

*Supporting women and young people to
build sustainable livelihoods in multiethnic
communities in Fiji*



Vanua Levu Community Profiles



**PACIFIC CENTRE FOR
PEACEBUILDING**

Supporting women and young people to build sustainable livelihoods in multiethnic communities in Fiji

Vanua Levu Community Profiles

Produced by the Pacific Centre for Peacebuilding (PCP) with support from the International Women's Development Agency

July, 2013

Acknowledgements

PCP extends sincere gratitude to the following groups, organisations and individuals for their support on this project:

- *Bulileka* Mother's Club
- *Naleba* Multiracial Women's Forum
- *Tosovata* Women's Club
- *Vanua Levu Arya Mahila Mandhal*
- *Vunicuicui* Multiracial Women's Forum
- *Vunimoli Mahila Arya Mandhal*
- Integrated Human Resource Development Programme
- Northern Development Programme
- Canada Fund
- Commissioner Northern
- femLINKPACIFIC: Media Initiatives for Women
- Generation NEXT North Team
- Adi Vasulevu Chute (former PCP Manager North)
- Claire Rowland
- Emily Miller
- Georgia Ride
- Kristy Nowland
- Rebecca Spence

For more information contact:

SUVA

The Pacific Centre for Peacebuilding
P.O Box 18167, Suva, Fiji

Phone : (679) 3310 208/3310 209

Fax : (679) 331 0250

Email : info@pcpfiji.org

Website : www.pcpfiji.org

Facebook : www.facebook.com/pcpfiji

LABASA

The Pacific Centre for Peacebuilding
P.O Box 3955, Labasa

Phone : (679) 8816005

Fax : (679) 8816006

*Supporting women
and young people
to build sustainable
livelihoods in
multiethnic
communities in Fiji*

**Vanua Levu
Community Profiles**

The Pacific Centre for Peacebuilding presents
a summary of the work undertaken with
women and young people in Vanua Levu in the
communities of *Bulileka, Naleba, Vunicuicui* and
Vunimoli from 2007 till 2012



**PACIFIC CENTRE FOR
PEACEBUILDING**



Foreword from IWDA

*Message of support from the International Women's Development Agency for Pacific Centre for Peacebuilding "Supporting women and young people to build sustainable livelihoods in multiethnic communities in Fiji: Vanua Levu Community Profiles" publication
30th May, 2013*

International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) and Pacific Centre for Peacebuilding (PCP) started a working partnership in 2007. In 2010, PCP approached IWDA to support their rural project 'Supporting women and young people to build sustainable livelihoods in multiethnic communities in Fiji'. This project is an important part of PCP's Community Peace and Human Security Programme.

The Community Profile information collected and published by PCP is a valuable development publication. It brings visibility and voice to the priorities of rural women in Vanua Levu and their communities. These demographic profiles provide up to date and culturally specific information about economic, social, political, environmental, personal and food security needs from the community perspective.

The information you are about to read was collected by the PCP North office team, through a series of community workshops. PCP used peacebuilding methodologies to generate dialogue and increase the confidence for exchange between the women in the groups. This enabled rural women of ethnic diversity to work together and determine solutions for a safe and secure future.

On behalf of IWDA, I warmly congratulate PCP for raising the voices and hearts of these women through their great work with Northern communities in Fiji.

Joanna Hayter,
Executive Director,
International Women's Development Agency

Introduction

The Pacific Centre for Peacebuilding (PCP) works with peacebuilders in the Pacific to transform, reduce and prevent conflict. Our vision is to create a just, peaceful and sustainable Pacific and actively promote gender justice through inclusive decision-making, empowerment and participation.

Founded in 2007, PCP has an office in Suva and Labasa with a staff of 12 based in Suva and 4 based in Labasa (refer to last page for organisational structure). Since its inception, PCP has been working tirelessly at the micro, meso and macro levels in Fiji and does this via the following programmes and projects:

1. Women and Youth Sustainable Livelihoods Programme – North Project

Work in the area of: Sustainable Livelihoods and Conflict Resolution

Target group: Women's and youth groups

Objectives of the programme: To promote group decision-making processes that are sensitive to gender and cultural differences, and enable equal representation and participation of multiethnic women in their community's development, as well as the equal distribution of development benefits across ethnicities. To improve women's knowledge and skills on ways to analyse and resolve conflict situations that arise in their communities. To continue to assist women's groups to identify and undertake activities that can contribute to their families and community's livelihoods, food security and economic security.

2. Leading Transitions: Strengthening the Capacities Of Local Community Leaders and Enhancing the Skills Set of Community Based Organisations – North Project

Work in the area of: Good governance, leadership, mediation, conflict resolution, effective communication and sustainable livelihoods

Target group: 16 communities in Vanua Levu: Seaqaqa (4), Bua (4), Cakaudrove (4), and Labasa (4)

Objectives of the programme: Build greater social cohesion through enhancing skills in dialogue, community participative planning, and leadership for good governance and conflict resolution, thus enabling communities to contribute more effectively to the peaceful conciliation of stakeholder interests and enhance the prospects for equal participation of men and women in social, economic and political life.

3. Women's Peacebuilding Leadership Programme – Regional Project

Work in the area of: Conflict analysis, prevention and transformation, trauma healing.

Target group: 20 regional women (aged between 25 and 40) who have worked in the area of peacebuilding in Autonomous Region of Bougainville, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomons Islands and West Papua undertake a three year Graduate Certificate programme in collaboration with the Center for Justice and Peace Building (CJP) in Eastern Mennonite University (EMU) in the USA. The programme targets women peace building practitioners in these countries who are recognised in their community as possessing leadership potential and dedication to their community.

Objectives of the programme: 20 Pacific women lead the design, development, and implementation of peacebuilding projects and processes at community, national and regional levels. The programme will inculcate knowledge of peacebuilding theory and practical skills in the learners and provide guiding frameworks, theories, and other peace and conflict management tools to enhance their peacebuilding efforts within the Pacific.

4. Restorative Justice

Work in the area of: Restorative Justice

Target group: Fiji Correctional Services Rehabilitation Team, Fiji Police Force, prison inmates, survivors and their communities

Objectives of the programme: To educate officers on restorative justice concept and processes and to engage them in creating restorative justice awareness for inmates. To educate and encourage survivors on the importance of meeting offenders through a restorative justice dialogue process. To educate survivors and offenders families and communities on restorative justice processes. To select and train key community leaders from survivors and offenders communities to provide ongoing support for victims and those affected by violence

5. Government and CSO Dialogues

Work in the area of: Public participation, constitutional development, dialogue, negotiation and mediation

Target group: Senior government officials, key civil society leaders (includes a range of sectors such as political parties, trade unions, human rights and faith-based organisations).

Objectives of the programme: To create spaces for public participation and improve popular consultation processes. Additionally, to train our target groups to better understand the importance of dialogue.

In 2007, PCP undertook a project in Vanua Levu in the communities of *Bulileka*, *Naleba*, *Vunicuicui* and *Vunimoli*, to empower multiracial and multicultural women's groups to claim a stake in the decision-making process for their communities. Funded initially by the AusAID NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP), the project is ongoing with assistance from the International Development Agency, from 2012 onwards.

Using peacebuilding framework and methodologies, PCP has assisted these communities in identifying their needs and actively developing solutions to address their self determined economic, health, food, environmental, community, political and personal security concerns. Whilst women and young people are marginalised economically and socially in these communities, through the success of this project they have demonstrated that they are strong peacebuilders and active agents of change.

An evaluation undertaken by the International Women's Development Agency concluded that the project progressed all objectives and was most successful in achieving women's empowerment outcomes. Women shared many positive stories of change including: increased opportunities and confidence to speak English, to speak in public and to engage with government. These changes signified increased agency to participate in public life, including in community leadership roles. Women also cited improved understanding and trust with women of different ethnicities leading to improved relations and increased knowledge and skills as significant changes. Women were supported with activities to improve their livelihoods, however these have not yet resulted in a sustainable income or food security for the women. There were significant changes in PCP staff's understanding of peace and community development through this project. PCP staff also improved their own understanding of ethnicities and cultures.

The project progressed gender equality between women and men by: empowering women to participate in public life; enabling women access to resources and development benefits; and increasing men's respect and support for women's activities. Men's support was mainly provided within their traditional gendered roles, such as proving physical labour. The project also began to change men's traditional thinking about women by seeing women in leadership roles and as active agents of change.

Community Profiles





Bulileka

Population Demography

Total Population	4450
-------------------------	------

Population by Ethnicity

I-Taukei	928
----------	-----

Indo-Fijians	3474
--------------	------

Rotumans	2
----------	---

Other ethnicities	46
-------------------	----

Note: There no female/male break-down for this community

Population by Village or District

Dreketilailai Village	614
-----------------------	-----

Boubale	493
---------	-----

Urata	277
-------	-----

Anuve	231
-------	-----

Bulileka Village	464
------------------	-----

Vitadra	740
---------	-----

Bangladesh	309
------------	-----

Boca Loop	373
-----------	-----

Bulileka Lowcost	686
------------------	-----

Bulileka Hart	263
---------------	-----

Source: Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics

Geographical background

Located approximately 12 kilometres from Labasa Town is Bulileka, an area whose residents derive their income mainly from employment in Labasa Town and by producing and selling handicraft. The multiracial community consists of villages and settlements where the I-Taukei Land Trust Board manages land leases. The area has relatively better infrastructure (such as roads) and access to services (hospital and school) than other communities in Vanua Levu. Residents are especially proud of the schools in the area - Boubale Primary School, Bulileka Primary and Bulileka College – as generations of people in the villages and settlements have been educated there.

Women's groups

Tosovata Women's Club

Although founded in 2005, the Tosovata Women's Club was re-established in 2010 and currently has 13 members – all are I-Taukei and while all follow Christianity, majority come from the Methodist denomination. All members are married and two are below the age of 30. The club has contributed to the upgrading of the community hall and are looking to expand the space. There are also plans to commence a beehive income generation project with support from the Integrated Human Resources Development Programme (IHRDP).

While undertaking community outreach work in Fiji's constitution-making process in 2012, PCP was approached by the Club to develop their capacity in seeking funding for projects. As a result of the collaboration and mentoring by PCP, members of the Club were able to extend their network to government funding and development agencies to allow for capacity building and empowerment training¹.

Bulileka Young Mother's Club (previously Bulileka Mother's Club)

The Bulileka Young Mother's Club is a branch of the Bulileka Mother's Club and looks after the welfare of young single mothers in the community. PCP started working with this group in 2009 (till 2012) as a focus group for peacebuilding and conflict analysis capacity building activities. After conducting a Needs Assessment, PCP determined that the community faced economic security issues and assisted the Club in becoming part of the Northern Development Programme (NDP). Like the Tosovata Women's Club, members of this club also participated in NDP's Business Development Training where they learnt how to develop business plans and secure funding for projects. As a result of this training, club member's Lusiana Matei and Rufina Ratulele, now successfully run a market business selling local produce and a dalo farming business in Bua, respectively².

Priority areas of concern for the group

Some self-determined priority areas of concern that remain for members of the Tosovata Women's Club include upgrading and expanding the community hall (the roof of which is leaking) as it is too small for the growing number of people in the village. They are also looking to install some permanent pathways in the village so children and the elderly can walk around freely and safely when it rains. The Club also plans to ask for a grant from Integrated Human Resource Development Programme (IHRDP) to set up beehives for making honey. Any income generation project will complement current fundraising to purchase raw materials for the expansion.

1 In April 2013 the Tosovata Women's Club participated in the Northern Development Programme Business Development Training. Men and other young people of the village were also invited to the training at the Bulileka Village Hall.

2 After the death of the Club's President, the Club faced some administrative issues and now operate run as the Bulileka Young Mother's Club.

Naleba

Population Demography

Total Population	573
Population by Ethnicity	
I-Taukei	86
Indo-Fijians	487
Population by Gender	
Female	280
Male	293

Population by Village or District

Sector 16	314
Sector 17	103
Sector 18	156

Source: Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics, 2007 Census

Geographical background

Approximately 25 kilometres from Labasa Town is the community of Naleba. With the main source of income derived from sugarcane farming, the residents in this community are mainly Indo-Fijians. Traditionally governed by the Village of Mataniwai, Naleba was divided in three sections under the Colonial Sugar Refinery system: Sector 16, Sector 17 and Sector 19. Sector 16 is populated by Indo-Fijians while the two sectors have a multiracial population. Residents living in this area have limited access to water and face poor road conditions.

Women's groups

Naleba Multiracial Women's Forum

Founded in 2010, the Naleba Multiracial Women's Forum has 15 active members (from the initial 35); six of who are I-Taukei and nine, Indo-Fijian – six members from the 15 are also

married. The objective of the Forum is to foster and strengthen ethnic relationships and help reduce economic hardships in the community.

Naleba's journey with PCP started when PCP undertook a Needs Assessment that assisted the women in identifying key issues in the community. This assessment became the basis of the community dialogue that PCP hosted, involving government authorities like the Ministry for Works and Energy and Integrated Human Resources Development Programme (IHRDP) from the Commissioner Northern's Office. The dialogue assisted the women as well as the community at large to increase their network and build their capacity in approaching government officials to identify, prioritise and solve key issues.

“For some of us, we feel like we are grandmothers and we are at the end of life. She [former PCP North Manager] came and she shook us up. She came and she encouraged us to look after our livelihood, our health and economic security. Now we go to the government offices to talk to them,” said the President of Naleba Multiracial Women’s Forum.

For Indo-Fijian women, being involved in activities outside of the home was significant, because they face more restrictions in their mobility.

“In the Indo-Fijian culture, they [women] can’t come and sit and talk – that is their culture; only the men. But now that this group is [sic] started Indo-Fijian women are allowed to attend; and the women are supported by their husbands. It’s like they’re renewed,” she shared.

With PCP’s assistance, the women of Naleba also increased their network with other organisations like femLINKPACIFIC³ through whom the women were able to participate in their community suitcase radio. The women of Naleba also built their capacity through trainings, which helped them to venture into small income generating projects. As a result, the Naleba Multiracial Women’s Forum was able to seek around \$16,250.00 in funding from IHRDP for their poultry farm project. Of this amount around \$13,450.00 was given to the group in 2010 for the construction of the poultry farm and \$2,800.00 was given later for the egg selling extension. The project was fully funded by the Government of Fiji but has operated under a Memorandum of Understanding since June 2010 for the farm to meet an operational scale in the period of time. Unfortunately the farm is not operational at the moment due to an unanticipated increase in operational cost, which proved to be unsustainable.

Priority areas of concern for the group

Apart from economic constraints, poor infrastructure is an issue of great concern for the people of Naleba. Water in the community is supplied through a borehole constructed by the Government of Fiji. This was seen to resolve water woes of the community that had continued for over twenty years but the borehole has serious sanitation issues which needs to be resolved.

3 femLINKPACIFIC was established in September 2000 and is registered under the Charitable Trust Act in Fiji. The overarching focus of femLINKPACIFIC’s range of community media initiatives is “women speaking to women for peace”, a direct link with the women’s peace initiatives during the May 2000 crisis, in particular the Blue Ribbon Peace Vigil, where femLINKPACIFIC was “born”. The overarching development objective of femLINKPACIFIC’s work is to address the imbalances caused by the traditional decision-making structures, which impede women and young women’s effective participation, especially from the rural population and the poor, to communicate openly on common matters. By developing and implementing a range of women’s media initiatives, such as taking a small mobile radio unit out to women and the communities, femLINKPACIFIC offers a “safe space” to articulate and exchange their viewpoints.

Vunicuicui

Population Demography	
Total Population	1206
Population by Ethnicity	
I-Taukei	234
Indo-Fijians	972
Population by Gender	
Female	620
Male	586

Population by Village or District	
Ulibau District School	16
Ulibau	17
Vuniyalayala	435
Nakorowiri	70
Vunicuicui	515
Ranivau	8
Nabunikavula	91
Dramea	13
Nakavisa	7
Waikisi	4
Nasoni	30

Source: Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics

Geographical background

Located some 15 kilometres from Labasa Town is Vunicuicui, home to four I-Taukei villages: Korowai, Navunikabula, Wakisi and Dramea, as well as four settlements predominantly occupied by Indo-Fijians: Vuniyalayala, Tadravula, Nasoni and Central Vunicuicui.

The town of Labasa is the nearest market for Vunicuicui residents to buy and sell produce. Although, there are some services available within the community, the people need to commute to town to access some essential services such as the Labasa Divisional Hospital; private practitioners are also only available in the town area. Scholars also need to travel outside of Vunicuicui for higher education since there are only two primary schools in the area - Uluibau District School and Vunicuicui Indian School. For daily needs and household items people need to go to Labasa Town but there are convenience stores in the area. Since Labasa Town is still a lifeline for Vunicuicui, residents rely heavily on the bus system as most of the residents do not own vehicles and find taxis/hired vehicles expensive. The bus system has been increasingly unreliable due to the deteriorating road condition. Despite these challenges, people still commute to town for survival.

Some residents of Vunicuicui have sought employment in town but farming remains the main source of income for the residents. Sugar cane, root crop, vegetable, dairy, bee and yaqona farming is undertaken in the area. Land lease expiry has hindered the capacity of production but people have found alternative crops to grow that require less land area than sugar cane farming. The increasing cost of living has made living in the region a challenge. For some, migration has been the answer to a better lifestyle but for others the vast land area and the river (fishing) has provided an alternative form of income.

Women's groups

Vunicuicui Multiracial Women's Forum

Founded in 2010, the Vunicuicui Multiracial Women's Forum has 13 active members; seven of who are I-Taukei and six, Indo-Fijian – all members are married. As a result of this Forum, a good relationship has been fostered between residents from the I-Taukei and Indo-Fijian community. The Forum was formed by the women, none of who were in formal/paid employment, as an avenue to increase their economic security. Majority of their spouses were cane farmers and labourers with low income and low job security.

With no knowledge and technical skills on how to set up a micro-enterprise, the initiative never took off until some of the members met with staff from PCP and femLINKPACIFIC at a gathering, a year later. The Forum was put in touch with the Northern Development Programme and 25 women (some of whom were not part of the Forum) undertook a New Business Creation Course. PCP's former Manager North was instrumental in assisting the women with their proposal seeking a grant to start a cooperative dairy shop and a seed bank.

The cooperative shop was financed through the National Centre for Small and Micro Enterprises Development: Northern Development Programme, which provides equity assistance through grants to enterprises to improve the livelihoods of the people of the Northern Division. The grant was on a 60/40 basis whereby the community paid 40% of the grant amount through borrowed funds from the Fiji Development Bank.

The motivation to start a shop stemmed from the need to provide food security through easy access to grocery shopping for rural women, men and children in Vunicuicui and surrounding areas especially during flooding when it is impossible to access stores in Labasa Town. In the future, this income generating mechanism for the multicultural women's group has the potential to improve the standard of life and their families in this

economically challenged rural community (Note: the shop is not yet yielding profit as they are still repaying the loan).

In addition to the cooperative shop, the Vunicuicui Multicultural Women's Forum, with the support from PCP North office and funding from Canada Fund, managed to construct one of the first rural seed banks in the North. The seed bank was a strategic move to ensure food security is maintained in this rural community at all times. It will provide security to save and supply seeds during times when seeds are scarce and food supply is reduced and threatened. The seed bank was given seeds by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC). SPC also helped the community harvest a new variety of *kumala* in Vanua Levu that was the first of its kind. The Vunicuicui Multiracial Women's Group used their increased negotiation and communication skills to speak to government officials and to secure land from women landowners to house the seed bank.

"We were frightened to enter any of the [government] offices; we thought these men were big men, not that they were just humans. She [the former PCP North Manager] taught us that we are so strong and can talk. Before we would just hide in the home," said the Vice President of Vunicuicui Multiracial Women's Forum.

Speaking English, going to government offices and speaking in public signify, women's increased agency to participate in public life.

For the Vice President of Vunicuicui Multiracial Women's Forum, her involvement in the project (which has also led to other opportunities) has contributed to her increased in knowledge, skills and confidence and respect from the community to be able to take on significant leadership roles in the community. She is now the community spokesperson responsible for advocating to the government to provide electricity to the village.

"I am a good leader, but I want to go up. One day in the future I want to be a MP. Not for the community, but for Fiji. First I must be a good leader for my multiracial group," she shared.

For other women, whilst they did not necessarily become community leaders, the experience of being in a group is an empowering one because it enables them to get out of the home, connect with other women, share experiences and take on leadership roles within the group.

Women in multiethnic groups cited changes in increased understanding of I-Taukei and/or Indo-Fijians and of the commonalities between people, leading to improved relationships between women in the community. Speaking English was also significant here because it meant the women could better communicate with each other.

“Now we learn each other’s way of life, customs, cooking, language, how to manage money. When we’re not in the group we don’t mix. And there is hate. Now we see people and say bula”.

Priority areas of concern for the group

The Vunicuicui Multicultural Women’s Forum has faced many challenges to keep the cooperative shop and the seed bank running. Increase in the cost of business license and competition from other communal shops have been detrimental to sales. The seed bank also suffered damage in a hurricane and is no longer functioning as it awaits repair.

Case study: Nirmala Sharma - PCP Project Participant

Nirmala Sharma has been a resident of Vunicuicui since marriage in 1993 and still resides there. She was born and raised in a farming community of Bua and had limited access to educational facilities. After finishing secondary school she married Deo Sharan Sharma whose family has resided in Vunicuicui for generations.

Since she first arrived in Vunicuicui, she has seen a lot of changes and challenges in the area. She remembers getting married in a cane-farming family who now barely have any land left to farm on. This rural community has battled many hardships influenced by environmental, economic or political factors. According to her, economic security and infrastructural development is priority for the community. The loss of fertile soil to land lease expiry has rapidly decreased the community’s capacity to generate income to support the needs and wants of the people. She, like most women in the community, have adapted new ways of generating income like bee and vegetable farming whilst her husband



has found employment in Labasa Town. Nirmala, as the secretary of a local religious group has fought a long and hard battle to have electricity supply in her area Nasoni in Vunivicui. She acknowledged organisations like PCP for empowering women and directing them towards economic prosperity, as well building their capacity to participate in decision-making processes.

Programmes initiated by PCP have aided Nirmala to effectively increase her knowledge base and network to find the confidence in approaching local authorities. She confided that her once existent fear of dialoguing with officials has now diminished:

“I used to be very frightened of saying anything, to talk to people in the offices but now I know that I have to speak, it has to start from somewhere. PCP empowered me to become a social worker.”

Through PCP’s programmes in the North, Nirmala now also collaborates with other organisations like femLINKPACIFIC and the Fiji Women’s Rights Movement (FWRM). She has been a part of their community suitcase radio and the national Fiji Women’s Forum (short for Fiji Consultation on Women’s Participation in National Democratic Processes), respectively.

The Fiji Women’s Rights Movement (FWRM)⁴ has worked with Nirmala since 2010, after they had met her through this project. The FWRM team commended Nirmala’s efficiency in identifying women to take part in FWRM’s many training/workshops when the team comes to Vanua Levu. FWRM Human Rights Training Officer Neomai Maravuakula shared “we just have to tell Nirmala who our target audience is and she manages to get the people”. In 2012, Nirmala was also part of the second Fiji Women’s Forum as a femLINKPACIFIC nominee to participate in the forum as a community leader who had strategies active on the ground in regards to the constitution-making and election civic education process.

During the 2012/2013 constitution-making process, Nirmala Sharma was one of the few Indo-Fijian women who made an individual verbal submission to the

4 The Fiji Women’s Rights Movement is a multiethnic and multicultural nongovernmental organisation committed to removing discrimination against women through institutional reforms and attitudinal changes. Our vision is for the women of Fiji to be free from all forms of discrimination, have equal access to opportunities and to live in a healthy environment where the principles of feminism, democracy, good governance, multiculturalism and human rights prevail.

Constitution Commission at the Labasa Civic Centre. The FWRM team present at the submission venue commended her “brilliant public-speaking and analytical skills”.

With the peacebuilding skills that Pacific Centre for Peacebuilding has shared with Nirmala Sharma and her group, she has not only been able to articulate their views outside but within their own community elders and affectively dialogue and negotiate with them.

Indo-Fijian women in Fiji are deemed to be less actively involved in communal development but the multiracial women’s group in Vunicuicui is an exception since Indo-Fijian women have influence in the group. This change has been brought about by the presence of Nirmala as an office-bearer within the group. The women take more interest in the group since they believe their ethnic group is represented. Nirmala’s involvement in the group has also increased her network amongst the I-Taukei members of the community.

A notable achievement of Nirmala Sharma is the push to construct the Vunicuicui Multiracial Women’s Forum Co-operative Shop on their family land. As a daughter-in-law in a traditional Indo-Fijian family, she has overcome all odds in convincing her in-laws to permit the group to setup the co-operative shop on their land. The shop has provided the women of this group with an opportunity to generate much needed income.

Her dream is to have electricity in her community. Nirmala acknowledged PCP for hosting dialogues with key stakeholders in the community that brought representatives of agencies to the area and provided assistance to her in the electricity project. She hopes to have electricity in Nasoni by the end of 2013 through the Government’s Northern Development Programme in the 2013 Budget. She believes that consistent electricity supply will improve the living standards of households in Nasoni. She also stated that due to lack of electricity the shop has not been able to sell frozen goods, thus losing out to competing shops in the area.

Nirmala Sharma of Nasoni settlement in Vunicuicui, Labasa is a remarkable example of an empowered woman leader who has become an influential figure in her local community. It is seldom that any rural Indo-Fijian woman with limited education capacity has established herself as a community leader. However, through social empowerment and development opportunities, this barrier can be overcome.

Vunimoli

Population Demography

Total Population	336
Population by Ethnicity	
I-Taukei	76
Indo-Fijians	254
Population by Gender	
Female	151
Male	185

Population by Village or District

Vunimoli Village	43
Vunimoli Settlement	293

Source: Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics, 2007 Census

Geographical background

Located approximately 15 kilometres from Labasa Town is Vunimoli, where sources of income for the multiracial community lie in sugarcane farming, cash crop, fishing, weaving and through sales of produce in the Labasa market. A small population in Vunimoli has also found employment in Labasa Town. Vunimoli has three schools - Korotari Primary School, Vunimoli Primary School and Vunimoli Secondary School. There is regular bus service in the area, which the people depend on to access essentials services in Labasa Town. Another key feature of the community is the Korotari River, which people use for fishing and sand & gravel extraction.

Women's groups

Vunimoli Arya Mahila Mandhal

Vunimoli Arya Mahila Mandhal is a religious women's organisation that was founded in 2006 under the Vanua Levu Arya Mahila Mandhal, the governing Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of Fiji's Women's Wing in Vanua Levu. It currently has 12 Indo-Fijian members, all over the age of 30. The Mandhal exists in a male dominated community society where male members of the Vunimoli Arya Samaj undertake decisions and communal projects.

The Mandhal and PCP started working together in 2009 and through peacebuilding methodologies, PCP assisted the women in identifying and prioritising the needs of the community. One of these needs included the urgent upgrading of kitchen facilities and the installation of a water tank at the community temple.

Situated in a low-lying area near the Korotari River, Vunimoli has a history of flooding which

drives many of the residents to seek refuge on higher grounds. The Vunimoli Arya Temple was then constructed away from the flood prone area to cater for residents seeking shelter. There was however, no kitchen or provisions for water supply at the temple/evacuation centre. With PCP's assistance, women from the Vunimoli Arya Mahila Mandhal were able to seek funding from Canada Fund to construct a kitchen and install a water tank in the temple. Although, there has been no major flooding since 2009, the people of Vunimoli are rest assured that they now have a proper evacuation centre.

Women part of the Mandhal felt proud that they were able to collectively contribute to the community, particularly when people from other communities came to visit their temple.

"Our environment of the temple has changed with the kitchen and the tank. We are really proud of ourselves. We have achieved something," shared a group member for the Vunimoli Mahila Arya Mandhal.

Priority areas of concern for the group

Residents of Vunimoli have been faced with water woes for decades since the government water supply did not cater for the whole area. As a community initiative, a catchment and reservoir was built to supply water to homes in the settlement. The community funded the project and each year residents pay a sub that contributes to the maintenance of the catchment, reservoir and pipes.

This issue took a long time to resolve as the landowners were not in agreement of pipes crossing their land and were seeking fees/charges the community was unable to afford. Through PCP's engagement and conflict transformation tools, both the landowners and tenants were able to come to a mutually beneficial resolution and the pipes were installed. Since access to water has been an ongoing concern in the community, the Vunimoli Arya Mahila Mandhal has prioritised the issue.

The Mandhal also plans to start a virgin coconut oil enterprise and has applied to another civil society organisation for grant funding.

"After the kitchen, the members were motivated to fundraise for other things and held a small bazaar. They are holding a soccer tournament this Saturday – the soccer players pay a certain amount to participate in the tournament. The women can also sell things at the soccer match – they make sweets etc," shared the President of the Vunimoli Mahila Arya Mandhal.

Conclusion

For the past five years PCP provided ongoing peacebuilding and conflict resolution informal training/sharing and support to the groups to be able to build trust between each other and effectively work together. Supporting women's groups was also an effective means of empowering women as women developed confidence through their involvement in the groups.

The approach PCP used to engage with communities was very empowering. PCP facilitated women to analyse, develop and voice their needs and interests through needs analysis, development of plans, and linking the women with regular femLINKPACIFIC consultations. The project also provided women with opportunities to acquire skills, such as finance and business development skills, by linking them with government programmes.

The communities highly appreciated the responsiveness of the former PCP North Project Manager in times of need. The amount of time she spent in communities and the ongoing support provided was very much appreciated by the women, and contributed to a great deal of trust, respect and regard for her. The strong relationship with the community and ongoing meetings and support provided were important in providing motivation, encouragement, building confidence and resolving conflicts in the groups as they arose, and helped progress the objectives.

"The project was important, because it was a point of interaction where the women could get together and talk," said Former PCP North Manager Adi Vasu Chute.

In 2013 the implementation of the project will undergo a restructure based on the recommendations on the evaluation conducted by the International Women's Development Agency in 2013 by Kristy Nowland and Georgia Ride.

PCP Organisational Structure



