostly at the head, in the upper corner while younger men sat behind. Women,

16 Crossing the males means that the women cannot walk or cross in front of the men while they are sitting on top.
whenever they were seen sat in a corner at the far end of the mat. In other instances it was only men who were seen sitting together. The women congregated in another house, sat around and drank kava and smoked cigarettes.

The women all agreed that these traditions are passed down from one generation to the next as echoed “...the leaders are just following from their fathers, grandfathers and forefathers”. The males interviewed also concurred with this view as they stated too that “from our forefathers of 20 years, we don’t put women in leadership in the village so women respect that eh as part of leadership in the village”. The point was made by a woman:

“yes it is a custom, but from our village like it always comes through elders, like if the elder has been chosen and he passed away it will be given to the second eldest, or if it’s a women, it may be given to the woman, but if he is still alive, he will always be the leader, that’s the way of being chosen” (SI, p. 29)

The women noted that for a woman to be considered to be a leader or make decisions for her clan she has to be of chiefly rank, for example, the female leader of the mataqali, otherwise it is not likely that any woman will be chosen for leadership or decision making roles.

Furthermore, they noted that a female leader had never been chosen as the leader of the village because it was “not traditional for a woman to lead the village”. Some of the women, especially older women, felt that the position of ‘headman’ of the village should be held by men and not women. The women explained that they were taught that men should lead and make decisions so from early childhood they have just known men to be leaders. Leadership roles were considered very important roles for men.

The women in the focus group said that they were taught that women’s role is in the kitchen. Most women voiced that they are taught to support the men. The women said that they were afraid to challenge the status quo. The women frankly reported:
“Just in the family, in the village, we are frighten, it is taught to be the men, has to be the norm, like before the men has to be in the leading role and the women have to do the work in the kitchen…” (FGW, p. 50)

Some women related that some men instill fear which deters them from even thinking about leadership. They stated that the men use their voices to dispel any preconceived ideas women may have regarding leadership. One woman claimed “men will threaten something or raise their voices to pull women down…”

One woman opined while the males are leading and making decisions in the village, it is the women are the ones doing everything.

“…most of the work and most of the things done in the village is mostly women. Most of the houses here, women is the breadwinner for the family. Women can provide things for the family, build a house like that, it’s the women, women are doing everything, but if it comes to the decision making like that, it’s the men, but if we look at it properly, it’s the women who are doing everything” (SI, p. 41)

Some of them also made the point that women are leading from behind

“we have good leaders (women) who are there but behind others eh. But what is mostly done is that they (the villagers) see the ones who are there...there are very good ones behind eh...good women leaders who we don’t open our eyes to...”

In addition, some of the women from both the individual interviews and the focus group voiced that the decision for a woman to be head of the village or “headman” rested with the men. They noted that even if the villagers as a whole were to choose a woman, the final decision would be left to the men to decide. One woman stated

“firstly for these community, if a woman to stand up to be a leadership, don’t know about the men eh, to support her to make a decision eh. For
woman to make a decision, it is up to the men to support that decision or no… women can be (leaders) but for men, I don’t know about men, what will they say eh? Men may not support because usually in the villages only men is the headman but for women we make decisions in the home... Is up to the community for us women [if we] want to choose one of us women to be a leader of the community, it’s up to the men’s decision. When they say yes, it can make a better, (men have to agree for the women to lead), because for our village the men should support the woman because we are living in a community” (SI, p. 26-28)

From the focus group discussion with the male participants, there were missed views as to whether or not they would relent to female leadership and decision making. While some of them opined that they would, it had to be on the condition that the woman is well educated and competent. One man vehemently stated:

“it depends on some, some say yes some say no. If she stands up and give one good example like that, everybody in the village would support it” others felt that “it depends on her roles if she is doing the right thing, then everything should be, if she is like that we can organize another meeting and appoint her, if she stand up here we can support her” (FGM, p.53).

Several of the males felt that the women need to demonstrate motherly caring qualities. In the words of one male participant:

“really caring woman like that, she cares about the person in the village, their problems, their difficulty, she has do go down in the village, house to house, ... we can see her, we can respect her, the main thing she must have a heart” (FGM, p. 54).
One male participant vehemently asked “what kind of leadership do you want women to take in the village” requiring the researcher to explain again the purpose of the research.

**Relationship Taboos**

From observation it can also be stated that to a large extent the relation between families members, male and women, restricted close contact or communication between some person. For example, it is not permissible for some men to have any close relationship, or to communicate, with women. As was observed some men kept a distance from some women. It was further explained that some women cannot go into the same house or building when some of their male relatives are present as this was against their customs and was considered a taboo. One woman expressed “you know I can’t be in the same place with him [referring to the leader], before I got married I spoke to him but now, no, I can’t be in the same place, we don’t speak to each other”

**Family Responsibilities**

Family responsibilities were blamed for women not being able to lead or make decisions for the village. All of the women agreed that the family and household duties were major factors which hindered them. They claimed that they had to work “from morning till night” unlike the men who do “two or three works like that”. The women mentioned that they always have to think of the things they do at home and as a consequence had little time to engage in additional roles. In the words of one woman:

“I think their [women] homes, the household, their cause [work] at home because if I put myself to [using herself as an example] it that’s one thing that will tie me down, so I think it’s the same with other women, because the place we are supposed to be, women gathering [at meetings], and there I am at home, or doing something else, going to town or something” (SI, p. 17).
One woman explained the difficulty of trying to get women to participate

“I want to call them for a meeting, one meeting ten o’clock... but they were out, early morning they went out at sea, went out to the river, then I say change it for next week, we have to do a meeting, because that [the women’s work at sea] is for their family too...” (SI, p. 35)

The women admitted that they are often caught up doing work at home or fishing which leaves them limited time for anything else. Further, the women recall that at times they are not able to attend village meetings because of the commitments they have at home. For some of them while their children assist with household chores many of them admitted that they have children who are still at a very young age and therefore require their time and attention. Many very young children were observed running around the village.

Besides, for those women who had the sole responsibility of running their home, as was related it was often challenging for them to assume more responsibilities. The women mentioned that they are also required to attend school meetings and engage in school activities for their children’s.

At times the women explained they are discouraged by their spouses or other family members who insist that they have other responsibilities in the home which they should be looking at. One woman stated:

“their [the women] husbands would tell them you got responsibilities at home, you are not supposed to go and take up that position, because most of the times they would be involved in going and lots and lots of commitments, they themselves don’t want to go because of the responsibilities” (SI, p.38)

The women opined that unless they are assisted by their husbands with some of their work it is extremely difficult for them to take on more responsibilities such as those
required in leading the village. One women stated “unless they have understanding from their male partner and they both take chances looking after the children and the household chores” them that would free up some of their time.

Other women who claimed that their husbands or spouses encourage them to participate, in some cases also decline to be involved for reasons that they are otherwise engaged in the duties of taking care of the family.

**Low Self Confidence and Fear**

Some of the women shyly expressed their personal preference not to be leader or contribute to decision making. They voiced that they do not have the confidence to lead anybody but themselves. “I can’t talk, I am ashamed, I am afraid” one woman said. Another explained:

“they (women) are shy to show up their capabilities, they think they are not fit to, like their attitudes, they think they are not fit to lead the village or take part in any groups or make decisions” (SI, p.38)

Another woman explains:

“...they don’t want to [lead], they are giving excuses, I don’t know, like they frighten, or they just can’t talk like that eh, maybe they can’t go and have the meeting like that eh, just want to stay at home, stay in their village, they can’t leave their village and go somewhere else, because if we have to do that thing [lead] we have to go, we have to leave our family, meeting here, meeting there...like they are frighten, what’s wrong with them...” (SI, p.33)

Some women stated that they preferred to just sit and listen to what the other leaders have to say. Even those who expressed interest in leadership and decision making declined to seek leadership in the village. Some women who participated in the semi-structured interviews even suggested that they would be leaders if there were no men in
the village. One women stated “I want to be leader yes, but not in this village, plenty gorillas, plenty big men here with their two heads, talk like this, with their chest out”.

The women noted that the view that men hold that they are weak has been so often etched in their minds that some women have come to believe that leadership and decision making roles is not suited for them.

“it’s the saying that women are weak, you know, like men always look at women ... only in regards to doing domestic duties, all they know is to make babies you know, they are week, mostly women are weak, they (men) think that [from when] they are born they are told that you are the head of the family, they are strong eh like that’s from their bringing up, so that is kept in their minds, that’s what I see, women only do household things...” (SI, p. 41)

Nonetheless, some women felt that while men don’t think they have the “guts” to lead and make decision, they can do just about anything the males are doing. The women also mentioned that “some [women] talk behind our backs, like gossip” and say to them “don’t go you are not supposed to” which discourages them. They stated:

“if you have a female leader, if they talk like that in the community, plenty people will talk after them eh [gossip], that’s why we like the males to be leader. If one female, plenty people will not support female leaders ...many times when we have a meeting in the community we can have a fight eh, we can talk with them, talk after them...” (FG, p.39)

Conflicts
Other problems identified by the women had to do with internal conflicts and disunity among groups and clans. The women explained that since the village is a fairly large one, it is not devoid of conflicts when it comes to making decisions. From the male standpoint the women related that
“sometimes like when the men are involved in decision making, there is dispute in the village, between men themselves...it’s a collision between the two clans... like the men they are both strong on all sides, like for us women we normally cool the quarrelling... we do peacemaking, we cool them down...” (SI, p. 39)

Some of the women related that some women in the village sometimes fight verbally or physically among themselves regarding issues. As a consequence they do not always support each other.

**Village By-Laws**

Some of the women also made reference to the village by laws as a hindrance to women’s leadership. They claimed that once they are in the village they are required to abide by the laws which govern village life. One woman stated

“Yes, like if some of us stay in the village, we have to live like a village eh, what they say in the village we have to do, what the headman says, go and clean up the community hall, do, if the church say, we do” (SI,p.45)

Other women felt that the village laws are there for them to follow but not all women follow them all of the time. This they say sometimes leads to conflict in the village.

**Women’s Capabilities as Leaders**

The women were asked whether women in the village are qualified or capable of being leaders and decision makers in the village. The general consensus was that women are both qualified and capable of being leaders and decision makers in the village. The women in the focus group related that “they are experienced, because what the males do they [women] do, what they talk they can do, they walk the talk”.

Likewise the male participants in the focus group also believe that there are women capable of taking leadership roles for example one man admitted “we have seen some women who have the ability of leadership in the village...plenty of old women”. Several
others, when asked by the researcher whether women were capable of leading, echoed similar sentiments. They commented that women give some good ideas and suggestions.

Additionally, the women in the focus group claimed for example “if we [women] say something we do it right away but men, if they have to do it, they have to talk it…” One women noted:

“...sometimes when we want something we talk to ladies, it is better to speak woman to woman, the tone, men have a different tone, better to communicate with the woman, when woman talk they will do the work straight away but the men will be laid back, they will talk, they will sleep then do something else whereas the women will do it straight away” (FG, pp. 50-51)

From the illustration as the women see it, women are more reliable and timely in getting things done. The women strongly felt that generally when compared with men, women had very good and even better qualities to take up leadership roles. For example one of the women ardently believed:

“women are more energetic compared to men... the women are always there to look after children...lots of men always go, especially at night eh, like in our village, mostly for family and men they go around looking for grog, this can pull the family and the community” (SI, p.29)

The women spoke of inclusiveness in the leadership of females and felt that they would also see the same in women as the head of the village. For example the women in the focus group opined that when women make decisions, everybody benefits from the decisions. These views were similar to the ones echoed by the women in semi-structured interviews. On the other hand, the women in the study also pinpointed that men are independent and strong and their views and decisions are final and these are respected.
In addition, most of the women claimed that women communicate better than the males in the village. They felt more comfortable speaking with women as women were more receptive to their concerns and listened to what they had to say. As such most of them felt that their interests would be better served by women.

The idea that women looked after everyone in the community was expressed by all the women as well as by male participants. The women expressed the view that “women can talk to us, they would do the right things, look after everybody in the village”. They mentioned for example “if a woman is in the house and know the children are in the house she would consider all those who are missing especially at mealtime” and believed that in the same way women look after their homes, a female leader would look after the interest of all of the villagers.

Further the women emphasized that compared with the men who are socialized differently, “women would allow everybody to have a say or take part in decision making...” For these reasons some of the women in the focus group opined that “if the women are good leaders in the home, they should be good leaders in the village too”.

Another point made by most of the women was that women and men think differently. One woman stated that “what women think, some men don’t think, they think different things, women have different ideas” Furthermore, most of the women shared similar views that were a woman to lead the village she would look back at the weaknesses of the former leaders and learn to lead better. In the words of one woman:

“...she would look back and see the weaknesses that we had all these years and so I think she can better that, so that’s why I say a woman would make a good leader” (SI, p.18)

**Education**

All of the participants felt that education was a prerequisite for leadership and decision making roles. The women interviewed indicated that several of them had completed secondary and in a few cases post-secondary education. Only a small number of them
had attained university level qualifications. From observation however, the level of comprehension and discourse for most of the women, especially the younger women, was visibly high.

Both women and men expressed the view that women needed to be “very educated” before they are considered for leadership or decision making roles in the village. Education was also linked to problem solving skills.

“yes, if you are educated, then you will be in a position to solve any problem in the village, if not you will not be able to deal with the issues and problems in the village, education is a must, cant lead without it”

(FG, p. 51)

Other women felt that in addition to education the woman must be able to speak out and represent the interest, give advice and communicate smoothly with people of the village. When asked whether there are educated women in the village, most of the participants responded in the affirmative. One woman stated that “women are well educated and can make good decisions too, they also have the experience...”

Conversely, others said that notwithstanding the existence of education facilities, not all women in the village are educated and cited various reasons. For example as one woman stated “it’s up to each one in the family, but women are not given the opportunity, it’s up to you if you want to go for further studies...” In another example one woman said that “we have the guts to go to school but the finance, we are not able to proceed with our education”. The women further related that in some instances young girls are not allowed to do further studies at university level because of the distance and the fact that they may have to be away from home. One woman stated:

“...sometimes daughters, sometimes they don’t want them to go out for education far away. If she is the only daughter, then they would not send
her away, if your family is there in Suva, like that, but if no, can’t send her...” (SI, p. 16)

The Disadvantages

Many of the women felt that while some of their issues and concerns are addressed some of the time, their interests, problems and suggestions are not always addressed adequately “sometimes of our problems are addressed, sometimes they [the leaders] are not really concerned about that”. Other women also felt that women are not properly represented in the village. One woman stated:

“if [there is] something we need, we say to them [the leaders], they just go and talk talk talk like this and they never do it, cause some of the time we meet at the community hall, some of us got no water-sealed\(^{17}\) flush toilet, they need it for so many years, nowadays still asking for it in the koro” (SI, p.25)

“in this village, especially men, they are not concerned of our problems...they think we do not have the right, like we are left behind, they are just ruling the village by themselves, they think [of] men, only men, we have no place, women have no place in society, we don’t have equal rights...” (SI, p. 28)

One woman recalled for example one instance when their needs were not priority:

“the women’s organization in the village had wanted, usually they want like a boat or anything like that, for them but they had to strive for a long time, then they have it, because the money eh. It was funded by half the government and half the village, so they had to cry for it so a boat and an engine a few other things, sewing machine, to help them when they

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\(^{17}\) Water-sealed toilets are alternatives for those areas which are not sewered and where people are using pit toilet
In the focus group discussion, the women recalled that they wanted to have flush toilets outside but the males were against it even though the funds were available. This they said would have resulted in better health and sanitation for the village.

While a few women blamed the absence of women in key leadership roles as the cause of their interests not adequately being addressed, many of them felt that women will still have to deal with the men and as a consequence still felt that it would be a challenge to them.

**Health Issues**

Some women in the study mentioned that because the women work very hard they developed sicknesses. From observation many of the women appeared to be suffering from coughs. One woman mentioned:

“yeah they have to do work every day and the food they eat, every sickness cold, fever, chest, headache, because [every] day they struggle every day, pneumonia, because day they struggle and nighttime they can’t sleep. The daddy just come and wake them up like this, plenty grog [laughs] and come and wake up, if no, you can’t say... he have to give one slap on you [laughs], eh want to rest at nighttime but can’t...” (SI, p.35)

Some of the women mentioned that they suffered from some form of sickness such as diabetes, high blood pressure, but felt nonetheless that these had nothing to do with leadership or unmet needs. Instead some of them insisted that it was the women’s responsibility to take care of themselves. In the same vein, other women expressed that even when they wanted to look after their health the medications were not always
available in the village dispensary. This was even after they had raised the matter with the respective leaders. One woman stated:

“...yes especially lack of medication in our dispensary, we used to address men in meeting like when we have [a meeting] in the hall and we used to tell them [to] take it up but they don’t take it up” (SI, p.50)

Some women also recalled that in times past there was a major problem with teenage pregnancy in the village but that it is not as prevalent as before.

Safety and Security Issues
Most women felt that the village was generally safe, they were protected and that there were not many security concerns affecting them. One woman explained:

“Yes in this village we never heard about rape or abuse like that because mostly the headman always calls out for children, especially for children. Six o clock they have to be in their houses eh and us women we take care of ourselves, staying at home, especially for me eh, when I go to sleep, lock all the doors, cause you don’t know eh, maybe one day you fall asleep some people will go [into the house]...” (SI, p.27)

Although some women also mentioned that there are few cases of violence against women they indicated that when this occurs the leader usually directs the matter to the police station. For example one woman recalls:

“... women hiding from their husband and plenty of them they go to the hospital. The leader takes those cases to the police station. If they do it once, then the leader ask each [to] state the problem, if it’s the second time then the leader has to go straight to the police station” (SI, p.33)

Some women nonetheless insisted that there are strict village rules which are constantly explained to them. One woman noted:
“because the rules (village rules) strict now and we always explain to them eh, especially the mothers, headman always tell us everything like that eh, from the people in the police station they come, and from the violence against women, bring them in do some workshops so we can learn everything like that, especially to the community” (SI, p.36)

Most of the women also voiced that they are protected by social welfare, women’s rights, Women’s Crisis Center, own organization, NGOs, and other institutions which conduct awareness workshops for women in the village. They all echoed that the heads in the village encourages and supports these initiatives. The women claim that it is through these workshops that they are made aware of their rights, especially of equality, as women in the village.

Desire for Change

All of the women interviewed ardently expressed the desire for change in the village. One woman stressed:

“If I am chosen to lead the community, then yes, because I can lead a better community, can communicate, because I want to change, ... its very hard in Votua...”

The women felt that they could make a difference as “more can be done to assist women in the village”. More specifically, they expressed that if women are to get involved in leadership for the village, it would result in transformative changes. For example, many of the women mentioned the desire to undertake new projects in the village such as building bus sheds, installing flush toilets for homes and encouraging youth activities.

According to some of the women more people will be able to participate in decision making, especially women as they claimed there are unable to attend meetings due to the time of night these are usually held. One of the women said:
“If a woman runs the village there will be a change, like men once if they take over as a leader, like if they have a meeting, they always have it at night. Women can change the lifestyle, like the meetings should be held in the daytime rather than in the nighttime, when everyone is present, because sometimes in the nighttime it always runs like 11, 12 and it finishes when no one is there to participate, less people will be there to participate” (SI, pp.29-30).

According to two other women participants:

“… women here they are so, compared with the men, mostly men they are lazy doing work, even women they can do anything like especially even when something come up in the village, headman, women are there to participate but when it comes to choosing a leader, they prefer men, that’s what is wrong with us here especially in Votua. Like they can give chance eh to women, women participate but men are chosen to be [leader] “(SI, p. 28).

Another woman stated:

“yes, they should [give women a chance to lead] because women got big, many knowledge, how to do that, because women make the men move what takes the decisions eh” (SI, p. 32)

Overall the women felt that things would be done better, whatever the concerns of women, they would be taken seriously. They mentioned that when women’s issues come up, they are often not dealt with, or not adequately dealt with. The women believed that women would pay more attention: “more will be done when women [leaders] are leading, more ideas women will come up with, more promises will be fulfilled and the village will move forward”.

The women noted that they are aware that the time has changed and that they are in a new era of modernization and as such they are willing to accept the new changes that the
time has brought. One woman speaking on behalf of the women in the focus group stated “... now time is changing, before men used to tell us you are second class... [now] we want to be part of that on par with men; like before in a meeting when the women talk the men would say you close your mouth...”. Inspite of the changes taking place around them, the women in Votua still clamor for equality in the village. Some of the women acknowledged that they are just like men since they are doing all that the men are supposed to be doing and more. (FGW, p.50). As one of the women put it:

“Yes, I think so cause women we have equal rights, then why do we differ from men? If men can do the job that women do, why women can’t do men’s job? Women do the same work that men do and more, women are like men, sometimes the men assist, some men in our village some of them... but some of them, their friends, sitting around, drinking grog” (SI, p.47).

Another said:

“... in this time, women, we have the right to fight for our rights, so that we can solve the problems about the men doing harder things about us eh” (SI, p.35)

Others who did not hold the same view noted that the women would have to deal with the men and the people of the village. They stated that even if the woman takes the concerns to the meeting, there will be complaints, “where will we get the money from, the males will not support it”. One woman said “the woman would just give up”.

In order to help promote women to leadership and decision making roles the women provided several things which they felt needed to be done concurrently. These suggestions were clustered around the following two themes:
Education and Training

Most of the women felt that there was a need for education as there was no place for uneducated women in leadership. Both women and men echoed the view that education was very important for leadership and decision making and as such women needed to be educated. An emphasis was placed on opportunities for education for women in the form of scholarships. In addition to education, the women felt that there was also a need for training, more so specialized training aimed at building in women capacity to lead. A woman speaking on behalf of the women in the focus group a woman emphasized that “more training can help them [women] to develop themselves”.

As such they many of the women opined that there was a need for continuous training in leadership roles so that women could be comfortable when the need arose for them to take on leadership and decision making roles. One woman suggested:

“Set up workshops for leadership, workshop in the village and ask all women to attend, so that they can show themselves up, like how you can become a leader, you give in your thoughts, you bring in NGOs to come and talk about leadership, how you can become a leader, how you can rule, how you can take over a village, so that they are not left behind, so that women can know that we are something in the society, promote let them go out, not only in the village but out in town to see what is it like to be a leader, attend a lot of workshops, let them go out (SI, p.40).

In the voice of another woman:

“More of the programs to educate younger generation to become leaders women to leadership, those who are educated in the town or urban but those who are staying in the village are still in the mindset that the men are in leadership, but if more education is available for women to take up leadership role, we can ...” (SI, p. 36).
Some women admitted that even if there were to have workshops and training, if they do not have the support they are still not able to attend. One woman stated:

“...sometimes they use to come here, like one day they came here, training good leadership, and some of us went to the community hall, they give us booklet for things we have to learn to be a good leader. My husband went, I was willing to go but my baby still small eh, and my husband went and came home and said oh you missed a good thing we learn. What you learned? We learn about good leadership, to be a good leader you have to be a good man, you have to be first, if they call you have to go, but you have to be first not when the time comes you can’t go” (SI, p.49).

Further the women acknowledged the work of the Red Cross Society and the Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre and other NGOs in terms of advocating for women’s rights. Some of the participants opined that it was through these organizations that they are educated about their rights and therefore felt the need for them to be more consistent in these initiatives. Additionally, some of them pinpointed that the workshops should target both men and women as a means to addressing issues of leadership and equality.

**Support and Cooperation**

Most of the women felt that it was important for them to take example from other female leaders. They were of the view that the older women should be encouraging younger women, especially when it was time to speak.

The women also felt that there was a need for support and cooperation, especially from women. Many of them opined that support from their women folk was not always forthcoming. One woman noted: “I think women should cooperate in anything, like any organization that come in the community, they should participate in the community from that they can learn”.

The women emphasized the need for the males to support them. In the words of one woman:
“men can support the woman to be leader, sure they can support because plenty times when the men want to be leader, the women support [them], then if the women want to be leader then the men should support it too... but some of the men can but some no, some of the men would accept it and some wouldn’t accept it, ... goes like this some of the men can understand cause the women do everything, but this time it’s very hard, because the men are the leaders in everything, they don’t want the women to be leader” (SI, p. 44).

Some of the women mentioned that they needed support, especially married women. They noted that husband or spouses should assume some of their responsibilities such as doing household chores and looking after the children. They also needed support from the family and community as a whole.

**Conclusion**
This chapter presented the findings from the semi-structured interviews and the focus group discussions and participant observation conducted in Votua Village. It highlighted the contributions made by the women participants to the home and community. It also examined several issues related to women and leadership in the village and the constraints which prohibited them from leadership at the higher echelon in the village. These included patriarchal, traditional and cultural practices, domestic and family care responsibilities, relationship taboos, low self-esteem and fear, conflicts and village laws. Among the other issues examined were the disadvantages of not having a woman as a leader of the village and areas the women felt could help to improve their status in Votua Village. The next chapter will present an analysis of the findings.
CHAPTER 6
ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on women’s participation in leadership roles at the grassroots in rural Fiji. The main purpose is to examine women’s contribution, to find out whether or not rural women are represented in leadership and decision making, and to explore whether their exclusion affects development in Votua village.

This analysis presented in this Chapter is informed by the data collected from semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and observation and is presented in accordance with the themes which emerged. These are discussed within the broad range of academic theories and research.

The women in the study comprised both young and older women between the ages of 23 to 61. Most of them were within the productive age of category (15 and older) as defined by the 2007 Census (Bureau of Statistics, 2007). In terms of education, many of the women had attained primary, and a few of them secondary, levels education. Four of the women had completed post-secondary and university education. Nonetheless, there were more educated younger women than there were older ones. This suggests that the young women are better educated than the previous generation and this is perhaps because more educational opportunities were available to young women today.

It is surprising that some of the women interviewed were also of chiefly status either through their mother or father’s lineage. As expected, there were more married than single women in the sample, almost all of them had at least one child if not more children. The number of persons living in these homes was also within the normal household range of 6.4, particularly of the iTaukei Fijian, as recorded by Narsey (2007).
Women’s Contribution to Home and Community

The first research question sought to find out about the contributions to the home and community made by the women in Votua Village.

Domestic and Family Care

It is apparent from the evidence of the interviews and observation that the women in this study play a multiplicity of roles. Overall, these ranged from domestic and family care such as washing, cooking, cleaning the house, fetching firewood, taking care of their spouses, children, in-laws and the elderly. Women also engage in fishing and farming as well as voluntary community work. These roles represent the most significant and extensive contribution which the women make in the village. A small number of the women have part-time jobs for which they receive payment, in addition to their household duties.

The work which the women engage in within the home is what Narsey (2007, p.49) describes as ‘unpaid household work’. These jobs are however generally considered low status, identified mostly with women (Chandra and Lewai, 2005), yet they are essential to both the home and community. What is of interest in this study is that this category of work is also closely associated with gender roles and therefore forms the basis for an understanding of women’s patriarchally-assigned roles.

The roles which the women identified comprise a normal part of their day. Most of the women in the study are required to work long hours because of their economic circumstances, to ensure that they provide for the needs of their family. On average, the evidence reveals these women spend 14 hours doing five to nine different tasks daily. The women generally do more of one task and less of the others on a given day. When the women were not fishing they were engaged in domestic and child family care roles or vice versa. Extensive documentation of similar findings is recorded in a previous research report (Narsey, 2007). Other findings suggest that the drudgery of the many types of work in which women engage on a daily basis is typical of rural women (Srivastava & Srivastava, 2009).
**Fishing**

What also emerged from the findings is that small scale fishing whether for subsistence or commercial use, comprises a significant portion of the responsibility the women have in the village. Subsistence fishing, involving mostly women, of all ages, undertaken individually, was recorded in the early 1980s as being very common in this rural area (Lal and Slatter, 1982). In other words, subsistence fishing is largely women’s work. For many of the women it is their key source of income and livelihood. Other earlier research has confirmed that it is predominantly the women, especially in the rural areas, who are engaged in regular subsistence fishing activities in Fiji (Vunisea, 1997; Novaczek et al, 2005).

As evidence in previous research findings, the women’s involvement in commercial activities related to fishing is consistent and weekly (Vunisea, 1997), and requires even longer hours of selling than fishing. Even if it entails putting their lives at risk by diving to the bottom of the sea, or sacrificing their own needs, the women are diligent in their fisheries activities to meet the needs of their families. These women no doubt have a crucial economic role which according to them provides the substance of their survival and that of their families. This was demonstrated in the statement made by one woman: “when you have children everything goes to them eh”.

The earnings made from fishing are also spent in the home on family expenses. Quite apart from securing income, fisheries products provide a main part their daily meals. Additionally, income received from fishing activities is used to purchase food to supplement their produce (Mc Kinnon, 2014; Kongola et al, 2001; Carbo et al, 2013) or to send their children to school. The World Bank (2012) reports that women determine the nutritional intake and health of their offspring. Women decide on a daily basis what will be cooked and consumed. The statements made by many of the women such as “some we eat, some we sell”, “I decide what to cook” also confirms this. This therefore attests to the importance of the women’s role.
Typically, as indicated by the women, they perform a wider variety of task than men. This poses serious consequences for them. Firstly because these segmented pieces of work (since they occur in and outside of the home) are perceived to be minimal and less important than the roles which males perform in the village. It therefore becomes easy to continue to relegate women to these seemingly inferior, unrecognized and unimportant roles and to place less emphasis on improving the conditions under which these roles are performed.

Overall the roles of the women in this study revolve around the home, the family and the sea. They are expected to fill these traditional roles as women (whether wives, mothers, daughters). The evidence also confirms that like other rural women, the greatest contribution of women in this study is made in the domestic and subsistence spheres. They provide the basic household services and meet family needs. The findings thus support conventional thinking that it is still the women who bear the brunt of the household burden.

Women’s household responsibilities are ultimately accepted and justified as “women’s work”. In fact the findings of Chattier (2011, 2014) suggests that women’s larger share of the domestic and child care responsibilities reinforces women’s marginalization and contributes further to the gendered dimension of poverty. Furthermore the literature suggests that women, more than men, are likely to be exposed to poverty and hardship since the social and economic structure dictate that they provide for themselves and family (Chattier, 2014). For example, the use of open fires by the women in the study for cooking is, according to Narsey (2007), one of the indicators of poverty in Fiji (p.93).

Clearly, there seems to be a distinction between who does what in favour of males since they were neither identified, in this case and as the literature suggests, with domestic and care roles, nor with subsistence roles. In this regard, men have an unfair advantage over women. The household seemingly is the hub of this exploitation of women by men (Narsey, 2007; Reeves & Baden, 2000).
The evidence presented thus confirms the findings of a much earlier study which also found that women’s productive role in the rural Fijian communities is extensive and their domestic role is an additional and usually unassisted workload (Lal and Slatter, 1982). Slatter (1985) pointed out that domesticity places heavy burdens on women, and leaves them with meager resources and little assistance from males. This study finds, as suggested by Slatter (1985), that domesticity while critical to the sustenance of families, weakens women’s position in the household and reinforces their subordination.

**Community work**

Women’s work is also extended to work in and around the village. Though the findings indicate that some males participate for instance in the upkeep and cleanliness of their physical surroundings, notably, the women are the ones who are at the forefront of community activities from ‘clean-up-campaigns, to fundraising and church functions. It was evident that the village is dominated by the activities undertaken by the women as part of social expectations. Women also dominate in church activities, as shown in the findings. The women also dominate in these activities also. Of great importance to this study is the fact that the women show tremendous capacity to work together, share tasks, and fulfill their expected roles.

Moreover, from the evidence presented it could be argued that it is the contributions of the women which sustain their families and the community as a whole in the Votua village. The work that sustains both family and the community resolves around women. Expectedly, it’s the collective hands of the women that keep the community going. Given the enormity of the burden these women bear, and the magnitude of their contribution on a daily basis, it is reasonable to assume that if the women should forgo these roles, the livelihoods of homes and the community would be severely crippled.

Overall, the evidence points to the fact that the women carry with them heavy economic and social burdens. This simply means that these women’s lives are shaped for them by economic and social demands that fit the aforementioned gender roles. Lowe et al (1998) note that this form of inclusion can be oppressive for reasons that voluntary and
unpaid work can reinforce existing rural gender relations which endorse patriarchy. Further citing the work of Hughes (1997), Lowe et al assert that participation in community and social life for women is mostly done as a duty rather than a joy and those who are reluctant to participate suffer social isolation. Implicit in this analogy is that the women in these cases diligently work because it is expected of them and because they fear being isolated.

The women in this study are overburdened due to the heavy workload they carry. However, while some women seem empowered by the dependence of their family on them, other women are unhappy, resentful and covertly resist the roles that are thrust on them. What can be inferred by this finding is that on the one hand, the feeling of dependence (family dependence on the women) makes it more difficult for the women to break the cycle and strive for different roles. On the other hand, in the absence of other choices, the women are resigned to accept these roles since any change in women’s role can be perceived a serious threat to the established gender norms. Unsurprisingly, the evidence points to the relative smallness of women’s voice in making decisions in the home. This is noted when the women were asked who made the decisions in the home regarding management of the home and spending income. Whereas some of them indicated that they made some decisions, most of them reported that it was their husbands or spouses who made most of the decisions. The following statement attests to this “sometimes I make decisions, sometimes no, sometimes my husband makes most of the decisions”. Thus the evidence implies, as suggested by previous findings, that the women may sometimes have control over basic household decisions but not over large decisions or all decisions in the home (Domingo et al, 2015).

At the community level decision making is solely in the hands of males. While the women energetically engage in all the activities and have an even greater share of the roles, it is the men who make decisions regarding those activities in the community. The older women, it appears, are the driving force of community activities. The younger women fulfill whatever demands are made on them. It was not surprising to find that
men were identified at the forefront of the development projects undertaken in the village.

The second research question sought to examine whether or not women are represented in local level leadership and decision making and if they are not represented, it sought to explore the reason(s) for their non-representation. The next section thus will examine women and village leadership in Votua.

**Women and Village Leadership**

The women held different views with regards to leadership in the village. However the common core finding which emerged from the data collected was that women are underrepresented. The findings revealed that women were leaders at the lower echelons of decision making in the village. For instance, women were leaders in the women’s group and one of the *mataqali* in the village was headed by a female.\(^\text{18}\) However, the research found no real evidence that the women take part in leadership and decision making at the apex of the decision making structure in the village.

The female leader of the *mataqali’s* attained the position as leader directly as a result of her chiefly status. This finding is corroborated by the literature which suggests that indigenous Fijian women’s role and status is determined by the social rank into which they are born (Bolabola, 1986). Quite interesting, however, even though the village has a strong rotating policy of leadership, the female *mataqali* head has never been chosen as the leader of the village. This prejudicial and unjustifiable rotation of the *headman* position to only male leaders of the clans has blocked the chance for women to assume leadership in the village.

This evidence thus indicates that leadership, as the literature rightly points out, is still very much a male domain in Votua village, as it is elsewhere (Rhodes & Kellerman, 2013; Reddy, 2012). Women have never been represented at the most influential level of the leadership hierarchy. Simply, the female *mataqali* head was not a man therefore she

\(^{18}\) Subsequent to the fieldwork, the female leader of the *mataqali* died.
did not qualify to lead the village. The evidence is clear since all of the women in the study corroborated the view that women are not known to be leaders in the village. As some of them fervidly reported, it is not a village custom to have a female leader in Votua village. For this reason, choosing a woman as the leader of the village would require the villagers to go against the established social norms.

According to the literature, males are dominant and aggressive in asserting leadership roles (Chafetz, 2006; Corner, 1997), while the women live in conformity to these expected norms, the very ones which uphold male authority and leadership (Jakobsh, 2012). Male dominance has evidently been part of the village for more than five decades as reported by the women. Persistent gender inequality continues to disenfranchise women from leadership, especially at the head of the village. This is in part due to the prevailing cultural belief about women’s and men’s roles. As such these have become institutionalized and woven into the very fabric of the village.

The older women, especially those who are a part of the women’s group, appear to be the voice of the women in the village. From all indications, they continue to transmit the values and belief that the males are the ones to be in charge. This was evident as youngest members of the village knew well with whom the position of leadership rest. From as early as childhood, as the literature suggests, women are taught that the males are to be the ones in authority (Jakobsh, 2012). Indeed the women are trained to show respect towards men and to adopt a subordinate position in their presence. From the evidence presented, this form of socialization and internalization continues well into marriage. Thus, the cycle is overtly perpetuated, transmitted from mother to child and is lived without question (Anderson et al, 2015; Chafetz, 2006; Corner, 1997). In other words, it seems that women are the primary agent of socialization of the young into gender roles.

In terms of decision making in Votua, limited input is made by the women. The functions of the women’s group and the subsequent representation by the leader are limited only to women’s issues. While the evidence suggests that women are allowed to
speak and have their concerns addressed among themselves, their voices and their participation in decision making regarding village affairs are restricted to the boundaries of their group. While women’s collective actions in their group around their issues can influence women’s participation and minimal change, collective action can only go so far where deep rooted traditional and cultural practices exist. In fact, women run the danger of men seeing them in the light of being rebellious and disrespectful and, as the literature suggest trouble makers (Reddy, 2012; FAWG, 2006) in the village if they step out of line and voice their opinions without being given due authority to do so.

It would appear then, as Slatter (1985) suggested, that the women’s group serve only to reinforce women’s submissive roles. Evidently, the activities with which they engage are reflective of such. Only in those instances when women’s input is required, is the leader of the group called upon to make representation on behalf of the women. Other women, especially younger ones, remain silent as several of the women confirmed that it is only the male’s voices that are to be heard. Women are not permitted to speak but are expected to remain quiet.

In the context of Fijian culture, as the women indicated, silence is a form of respect. Women are socialized to show humility, not to have a voice and not to question or challenge male authority. If a woman speaks, she is disrespectful. In rare cases, as the participants in the focus group suggest, do women flout this aspect of their culture. When they do, they are reprimanded by relatives or older women.

At the same time, as confirmed by previous research findings (Hussain, 2012), women’s silence gives the impression that they are less valuable, incompetent, lacking in knowledge and stupid and have consented to their relatively lower status. Because of the subtle nature of the culture of respect of women in this study, the women are also less likely to recognize when they are being exploited or discriminated against. In fact, what can be inferred from the evidence is that women (mostly older women) are used to keep women in place: subjugated to male authority which is in turn justified by culture.
An imminent danger lies in the aforesaid finding mainly because silence and the perceived respectability of women for men make women particularly vulnerable to persistent lower status as well as other forms of discrimination and violence. Male power is manifested in their voice or their authority to speak, their power to take control and to lead. Thus this could be interpreted to mean that even in situations which necessitates that women speak up for themselves, they are constrained by the ‘culture of respect’.

The idea that women’s place is in the kitchen also appears to be deeply rooted and to resonate with the women. As some of the women indicated, it is or has simply become, over time, a norm in Votua. The types of task with which the women engage on a daily basis as well as their activities in the community are testament to this. It is further reinforced by male supremacy and ferocity in asserting positions considered distinctively theirs.

Whether or not there is room for women to lead in the village is an issue, as far as the evidence suggests, that is dependent on the extent to which males in the village are willing to relent to women as leaders, especially as leaders of the village. From the evidence, while being of chiefly rank could enable women the possibility to lead the clan, nonetheless it does not guarantee women the position of ‘headman’.

There seems however to be room for leverage as some of the men noted in the focus group discussion that they would permit a woman to lead the village. This however is conditional. As one man, speaking on behalf of the group, put it: the women have to be older and respected and have to demonstrate qualities synonymous with her motherly caring roles. Two key points are noted by that male’s position. On the one hand, only older women are perceived to be worthy of leading the village. Implicit in this notion is that younger women are immediately barred from leadership simply because they are young. On the other hand, the women have to demonstrate nurturing characteristics if they are to be chosen.
Nonetheless the reaction of some males to the idea of women’s leadership in the village as demonstrated by the question posed to the researcher (see page 119), is worth noting. The male’s reaction no doubt reinforces the culture of male supremacy and suggests, as some of the women rightly pointed out, that it is up to the men to decide whether or not women will, in the present or in the future, lead the village.

Whatever else can be inferred from this finding, it is clear that the exclusion of women in leadership and decision making at the highest level of the community signifies not only their lesser status but also their inferiority and persistent subordination. Overall it can be noted that women’s active and valuable contribution in the home did not translate into meaningful leadership roles in the community.

The next section will discuss the constraints to women’s participation.

**Constraints to Women’s Participation**

**Patriarchy, Traditional and Cultural Practices**

It can be submitted that patriarchy, tradition and culture played a key role in determining who are the leaders and decision makers in the village. Similar studies correlate these findings (Corbett & Liki, 2015; Domingo et al; 2015; Hickman, 2014; Patel, 2013; Reddy, 2012; Jakobsh, 2012; Reeves & Baden, 2000). This view was shared directly and indirectly by many of the participants, women and men.

Patriarchal culture is evident in every aspect of the village. Males dominate in all of the key leadership and decision making roles. Even in the face of a woman leader of one of the clans in the village, men are the voice of leadership in the home and in the community. From the evidence presented, males have authority, privilege and control over every aspect of the village affairs with very limited input from the women. In patriarchal societies such as the one described by the participants, women and men have unequal opportunities to participate in leadership and decision making roles. Consistent with the findings of Domingo (2015) patriarchy has limited women’s voice, influence and leadership.
The findings strongly suggest that male roles are rooted in entrenched systems of power and privilege. Tradition supports the continual advancement of males as the dominant leaders and decision makers in the village. In fact, men have always held the powerful position of headman in the village. This was evident in the responses of both male and female participants in this study. Over two decades ago Ishtar (1994 p.129) wrote:

“It’s true that men are more dominant than women, especially in the villages, but women have grown up with it, it’s part of their lives that men should be superior. The women believe that they are there to listen, they do not take part in decision making. That is the man’s role. It is their belief that it should be that way, they have grown up with it. It is not that the men keep saying, “You listen to me I am the man”. It is just in their hearts that this is the way life is”.

The findings of Ishtar and others still hold true today for the women in the study. Evidently, the women admitted that tradition was definitely responsible for how the males operate, especially when it came to leadership and making decisions. It no doubt remains the fundamental reason for women’s underrepresentation in leadership in Votua.

While culture is important for social and economic development and for common understanding between individuals in the village, culture has also tended to negate the role of women in leadership, relegating them to the ‘kitchen’ and household roles and restricting them only to those roles (Kabeer, 2012; Reeves & Baden, 2000). While women’s help was actively sought and secured, for example when it came to maintaining a clean village and managing the home, they are not allowed access to the higher echelons of leadership and decision making. Nonetheless, because women have been traditionally socialized into doing domestic and child care roles, it should not imply that they are unsuited, or unskilled for other roles such as leading or decision making.
Gender discrimination is directly and covertly manifested in culture in the village. The observed sitting position of the women at ceremonies as well as during kava drinking also confirms this. Furthermore, the relative lateness of holding meetings in the village as explained by many of the women as well as the kava routines block women’s participation because the social and cultural system just did not allow women to be present in these settings (Corbett & Liki, 2015; Chandra and Lewai, 2005). According to Ortner (1974, p.69), culture considers women inferior when:

“elements of culture ideology and informants’ statements explicitly devalue women, according them, their roles, their tasks, their products and their social milieu less prestige than are accorded men and male correlates”.

Moreover, the silence of women’s voice also confirms the notion that women should be seen and not heard. For these women, culture promotes conservative ideas about women’s ability and rights to equality. Simply, conformity to these traditional and cultural roles and practices denies women access to power, influence and to be heard. In the same way, however, culture is crucial to change because it provides a role model for the world power structure.

In some regards because most of the women have accepted these roles as normal and natural, it would appear that they have made little, or no attempt to challenge the prevailing culture which has kept them in support and subordinate roles. Furthermore, there was no indication that efforts were made to represent the right to leadership of the village of the female leader of the mataqali. In fact, according to the findings villagers usually choose the headman. This includes both men and women. What is obvious, however, is that for the women to have proposed the female mataqali head to be head of the village meant challenging the prevailing hierarchy. This implies that the women would have had to challenge for instance, the authority of their husbands, fathers and leaders, which ultimately would have connoted disrespect on the part of the women.
One possible reason for this finding could be that because of internalized oppression the women have been conditioned to act against themselves and or to accept their position and not to make any attempt to change (Reeves & Baden, 2000). Another possible reason could be because the culture has become so resilient and they are so deeply anchored that it seems difficult to change (Domingo et al, 2015).

Worth noting is that it was quite obvious from the evidence that most of the women were aware of their rights to equality, however they remain confined by the traditional and cultural practices which are constantly being reinforced by the rules and mode of operation in the village. These have made it harder, if not impossible, for women in the village to make major decisions or input into the development of the village. The lack of any real participation of women in leadership continues to stifle their efforts to both lift themselves out of subjugation and contribute to the development of the community. Simply, women fall short of rising to their potential due to traditional and cultural barriers. Powerlessness is a central element of poverty, and any focus on poverty, inequality, injustice or exclusion involves analysis of and/or challenging/changing power relations (Luckey, 2015).

It is indeed nothing new that tradition and culture dictate who has access to and control over leadership and decision making. Nonetheless, social and cultural norms that dictate that women must be obedient, submissive can normalize inequality of any form meted out to women.

Religious norms also seemed to be intertwined with traditional and cultural practices. Though these were not strongly emphasized, from observation there appears to be a marriage of these practices. However the extent to which religion directly influences cultural and traditional norms or vice versa could not be determined by this study. Greater examination would require an in-depth study of the three variables and how they correlate and influence each other.
Since many of the problems which women encounter have their basis in culture and tradition, the ultimate solution is for gender based cultural obstacles to be examined, identified and targeted for change by legislative or policy intervention in order to bring about attitudinal changes in the village. When the women are freed from the constraints of narrow gender stereotypes and from the disadvantage that has prevented them from realizing their full potential, there will be positive spill offs for the village. Another strategy of redress is awareness raising combined with advocacy and action. Awareness and advocacy could weaken the rigid traditional views, norms and discriminatory attitudes and inspire conscious action to change which could lead to a new construct of gender roles. This is the core of transformation.

**Domestic and Care Roles**

All of the women in the study had their reasonable share of domestic and care roles. The general consensus from the women that these roles represent one of the formidable barriers which stand in the way of women’s ascension to leadership and decision making roles in the village, is consistent with conventional thinking and research findings (Corbett and liki, 2015; Domingo et al, 2015; Markham, 2013; UNDP Human Development Report, 2012; Holmes, 2007; Rhodes & Kellerman, 2006).

As the literature suggests, the findings confirm that women continue to, more than men, shoulder more of these responsibilities. As a consequence, they are less likely to pursue leadership and decision making roles outside of the home.

As the study alluded to earlier and as the literature also suggests most of the women are the major worker, sole breadwinners and managers in the home. Moreover, the women are compelled, because of the traditional and cultural demands and expectations placed on them as mothers and wives, to first satisfy these expected roles. Further, in the village where patriarchal norms are well established and persistent as discussed, indeed women are confined to domestication. These roles are uniquely women’s. Clearly, these penetrate into the leadership and decision making realm where women are not generally regarded as leaders. The extent to which women thought domestic and family
responsibilities are an impediment was acute. This was demonstrated in the responses of the women.

Either way, these findings support the idea that leadership or decision making roles are not easily accessible to women. Women simply have too much work to do and less freedom than men (Narsey, 2007). Evidently, the responses of the women highlighted, as numerous studies suggest, there is a huge gender gap which exists between the domestic and child care roles with which the women are involved and the male’s roles. As such, an inference which could be made in this study is that gender roles which, as stated, defines the sociocultural roles of men and women effectively excludes women from decision making and leadership. Several of the women alluded to the males as having dominant roles notwithstanding the women were the ones doing most of the work in the home and community.

As the literature suggests women spend more time in domestic and family care roles, unassisted by husbands or spouses. The same was also discovered to be true for the women in this study. What is implied in this finding is that since most of women’s time is spent on domestic and family care roles, adding another role will, as Slatter (1985) suggested, add another layer to their already huge burden. Women’s double (or triple) burden is a reflection of their marginalization and how it operates in patriarchal societies.

Even if the women are inclined to take up leadership and decision making roles, an obvious implication from these finding is that since the family is the women’s first priority, they are more likely to delay opportunities for leadership until their children are grown or other family members are less dependent on them.

The fact that some women were forbidden and reprimanded for taking up roles outside of the home also corroborates previous research findings. According to the women these roles were outside of their household duties. Without the necessary support to take up leadership and decision making roles, women will continue to find it difficult to take up
or function in these capacities. Furthermore, it becomes onerous when one has to think about home and family responsibilities and such a huge task as leading a village.

Overall, from the evidence, it is reasonable to note that any additional roles for the women in this study would add to their already burdensome and unassisted roles. The pressure the demands and roles women have, have clearly made it difficult for them to assume anything but leadership roles. However, it is reasonable also to assume that if women are assisted by men (husbands, spouses, fathers and brothers) with household and other domestic chores and are given the necessary support, this would not only lighten their burdens but also release time for them to participate in leadership roles in the village. A possible solution for women to be better able to balance their domestic responsibility with the necessary time to undertake leadership and decision making roles would to be for males to share some of the household roles or to introduce a child care facility in the village to offset the workload of the women.

**Low Self-Confidence and Fear**
The participants were asked whether they had the confidence to lead or make decisions. Some of the women in the study shyly distanced themselves from leadership and decision making roles. Lack of confidence, fear and intimidation were partially to blame for the women’s reluctance (Piterman, 2008; Kasamo, 2012). This finding is validated by the literature which suggests, for example, that girls are generally given little opportunities to make decisions or take up leadership roles (Komporaly, 2007; Chafetz, 2006; Corner, 2006). In light of the aforementioned, it is reasonable to assume that since women are not exposed to leadership or roles that are perceived to be associated with masculinity from an early age; they are less likely to have the confidence to perform these roles. Besides, if most of the times women are not heard because of the culture of silence, they will continue to be perceived as misfits for leadership roles even when they are themselves confident.

It is therefore no surprise that the women in the study were afraid to do that which is not acclaimed to be their roles. Otherwise, they would be perceived to be treading in the
male’s territory. Clearly, this is unfamiliar ground for the women and atypical for the people in the community. In fact, the tone with which one male questioned which woman the researcher wanted to be leader in the village endorses the intimidation and fear of which the women spoke. This could possibly explain the reason why some women decide beforehand not to lead anybody but themselves, or not to lead in Votua village, even if they are given the chance to do so.

In addition, the perception that women are weak and men are strong seems also to resonate with some women. As some research findings have suggested women are viewed as being ‘weak’ and ‘needy’, if they express interest in leadership roles (FAWG, 2006; Reddy, 2012), as their culturally defined role in the home is considered more appropriate and acceptable (Chandra and Lewai, 2005). Instantly, this connotes that a stronger person, in this case males, who appear to have the confidence by being more vocal, should be the leader. It is nothing new that men are perceived to be more confident or stronger than women (Eagly, 2003), but male confidence derives from their obvious advantageous position.

What also emerged from the findings is that according to the women leadership and decision making roles require one to be educated, conversant and capable. Understandably, where women are less exposed to acquiring these skills and have not participated in decision making or leadership roles, it becomes difficult for them to lead others to perceive them to be leaders. Having self-confidence is the basis of both leadership and decision making. Obviously, if a woman is not confident in herself or others are not confident in her capacity to lead, she is less likely to be chosen to lead.

Growth in inner self-confidence and capabilities cannot be possible if women are not empowered, in the same way that empowerment is not achievable if women are not given the opportunity to participate fully and equitably in the governance processes of the village. It is worth noting that discrimination and inequality have lasting impacts on people’s confidence and self-esteem and are considered to be direct barriers to young
women fulfilling their potential as leaders (Pacific Women Leadership Strategy, 2011-2019 p.8).

**Conflicts and Lack of Support**
The women related that some of the women in the village sometimes fight verbally or physically among themselves regarding issues. As a consequence they do not always support each other. Earlier studies indicate that Votua was not a very cohesive community (Lal & Slatter, 1982). Therefore without cooperation and support for women, and amongst women, it is easy to see why women would shy away from leadership roles. However, conflict and lack of support may hinder women from leadership on the one hand, but leadership is the catalyst which will help to build community capacity, cohesion and resilience (Gasteyer & Herman, 2013; Madsen et al, 2014) on the other.

**Relationship Taboos**
Another barrier which the study unearthed was relationship taboos. These as the women describe also prevent women from leading or making decisions in the village. Surprisingly, for instance, capable and competent women may be passed over for leadership roles because they are prohibited from communicating with some of the community members because of these taboos. In the village where communal activities take precedence over individual ones (Ravuvu, 1983), this could be quite problematic mainly because leadership and decision making require constant communication with villagers. Simply, this cannot be realized if the leader is prohibited from relating to or speaking with members of the village.

**Village By-Laws**
What also emerged from the research is that the village by-laws also stand in way of the women’s ascension to leadership and decision making roles. These laws prescribe how people are to behave in the village. The by-laws are closely aligned with traditional and cultural practices which deny women equal rights with men in the village.
The women in the village have to toe the line and live according to the laws of the village. This implies that they are restricted from engaging in any activity which contradicts village by-laws. Interestingly, however, this implies that the women have to give up their relative freedom of choice in order to live in the village. This results in a denial of the women’s right to equality. This becomes problematic since the by-laws are, to a great extent, discriminatory, contradictory to constitutional law and human rights, and outright prejudicial towards women. They are a blatant violation of women’s human rights.

While some women indicated that some conflicts may arise where these laws are not followed, the evidence suggests that some women, albeit only a few, follow them strictly. One reason which could be proposed for their deviation is that some of the women are cognizant of their constitutional rights and therefore regardless of the consequences, align themselves and action with these.

**Women’s Capabilities as Leaders**

On the whole, there was general consensus among all the participants in the study (males and females) about women’s capabilities for leadership and decision making roles in the village. These sentiments were strongly echoed among the participants. Reliable, adept and experienced describe some of the characteristics which the women strongly believed women generally possess in the village. For example many of them held the view that women *walk the talk* when it comes to getting things done.

In highlighting women’s capabilities, the women made references to the differences between how the males and females function in their roles. The findings do also seem to suggest, as reported by the women that when compared with men, women communicate better with other women and villagers in general. In fact, the women demonstrated good social and interpersonal skills and according to many of the women interviewed, women did not renege on decisions easily. These characteristics are also claimed, in other studies, to be associated with women in leadership (Gray, 1992; Eagly, 1987).
Consistent with research previous findings, these findings suggest that there seem to be obvious differences in the manner in which women and men lead (Hassan & Silong, 2008; Wilson, 2007; Corner, 1997; Eagly et al, 2003; Eagly and Johnson, 1990; Bass & Avolio, 1994). Indeed, women in the study appear to have a more nurturing and inclusive side to their mode of operation and one could assume that it would be how they would also lead. This was evident in one of the statements made by the women that if women are good leaders in the home, they will also make good leaders in the village as they would take care of everyone. This “take care” character is what Martell and Desmet (2001) and Prime et al (2009), spoke of. Besides, in line with the findings of Fiji Women’s Forum (2014), the women also appear to be humble, submissive, caring and peacemakers when conflicts arise between the male leaders in the village. Simply, women feel very capable of taking care of the needs and interest of all the members of the village. These qualities as the literature finds also correlate with transformational leadership.

In stark contrast, in their responses the women related that the men are strong headed, independent and arrogant. These qualities are common where males dominate. Clearly they fit well with the male style of leadership and gender stereotypes (Eagly, Johnson-Schmidt & Van Engen, 2003).

Given the qualities highlighted by the women, it is understandable why most of the women as well as some men believed that women would be good leaders and according to some women ‘betters leaders’ in the village.

It was not surprising that the women in this study also noted that women’s perspectives and ideas are different to the perspectives and ideas of males (Ballington, 2008). The males also admitted that the women give some good ideas. What is implicit in these findings is that although men are the dominant leaders, their decisions may be influenced directly or indirectly by the ideas and contributions of women.
Nonetheless, while the men also thought women are quite capable of leading, they expressed an obvious preference for older women. Instantly, this implies that younger women are less likely to be chosen for leadership or decision making roles. While the younger women might be more educated than the older ones as the study finds, they are more likely to be passed over for leadership roles simply for being young.

Consistent with research findings, most of the participant felt that if a woman led the village everyone in the community would be looked after. That is the needs, interests and concerns of all the people in the village will be taken into account (Ballington, 2008). The view that if women made the decision, the village would be better off- has been expressed before (Rokotuivuna, 1980). Specifically, women in Votua pointed out, for example, that compared with men women will ensure that everybody, especially the children, are fed. Quite interestingly, these qualities which the participants referenced are both synonymous with the motherly qualities of women (although not all women are by nature motherly) as well as those pivotal for transformational leadership. For this reason it is reasonable to assume that were women to lead, this would result in transformative changes in the village.

In sum, from the evidence, there can be no doubt about women’s capacity to lead. The women in this study demonstrate this capacity in the very contribution which they make. They exhibit great competency in managing the affairs of the home. In fact, as one of the women vividly expressed, women are already actively involved in everything, and to a greater extent than the men. This view is nothing new for women in the villages since they generally work harder than men and they are cognizant of what the village needs (Rokotuivuna, 1980).

Another key area which the women brought to the fore was education. Consensus was reached as all of the participants felt that education was a vital necessity, especially for decision making roles. While the evidence points out that educational opportunities are generally available to all in the village, it was quite alarming to learn that in the areas where both girls and boys needed to be educated beyond secondary school, preference
according to some women is given to boys. For example, girls are less likely to be given the opportunity for tertiary education if there was insufficient funds to support them. Moreover, as one of the participants explained, if pursuing territory education necessitates sending a girl away from home, for example in the city, she may or may not be able to go. This is dependent on whether or not there is a close relative living in the city. In this instance, distance becomes a hindrance to education as much as education becomes a hindrance to leadership.

Education plays a pivotal role in building capacity, encouraging independence, promoting critical thinking, fostering self-confidence and providing young girls with a vision of what they might become (Sweetman, 2000). Women’s educational status becomes a key to their participation in decision making and leadership. In the context of village management, it seems, education is one of the key factors in determining leadership roles. No doubt the advantages of education for males outweigh that of females simply because even for educated women, they are likely to be bypassed for leadership and decision making roles.

Education is also an important factor when analyzing women’s participation. In this context therefore it is unfortunate that preference is given to males when educational choices are made. Research evidence finds a significant link between education and the improvements of better health, sustainability and in general reduction of poverty (Asian Development Bank, 2012). It would be interesting to find out whether there is a correlation between education and the health, economic status and poverty of women and girls in the village.

The Disadvantages
A major disadvantage which the women reported was related directly to women’s issues and concerns as proposed by some studies (Ballington, 2008). These are often different to those of males and as a result, as the women indicated, men are not really concerned with women’s issues. There was an obvious lack of urgency on the part of the leaders in attending to the women’s affairs. When these issues were addressed, they were not
always to the satisfaction of the women. For example some of the women made reference to instances where they needed for instance, water-sealed toilets, boat and engine for their fishing activities and sewing machines. Given that these resources are crucial to the women’s fishing and voluntary activities and ultimately their livelihood, priority should have been given to them. Nonetheless, most women blamed the lack of women’s leadership and influence as a major cause of their needs not being satisfied.

While the research found that some of the women suffered from various health issues, most of these appear to be the result of natural causes and not as a direct result of their work. Women, albeit a few, showed signs of ill health such as pneumonia and coughing which could be related to their fishing activities, cooking over open fire and their work in general. Some research findings indicate that as a result of women’s double burden they sometimes face ill health, stress (Holmes, 2007) and according to Narsey (2007, 2012) the open fires used especially by the women and girls are extremely inefficient with being hazardous to health, causing both respiratory and eye disease such as trachoma, but the extent to which the observed illnesses correlate with the women’s roles is beyond the scope of this research.

There was general consensus from the women with regards to safety and security. The findings seem to suggest that Votua is a relatively safe environment. Although women indicated that there have been some cases of teenage pregnancy and domestic violence, albeit few, there seem to be very low tolerance of domestic violence by the headman. An indication is how these cases are dealt with by the leader as described by the women. The headman as well as the women indicated that domestic violence cases are reported to the police. One possible explanation which could be proposed for this finding is that because the current headman is a retired policeman, he advocates against violence against women.

Further, the findings also indicate that the women are exposed to and are aware of their human and constitutional rights. The relative influence of organisations such as the Women’s Crisis Center which conducts awareness campaigns in the village was also
evident. The extent to which these initiatives contribute to behavioural, cultural, perceptive and attitudinal changes towards women’s equal participation in decision making and leadership roles can only be speculated on. In fact, as one woman explained, they do not always have the freedom or time to attend the workshops or training offered because of their heavy load. Therefore, it becomes difficult to bring about change when a majority of the intended beneficiaries, though they do also target men, are not present.

Desire for Change

The view that women’s involvement in leadership of the village would lead to significant transformative changes was held by most of the women in the study. The findings suggest that generally women want to be able to participate equally in leadership and decision making. The women showed interest in changing the mode of operation to make it more inclusive and equitable.

Education and training as well as support and cooperation were two major themes which emerged from the findings. As discussed earlier, education of women was seen as paramount in the efforts to fight against injustices meted out to them. While the women recognize the need for education and training males are given first preference in education when resources are limited. Further, when the women are not able to attend these workshops or cannot proceed with their formal education because of the many obstacles which stand in their way, they are denied the opportunity for education and training.

Another point which can be made from the findings is that education alone will not be effective if it is not accompanied by attitudinal changes and other strategies to encourage and support equitable division of roles. It is agreeable that it will help to boost self-confidence, uplift women’s economic and social status and give them the necessary skills to negotiate leadership roles. Women should be able to influence the social choices and decisions which affect their sphere of work and their lives. Women need not be placed on the sidelines but given the opportunity to contribute and lead in meaningful ways that would lead to change.
Conclusion
This chapter has presented an analysis of the findings of the study which sought to examine women’s participation in leadership roles at the grassroots in rural Fiji. The analysis was presented in the context of the literature reviewed. In sum, the chapter presented the findings on the contributions the women in the study made to the home and in the community. These were mainly domestic, subsistence, small scale commercial fishing and marketing, and voluntary work for the church and the community. The chapter also presented the findings with supporting evidence on women’s under-representation in leadership as well as the obstacles which stand in the way of them attaining leadership. Some discussion of health, education and security implications was included. The final chapter will present a summary of conclusions as well as some recommendations and suggestions for further research.
CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Women continue to remain an underrepresented lot in leadership and decision making in societies worldwide. This study focused on women’s participation in leadership roles at the grassroots in rural Fiji—the case of Votua Village, Ba. The study examined rural women’s contribution, to find out whether or not rural women were represented in leadership and decision making, and to explore whether their exclusion affected development within Votua village.

The study examined women’s participation in leadership roles through feminist lens. It drew on the perspective of feminist leadership for social transformation (Batliwala, 2010; Antrobus, 2000; Rao & Kelleher, 2000), which examines women as agents of social change. Simply, it viewed women in leadership as a means of empowering them and giving them a voice to influence change for the benefit of their community and societies in general. A qualitative approach to data collection was utilized in this study since it is the approach most used in feminist research. It allowed the researcher to go into the domain of the women and collect data on their in-depth stores and experiences. This was further facilitated by the use of the case study approach which presented a unique opportunity for the examination of ‘rich’, ‘thick’ information from the women. Twenty semi-structured interviews and two focus group discussions were conducted.

Summary of Key findings

Overall the study found the women played a vital role in the sustenance of their families and Votua village. In keeping with the literature surveyed the women continue to shoulder most of the domestic and family responsibilities (Markham, 2013; HDR, 2012; Holmes, 2007; Rhode & Kellerman, 2006). They performed a multiplicity of roles which ranged from domestic and family to fishing activities and farming as well as voluntary community work. The women’s fishing activities were their source of income and
livelihood. Overall, these roles represented the most significant and extensive contribution which the women made in the village. Furthermore, the evidence indicated that the women sustain both the family and the community by their contributions. The roles were ‘unpaid household work’ which was usually done unassisted. Because this category of work is closely associated with gender roles, it formed the basis of an understanding of women’s patriarchally-assigned roles.

The women in this study were expected to fill their traditional roles as women (whether wives, mothers, daughters). The household seemingly was the hub of exploitation of women by men (Narsey, 2007; Reeves & Baden, 2000) and the source of poverty (Chatteir, 2011).

The women in this study face many constraints to exercising leadership in Votua village. The main constraints included traditional, patriarchal and cultural (Corbett & Liki, 2015; Domingo et al; 2015; Hickman, 2014; Patel, 2013; Reddy, 2012; Jakobsh, 2012; Reeves & Baden, 2000) barriers which form part a large part of the leadership structure of the village. The research found that the women were at a disadvantage as a result of gender based roles, traditional and cultural practices which discriminated against them and which denied them access to opportunities to leadership and decision. For example, while the village had a female mataqali head of one of the clans, she had never been chosen as the leader of the village. This thus reinforced the highly traditional, patriarchal and cultural practices which indicates that leadership, as the literature rightly points out, is still very much a male domain in Votua village, as it is elsewhere (Rhodes & Kellerman, 2013; Reddy, 2012). Further, the findings strongly suggest that male leadership roles in Votua are rooted in entrenched systems of power and privilege while tradition and culture supports its continuation.

The women, albeit the older women, were the voice of the women in the village. The younger women on the other hand were expected, as a form of respect, to adopt a secondary position in the presence of men. While some women follow the expected
norms, others covertly resent and are unhappy with their status. The women no doubt emerged to be the primary agent of socializing the young into the expected roles.

In terms of decision making in the village, limited input was made openly by the women. However the findings do seem to suggest that the women have some covert influence on males. Nonetheless, representation made by older women, was mainly on women’s issues. While the study found that men were open to allowing women to lead, there was an obvious preference for older women. Younger women on the other hand had to fulfill some predetermined criteria, which instantly bars them from leadership.

Another constraint the women faced included family responsibilities which were traditionally seen as women’s domain. These resulted in women’s limited freedom to participate in leadership and decision making roles. The women were burdened with triple work burdens which posed time constraints for them to devote to other activities such as those required for leadership and decision making.

Women’s choices not to lead because of lack of self-confidence and fear also emerged as one of those factors which could be linked to their underrepresentation. Some women preferred to just sit and hear other women speak and those who had some interest in leading preferred not to do so in the village.

Other obstacles which were found included; relationship taboos, conflict and lack of support and village by-laws which overtly discriminated against women.

The study also found that women’s issues and concerns were not always addressed and when they were addressed they were not treated with urgency. Some of the issues the women reported were directly related to their fishing activities. As the study revealed, these activates contributed to the livelihood of the women and their families. While the study could not determine a correlation between some of the reported and observed health issues and the women’s roles, some prior research points to the likelihood of
women becoming ill because of their domestic and subsistence activities (Holmes, 2007).

Based on the findings it could be surmised that women show the potential to be better communicators and facilitators of change in general. In fact, the women demonstrated good social and interpersonal skills and according to the women interviewed, women did not renege on decisions easily. These characteristics are akin to transformational leadership and women in leadership in general (Gray, 1992; Eagly, 1987). Women would therefore be the best fit for leadership roles in the village since they would lead in the interest of all villagers.

The findings also revealed that they are some competent, capable and qualified women who are suited for leadership and decision making in the village. Given the findings, one can conclude that were women to lead the village, it appears that, as expressed by Rokotuivuna (1980) and previous research findings (Ballington, 2008) the needs interest and concerns of all the members of the village would be taken into account. This would no doubt provide a win-win situation for both men and women. This ultimately, is what the women in the study wanted to see change.

Another key finding of this study was that the women were not always satisfied with the delay in addressing their needs and issues in the village by the leaders.

This study concludes that the participation of women in leadership, specifically at the higher echelons in the village will serve to amplify their presently unheard voices and enable the women to decide upon and take action that they believe are essential to the development of the village. This will ultimately benefit all villagers, particularly in raising their standard of living. As Atkinson and Cope (1997) argued, powerlessness is a central element of poverty, and any focus on poverty, inequality, injustice, or exclusion involves analysis of and/or challenging/changing power relations.

The mere recognition of the need for gender equality, equity and greater inclusivity of the women is a positive step towards transformation. However what is also important to
foster leadership and decision making, is creating an enabling environment that would facilitate both the empowerment of women and young girls and their entry into leadership decision making roles.

RECOMMENDATIONS
The following recommendations are proposed in line with the findings of this study:

- At the household level women need support and assistance. There is still a great deal to be done to ensure that women are not unfairly burdened by work, as the study has revealed. Changing this requires working with both men and women to change the social and cultural ideas about men’s and women’s roles (Domingo et al, 2015). As Narsey (2007) noted the participation of males in domestic and household roles is one crucial way of reducing the double and triple burden which women experience. This will free up more time for women to participate in training and other activities associated with leadership and subsequently engage in leadership and decision making roles in the village.

- It is not simply a matter of just promoting women into position through their chiefly status. While this is encouraged, as the study found, it is not enough to penetrate the leadership structure. Women need not just be symbols of leadership but rather should be empowered through leadership to make a difference in the village. There can be no doubt that for transformative change to happen the village needs to recognize women and elevate them to leadership and decision making roles. It is also not sufficient for women to be leaders in groups which reinforce their subordinate roles. As appears from the findings of this study, including women in the higher echelons of leadership could lead to gender equality and inclusivity for all in the village. In light of this, there is a crucial need for men and women to be sensitized and educated through advocacy about women’s rights to also lead and be included in decision making on the one hand, and the importance of women’s representation on the other. Since women are the key focal points of socializing the young, they should encourage the young in
debunking the negative stereotypes, which have kept decision making as the preserves of men.

- Government institutions such as Ministry of Women’s and women’s organisations such as the Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre have a key role to play in informing and educating both women and men of their rights, particularly their rights to leadership. Simply, in their advocacy efforts, women’s organisations must build strong coalitions with other groups to bring gendered perspectives to their mode of operation. Additionally, they can also be educated about available opportunities to engage with other stakeholders such as government and network groups, Funding Leadership Opportunity for Women (FLOW), to help to establish support systems for women seeking leadership roles.

- Ensuring that women have equal access to education and training is vital to both the development of women and obviously to the choice of leaders as found in this study. Education and training will help to build the women’s capacity and equip them with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to implement change and lead effectively. Nonetheless, training needs to be consistent and long term, as short term training programmes are less likely to lead to behavioural change (Leadership Development Report, p12). Long term training are more likely to enable penetration and behavioural change. It will help women to build confidence, both in themselves and in their ability to communicate and hence give them the necessary ability to negotiate for better conditions and equality, thus, dismantling some of the barriers and stereotypes associated with women’s ability to lead.

- It is not simply a matter of training more women nonetheless, although all women need to have knowledge and enhanced skills, nor is it a matter of raising women’s level of education, as education alone is not the panacea and the younger women already seem more educated. Instead, it requires identification and training of competent and capable women who show potential for leadership
and who are willing to challenge existing patriarchal and traditional structures in order to influence positive changes in the village.

- Achieving equality in leadership and decision making and the empowering of women will not be possible without men. Their support is vital as they are influential and the decision makers. Consciousness raising on shared work and family responsibility is a crucial factor in promoting women’s participation in leadership. Hence policies which consider and incorporate both men and women would help to promote the status and role of women in decision making (Chandra & Lewai, 2005). Women need support which is both determined and aggressive.

- All necessary measures have to be taken by all stakeholders, and in particular the Government of Fiji, to ensure that the customary laws are in sync with the constitution and international laws. This will result in the strengthening of women’s rights in the villages and therefore allow them the freedom to participate with men in leadership and decision making roles.

In sum, what is needed is awareness, advocacy, and action. Awareness and advocacy could weaken the rigid traditional views, norms and discriminatory attitudes while conscious action to change could lead to a new construct of gender roles and breathe changes for the village.

**Directions for Future Research**

The study has revealed that there is a need for further research in the areas, including studies of women and leadership in other rural villages as well as in Indo-Fijian settlements to ascertain if there are similar patterns of women’s underrepresentation and whether similar barriers also exist for women of different ethnic origins.
Further study is also necessary to establish whether some of the illnesses which the women mentioned in the study correlate with their work and contribution, particularly in their fisheries activities. Policies to integrate technological tools to lessen the use of archaic methods could be recommended to reduce or eliminate the related illnesses and to provide women a better means of providing for their needs.

Further research would also be useful to find out the extent to which women influence/impact the decisions of their spouses, husbands or fathers in deeply traditional, patriarchal communities with a view to devising specific policies to penetrate where those deeply rooted norms exist. In addition studies could also be conducted to ascertain whether long term intervention strategies such as advocacy and action results in behavioural changes of men and women in the village.

It would be interesting also to examine a village or villages headed by women to compare the similarities or differences in the leadership styles of those headed by males, and explore the development impacts of female leadership where it exists. This will further shed light on and strengthen the views on both women’s ability to lead as well their potential benefit to the villages, particularly in relation to transformational changes.
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GLOSSARY

kana kana  eat up
ibe-ni-kana  eating mat/dining mat
lovoan  oven dug in the ground/an underground oven/the system of cooking food in the earth using hot stones
mataqali  an agnostically related social unit/sub-clan usually a lineage of the larger clan
sevusevua  traditional ceremony
sulu jabaa  traditional skirt (wrap around skirt) worn by Fijian men and women as part of their customary wardrobe
tabutaboo, prohibition
tokatoka  extended family
tavalequ  my cross cousins
turaga-ni-koro  chosen/appointed head of the village, headman
veitacini  parallel cousins
vinaka vakalevu  thank you very much
vale  same room or same house
vanua  land, people, custom
yasana  largest administrative unit of Fiji administration
yavusa  clan
tavale  cross cousins
APPENDIX

Appendix A: Sample Questions used for the Interviews and Focus Groups

Simi-structured Interviews

Bio-data
1. Age
2. Level of education
3. Household status (1,2,3, child … etc)
4. Number of family members living in the same household
5. Are you of chiefly rank? Specify

1. What major contribution(s) do women make at home and in the community of Votua?

Contributions to Home and Community
6. In what ways do women generally contribute to the home?
7. What are the main duties/roles/responsibilities you have at home on a daily basis?
8. Do you have any input as a woman in how the home is managed/run?
9. Are there limitations (traditional/others) that hinder your work in any of these areas?
10. Do you work outside of the home?
   a. If yes, do you work for monetary payment, payment in kind or in voluntary activity?
11. What major roles/work are you involved in as a member of the village?

2. Are women represented in local leadership and decision making?
12. Who normally assumes leadership and decision making roles in the village?
13. How are the village leaders determined/decided?
14. Are women normally involved in leadership and decision making in the village?
15. If no, why not?
16. If yes, how so?
17. Do you have any input as a woman in how the village is managed/run?
18. Have you ever had the responsibility of being a leader/decision-maker in the village?
19. Do you have any interest in taking up leadership or decision-making roles?
20. If no, why not?
21. Are there any female leaders in the village?
22. Have there ever been female leaders/decision-makers in the village?
23. Were you ever encouraged to be a leader? By who and in what ways?
24. Do you think women in the village are as capable/qualified as men to be leaders/decision-makers?

3. What are the main obstacles which prevent women from being involved in leadership and decision making?
25. What are the things which prevent you (women in general) from being involved in leadership/decision-making in this village?
26. Do you think women have less freedom to participate in leadership and decision making because of their family responsibilities?
27. Do you think traditional practices prevent women from becoming leaders or decision makers in the village?
28. Explain in what ways…
29. Is education a barrier to women’s participation in leadership in this village?
30. Given equal competence/opportunities as males, do you think women should participate in leadership and decision making roles?
31. Do you believe that women can become good leaders in this village?
32. What are your reasons?
33. Would you want to be a leader/decision-maker in your village?
34. If no, why not?

4. How does women’s exclusion from local leadership and decision making affect the development of the community?
35. Are the women’s concerns being addressed by the village leaders?
36. If no, what do you think are the reasons for this?
37. Does the lack of women in leadership and decision making result in women’s concerns not being addressed?
38. Are women’s concerns being adequately addressed by the leaders of the village?
39. Do you think that things (approach to community development initiatives) would be done better or differently if women were placed in leadership or decision making roles?

40. In what ways?

5. What are the health, education, security issues affecting women and girls as a result of their inclusion/exclusion in/from leadership and how can these challenges be mitigated?

41. What are some problems the village faces as a result of women not being in leadership or decision making?

42. What are important health issues that affect women in the village?

43. What are the key education issues that affect women in the village?

44. What are the women’s security concerns?

45. Are these a consequence of women being absent from leadership and decision making?

46. Are there any activities/opportunities in the village to develop/encourage in women’s participation in village leadership?

47. What would you suggest should be done to help women become leaders and decision makers?
Appendix B: Supplementary Questions

Focus Group Interviews

These are organized for the participation of both males and females, though the focus is on women, the perspectives of males will also serve to explain whether or not women are represented and if not, the reasons for their underrepresentation.

1. Are there women represented in leadership/decision making roles in this village?
2. If yes, in what capacity (ies) do they serve?
3. If no, what are the main reasons why women are not in leadership or decision making roles?
4. In what ways is the community affected as a result of women’s absence from leadership and decision making roles?
5. What are the major issues and challenges as a result of women’s underrepresentation?
6. How can this problem be resolved/addressed?
7. Do women have access, or rights to land ownership?
8. Do they have the ability to cultivate land?
9. Would you respect or support women who show leadership potential or take on leadership roles?
10. In which areas do women play an active role as leaders in the village?
11. Are women involved in fundraising or other voluntary activities for the village?
12. Do you believe that women have sufficient qualities and skills to take on leadership and decision making roles in the village?
13. Do you think that women are capable of becoming good leaders and decision makers?
14. Given equal competence/abilities, do you think women should participate in leadership and decision making roles?
15. What is currently being done to encourage women into leadership and decision making roles?
16. What needs to be done to encourage women into leadership and decision making roles?
Appendix C

Interviewer/Researcher chatting with Women of Votua Village

Interviewer/Researcher Returning to the Host Home after Conducting Interviews