

# Locally-owned businesses on customary land in the South Pacific: Key success factors



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# Outline

- The Land Has Eyes and Teeth project
- Pacific-driven development & standards of excellence
- Moving beyond narratives of customary land as a barrier to economic development
- Case studies from Samoa
- Case studies from Fiji
- Findings regarding strategies for success
- Conclusions

# “The Land Has Eyes and Teeth” project

- Rejects the notion that land can be defined simply as an economic asset
- Supports a holistic understanding of land recognising cultural, social and spiritual elements (Batibasaga et al., 1999; Nabobo-Baba, 2006; Tuwere, 2002).
- Values the potential of indigenous businesses developed on customary land as a means to self-determined development

Over 80% of the total land area of 7 Pacific Island countries is under customary tenure

People of the Pacific have an ‘intense attachment to land’ (Curry, Koczberski, & Connell, 2012b, p. 116).



# “The Land Has Eyes and Teeth” project

- This Rotuman expression asserts that *vanua* is a living being that watches (with its eyes) and manifests physically through illness, accident and even death (it has teeth)
- It points to people’s profound understanding of the power of the land and its *mana*, which demands respect from all, from foreign investors through to indigenous entrepreneurs (Huffer & Qalo, 2004; Tuwere, 2002).



**The aim of our project** is to explain how communities across the Pacific have been able to establish distinctive models of economic engagement that allow them to pursue successful business development while retaining control over their customary land and upholding community processes and values.



# Pacific-driven development & standards of excellence



**Epeli Hau'ofa**

These locally defined standards of excellence, we argue, include different – but effective – ways of doing business on customary land.

*We should not be defined by the smallness of our islands, but by the greatness of our oceans.*

*We are the sea, we are the ocean.*

*Oceania is us.*

*We must wake up to this ancient truth and together use it to overturn all hegemonic views that aim ultimately to confine us again, physically and psychologically.*

*It is time to create things for ourselves, to create established standards of excellence that matches those of our ancestors.*

# Pacific-driven development & standards of excellence

In 2017, Samoan Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele delivered a speech at the UN Oceans Conference in New York titled “Our Values and Identity as Stewards of the World’s Largest Oceanic Continent.”

Through the Pacific Forum, leaders have endorsed this idea under the banner of a ‘Blue Pacific’:

*Blue Pacific seeks to re-capture the collective potential of the region’s shared stewardship of the Pacific Ocean based on an explicit recognition of its shared “ocean identity”, “ocean geography”, and “ocean resources”...*

*Forum Leaders recognise the Blue Pacific as being about all Pacific peoples, who recognise their needs and potential, who plan and own their development agenda, and who can act collectively for the good of all, rather than a few.*



# What drives locally-owned SMEs in the Pacific?

- **Cultural values** inform business practices and goals of indigenous businesses in our region (Harmsworth, 2005; Kahui & Richards, 2014; Leokana 2014; Lertzman & Vredenburg, 2005; Spiller et al., 2011a).
- **Collectivist approaches** – not individualism or achievement - were the norm for 700 Pacific Island entrepreneurs (Saffu, 2003)
- **Economic wellbeing** regarded as a means to fulfilling broader spiritual, cultural, social and environmental notions of wellbeing (Harmsworth, 2005)



# “The Land Has Eyes and Teeth” project

- Customary practices around land are said to ‘constrain’ economic development and impair investments in the Pacific (Gosarevski, Hughes, & Windybank, 2004; Hughes, 2003; Lea & Curtin, 2011; Prasad & Tisdell, 1996).
- A lack of land ownership by individual freehold title is seen as hindering long-term planning, creating conflict, and preventing banks from offering loans to indigenous entrepreneurs (Duncan, 2008)

Customary land is ‘*anachronistic in modern economies*’ (Jayaraman, 1999, p.9).



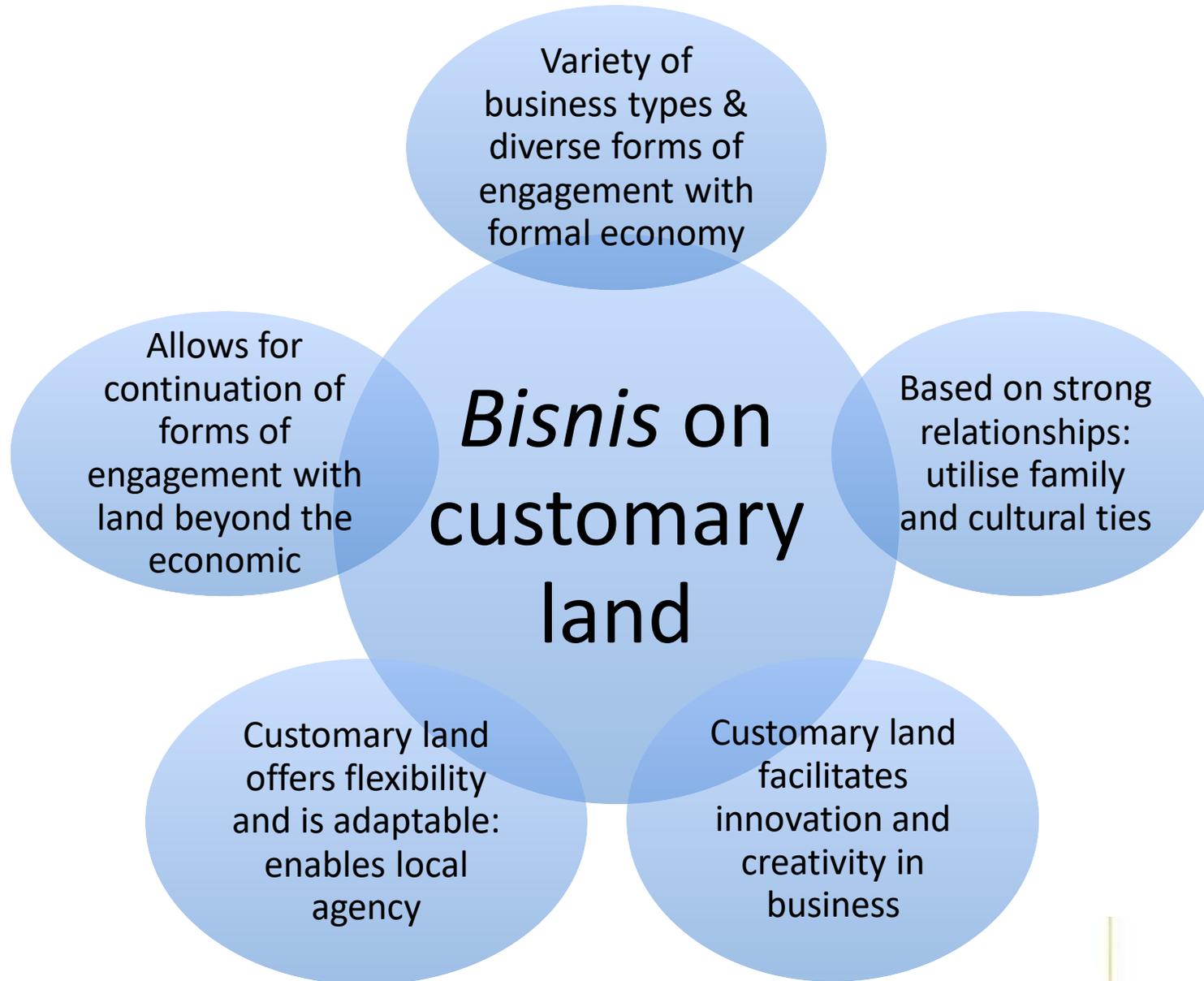
*‘...within the island Pacific  
there is little sign that **culture**,  
in whatever form, is seen as a  
resource but much more that  
it is seen as **a brake on  
hopeful structures of  
development**’*

(Curry et al., 2012b, p. 122).

We are seeking to produce a counter-narrative...



# Culture facilitates *bisnis* on customary land



# Case studies from Samoa



- Taufua Beach Fale,
- Lalomanu, **Upolu**
- Faofao Beach Fale, Saleapaga Lepa, **Upolu**
- Va'ai Koko Plantation, **Savai'i**

# Case study 1: Taufua Beach Fales - Samoa



# Case study 2: Faofao Beach Fales



# Case study 3: Savaii Cocoa



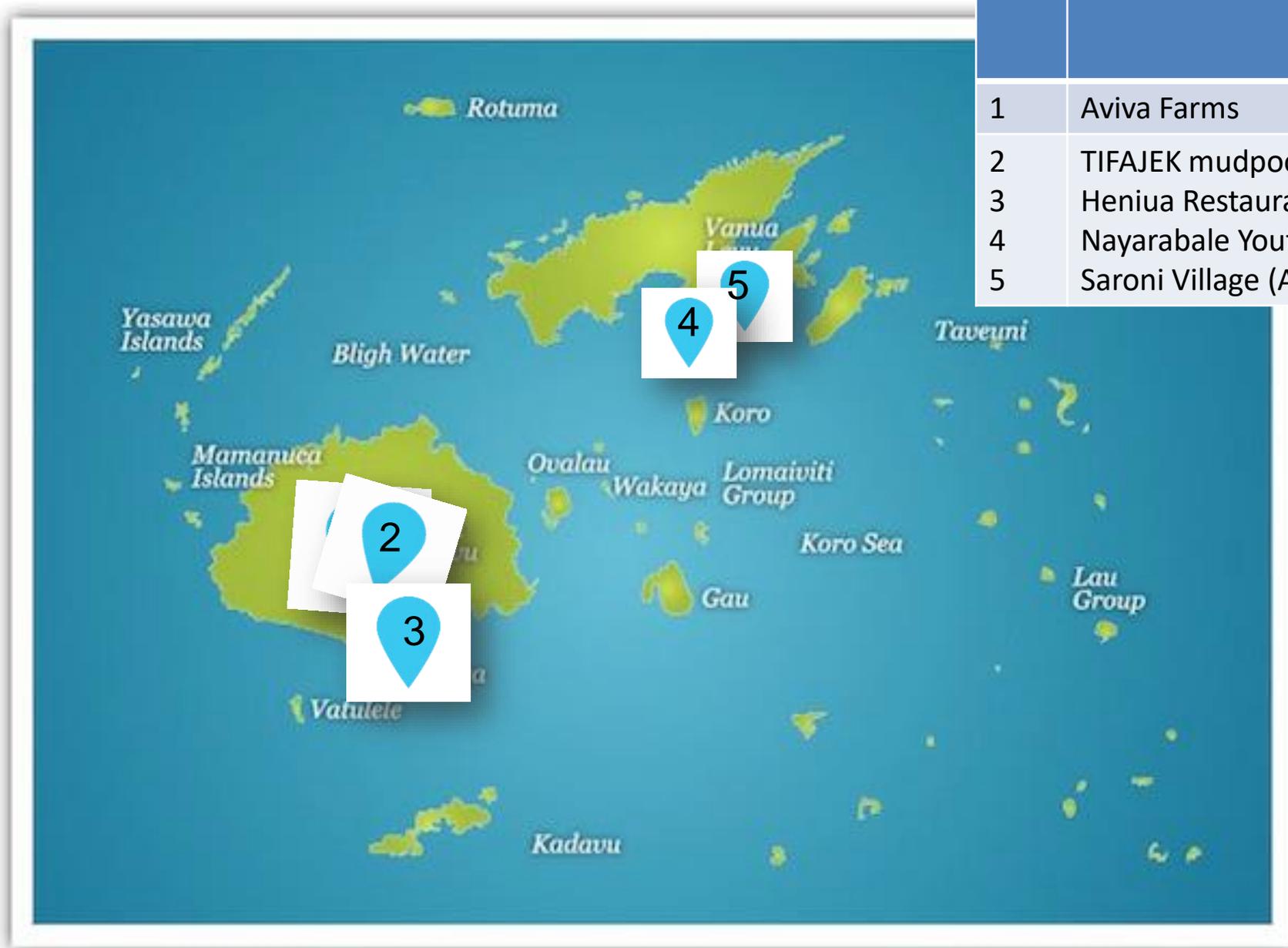
Forever discovering

Te Kunenga  
ki Pūrehuroa



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# Case studies from Fiji



1	Aviva Farms
2	TIFAJEK mudpool & Hotspring
3	Heniuia Restaurant
4	Nayarabale Youth Farm
5	Saroni Village (Action research)

# Nayarabale Youth Farm Work Structure

Week	Activity		
1	Youth farm		
2	Individual farms		
3	Tribal food security Activities		
4	Meetings and visitors, Sociocultural obligation (prescribed by; vanua-cultural, church, government, NGO or any visit from outside the community)		



# Nayarabale Youth Farm



Youths To Learn From Nayarabale



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# How Narayabale inspired development at Saroni:

*“We only know how to grow kava, taro, bananas etc, the crops that we are familiar with”*



# Saroni after 6 months



# TIFAJEK Mudpool & Hotspring





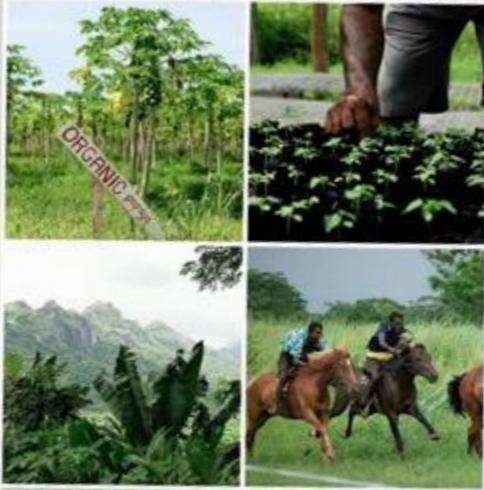
# Heniuia Restaurant

- Employ people from the village. (10 employees)
- They manage to afford family and tokatoka (extended family) related obligations.
- Horse business (Coral coast horse riding) to cover for social obligations.
- Respect for their vanua and family-social embeddedness/ partnership/ relationship with the community.
- General Wellbeing/ quality life.





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# Aviva Farm



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# Case study strategies for success

## 1. Support from chiefs and other leaders

- When establishing a business on customary land “there has to be agreement with the village. You can’t just come in and do your own thing”

Sili Apelu, Taufua Beach Fales, 2017

- “You need to explain the benefits [of your proposed project]. If it will [negatively] affect the land, they’ll be against it.... Unless the benefits flow to the whole community, not just one individual or family, they’ll be against it”

Koloni Vaai, Savaii Cocoa, 2017



# Case study strategies for success

## 2. Being attentive to relationships and spiritual beliefs

- Remaining connected to the landowning community through involvement in and contributions to customary affairs: **“It’s always about the relationship”** Lemauga Hobart Vaai – CEO; Samoa Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- **“We have developed it [the business] in such a way that there is no friction among the villagers...”** Sili Apelu, Taufua Beach Fales, 2017
- **“My village also helps us. We work together. Eg if some people come and steal something from my business, the village solves the problem” [matais will hold a meeting and work out what to do]** Koroseta Legalo, Faofao Beach Fales, 2017
- Spirituality and association with the mana of the ‘Vanua’ – a particular fish showed up when the researcher arrived; a good omen



*“It’s not about accumulating money. It’s about sharing. It’s a Christian principle but you have to know how to do it so the business doesn’t go into the ground”*

Sili Apelu, Taufua Beach Fales, 2017



# Case study strategies for success

## 3. Contributing to collective wellbeing



“There’s a saying in Samoa – because there’s sometimes jealousy – if you go up, you’ll need to take others with you” ... “The people that benefit are right here in the community – money circulates locally and the wealth is shared”

Koloni Vaai, Savaii Cocoa, 2017

*“I’m now understanding after years of working with my parents, what they wanted... It’s not really about material wealth, it’s about the wellbeing of the whole village” ... “The ultimate objective that we’ve inherited from our parents is that we need to help the villagers prosper”*

(Lumepa Apelu Taufua Beach Fales, 2017)

- Attending to local wellbeing also means ensuring that local people can enjoy what the business has to offer too, as appropriate e.g. Tifajek Hot Pools



# Case study strategies for success

## 4. Separation of customary and business finances

- managing a degree of separation (social and/or geographic) for the business from the social and cultural obligations and demands made on it and the owner(s)
- managing finances by having a specified aspect of the business through which contributions to the church, community and school are made



# Case study strategies for success

## 5. Informal business networks

- building informal networks with other indigenous-owned businesses to share knowledge, advice and labour.



# Na magimagi kaukauwa (*The strength of the coconut sinnet*)



# Case study strategies for success

## 6. Solid business skills and knowledge

- diversification of business activities
- access to support from NGOs and others E.g. SBEC; WIBDI; Coconut Cluster, Chamber of Commerce e.g.
  - ✓ business plans
  - ✓ improved agricultural techniques
  - ✓ certification e.g. organic coconut oil
  - ✓ product development e.g. raw materials into cosmetics
  - ✓ marketing – outreach to foreign markets

*“Sometimes it’s hard to survive during low season – some family overseas help with remittances. Brothers work on our plantation and can still earn from that even if beach fale business is down”*

Koroseta Legalo, Faofao Beach Fales, 2017

*“It’s a viable business. It doesn’t make huge profits but it makes enough to sustain itself”*

Lumepa Apelu, Taufua Beach Fales, 2017



# Case study strategies for success

## 7. Being true to their own vision & staying in control

- doing business at a pace and scale that works for them
- resisting external pressures to change

Post-tsunami Taufua Beach Fales resisted going more upmarket. Why?

*“Because [then we wouldn’t] have the personnel we can employ locally...it’s better to nurture the people locally”*

Sili Apelu, Taufua Beach Fales, 2017



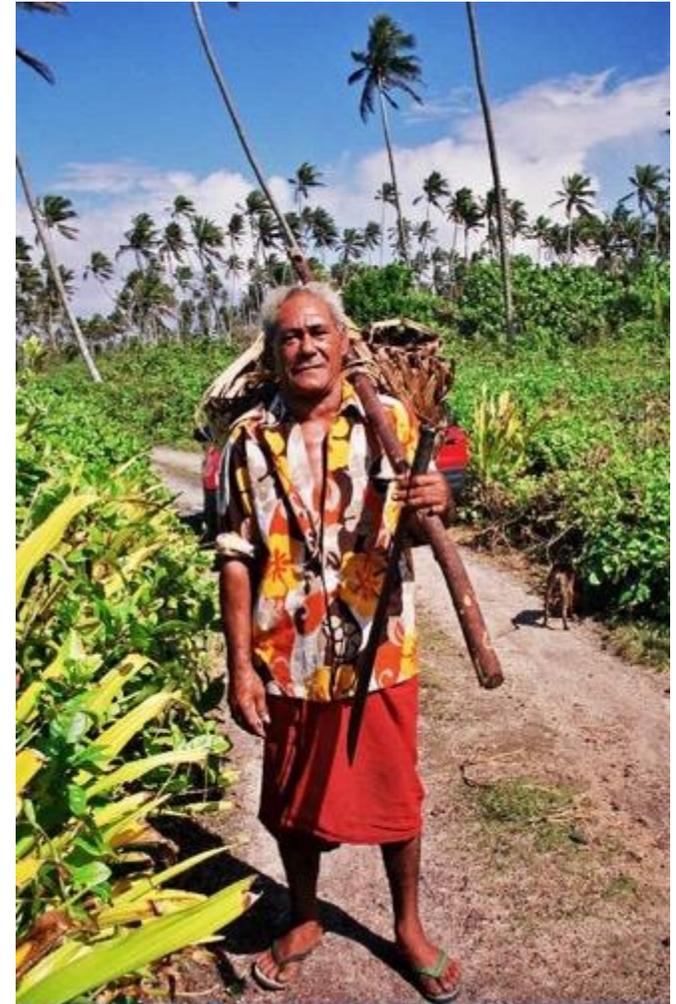
# Findings

- Social and cultural aspects of business development on customary land are central to whether the business succeeds – not just economically, but in terms of being respected and appreciated by the wider family and community.
- Surrendering or transacting away land for short-term gain certainly does not necessarily produce sustainable forms of business, development, or relief from poverty, in the way that these successful indigenous entrepreneurs have.



# Conclusions

- Pacific people's economic enterprises and their particular forms of connection to land **should not be defined as 'unproductive'** when they produce food and cash to help meet their needs.
- They **should not be defined as inefficient** when they enable people to meet multiple obligations, nourishing people physically, collectively, socially, culturally and spiritually.
- The creativity and strengths of indigenous businesspeople on their customary land needs to be recognised, appreciated, supported, and celebrated as examples of Hau'ofa's **'new standards of Pacific excellence'**.



*”Sa dodonu e na gauna oqo me sa veisau na noda rai, levu e da sa nanumaga me da I taukei ni qele ga ka mate yani yacova ni ra sa mai lewa na qelena I taba tamata tarava. Sa dodonu me da saraica e da na vakayagatakavacava na qele ka vakavure bisinisi kina. Na noda sega ni vakayagataki qelee sa ra levu kina na tamata vutuniyau e ra mai vakayagataka ka da cakacakatale kina me da bobula”.*

*It is time that we change our perspective from just being passive custodians of land and resources and leaving it to the next generation [to decide what is best]. Rather, it is time that we focus on how our land and resources can become business opportunities for further investment. Not using this opportunity lends itself to us becoming slaves [labourers] for foreign investors on our own land.*

Livai Tora, October, 2018

- The rural setting of these case studies of successful, inclusive business is also significant in the face of existing trends towards urban migration and extractive modes of development.
- Against the norms of capitalist, profit-seeking imperatives, these community-based, culturally-embedded businesses are defining a new way forward for holistic and inclusive tourism business practice.



*Customary land has a spirit and a heart – not just eyes and teeth.  
(Fiu Elesara, Samoa )*

How customary land is successfully used, and how we talk about it, offers the potential to reshape understandings of economies and development in the Pacific.



It is necessary to have strong policy frameworks which protect local interests