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# An Exploration of Youth Leadership Models in Fiji

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*Commissioned by the AusAID – Pacific Leadership  
Program (PLP)*

## Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Aims of the Research</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>Literature Review</b> .....	<b>8</b>
Exploring Pacific Leadership .....	8
Young People and Leadership Challenges .....	10
What Young People Want? .....	11
Leadership Training .....	13
<b>Research Methodology</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>Research Methods</b> .....	<b>16</b>
Ethics .....	16
In-depth Interviews .....	17
Current and Alumni Questionnaires .....	17
<b>Data Analysis</b> .....	<b>18</b>
Interviews and Questionnaires .....	18
Directory .....	18
<b>Opportunities and Challenges</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>Research Findings and Discussion</b> .....	<b>20</b>
The Landscape of Youth Leadership Programs .....	20
Programs as a Response to Leadership Challenges .....	21
Leadership Models .....	24
Training Programs and Culture .....	33
Traditional Leadership and Modern Institutions .....	34
Program Alumni .....	36
Case Study: Leadership Fiji Alumni .....	37

<b>Conclusion and Recommendations .....</b>	<b>38</b>
Conclusion .....	38
Recommendations .....	39
<b>References .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>42</b>
A1 – List of Organizations that Took Part in the Research	
A2 – Sex Desegregated Participant Data	
A3 – Interview Guide	
A4 – Current Members Questionnaire	
A5 – Alumni Members Questionnaire	
A6 – Directory	

**List of Tables**

Table 1: Location and Number of Organizations .....	15
Table 2: Current Program Members and Alumni Members by Organization .....	16

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## **Executive Summary**

1. This is the first exploratory study aimed at mapping the landscape of youth leadership programs in Fiji. The exercise is part of the Pacific Leadership Programs (PLP), ongoing work in developing an informed understanding about the dynamics of leadership in the Pacific. This knowledge will in turn assist PLP's strategic planning and commitment at the different levels of leadership development that it supports.
2. The study adopted a qualitative approach to data collection. Specifically it employed structured interviews with stakeholder respondents and questionnaires with current and alumni members of programs. The Pacific Youth Festival in Suva which coincided with the research also offered an opportunity to brainstorm some leadership issues with the youth participants. The research gave participants the opportunity to reflect on the programs they offer or on their training as participants.
3. Youth leadership research in Fiji and the Pacific is new. Despite the challenges identified in the study many opportunities were noted. This provides the scope for more specific and directed research into the different areas of youth leadership. This benefits all parties involved; donor agencies, program providers, participants, alumni members and communities.
4. The study highlighted that the landscape of youth leadership training in Fiji is diverse. Programs are situated between the two ends of the continuum; generic training programs and leadership specific ones. Within these programs exists a diversity related to program access, focus, issues and efforts of maintaining sustainability. Despite the differences, participants expressed the need to develop and strengthen youth leadership programs and to generate greater synergies between program providers.

5. It is evident that youth leadership program providers are responding to modern changes opting for an emphasis on achieved leadership. Aspects of traditional and ascribed leadership have, however, not been lost completely. There is recognition and acknowledgement of the strengths in the latter and these are emphasized and adopted where relevant in training initiatives.
6. It was discovered that certain programs particularly those for women are perhaps more critical now of ascribed leadership as compared to the past. This gives women and young people the opportunity to explore other avenues for meaningful contribution and a shift away from traditional 'stereotypical roles'. Thus there is more visibility in their contribution to leadership.
7. The study made possible the development of a directory of organizations offering youth leadership training programs. This will become a useful tool for inter-organizational cooperation and assist young people intending to access training initiatives.
8. The findings of this study, has provided a snapshot and generated the initial discussion and reflections about youth leadership training in Fiji. It calls for a more concerted effort in this area for the future. The experiences and lessons from this research are worth drawing from in the case similar studies are conducted in other countries of Pacific region.

## **Introduction**

This study provides the results of an exploration of youth leadership, specifically youth leadership models, a significant but often downplayed aspect of Fijian society. It offers the landscape of existing leadership models in both informal and formal settings and highlights successful initiatives that are crucial to addressing leadership issues faced by young people in Fiji. The study was conducted in a context where the potential of young people as leaders at the local, community and national level is mostly undermined. This was the challenge.

Leadership is a hallmark of Fijian society. It is the measure by which a community and its peoples are assessed. In the last two decades amongst other things Fijian leadership has come under scrutiny because of the failure of leaders to deliver and maintain order and stability. These are rooted in the following factors. Firstly reliance on the hereditary chiefly leadership system that is under pressure in this modern era. Secondly on a culture that downplays the role and contribution of young people in socio-economic and political affairs. Finally the issue lies in the failure of government to recognise, develop and support youth leadership initiatives. At present much of this responsibility is left to communities, faith-based and non-government organisations.

The research in a small way contributes to a literary area where little is known particularly in Fiji and perhaps in the Pacific. Findings from the study gives due recognition to the importance of developing youth leadership, consolidating existing initiatives and building on areas of program effectiveness. The information is intended to improve the work of relevant stakeholders like policy makers, program providers, international organisations and non-government organisations. As an AusAID – Pacific Leadership Program (AusAID-PLP) funded research, the results will add value to the organizations contributions towards improved governance Fiji and perhaps in the Pacific region. Subsequently the findings will benefit the community particularly young people who can be assured that leadership and leadership initiatives are part of mainstream discourse.

## **Aims of the Research**

The research aims are as follows:

- To explore existing positive and negative youth leadership initiatives in Fiji;
- To determine the extent to which leadership frameworks integrate gender equality objectives;
- To identify and address gaps in youth leadership initiatives;
- To contribute to the body of knowledge pertaining to youth leadership models in Fiji. assist in building on existing successful youth leadership models.

## **Literature Review**

Leadership posits itself as perhaps one of the few constant organizational features of any society. In the Pacific an understanding of leadership is significant because of the constantly evolving socio-economic, political and technological landscape. In this context leadership has not only become a matter of internal or in-country interest but one that has attracted the interest of outsiders particularly donor countries and agencies concerned about good governance as an integral measure of development and well-being. A literature review by McLeod (2007) found that there exists a good understanding of Pacific leadership models and the challenges they face. A key recommendation drawn from the review, however, suggests the need to explore leadership training models and their effectiveness in facilitating change (McLeod, 2007). This literature review seeks to build on this recommendation with a specific focus on leadership training programs and initiatives for young people.

### **Exploring Pacific Leadership**

According to Hassall and Bibi (2009), there is a scarcity of studies examining Pacific leadership. However, existing research has provided an adequate understanding of Pacific leadership and leadership challenges in the modern era (Nayacakalou, 1975; White and Lindstrom, 1977; Feinberg and Watson-Gegeo, 1996; Sanga and Walker, 2005; McLeod, 2007). Pacific societies enjoy a variation in leadership patterns. Leaders do not only occur in the context of social group leadership, but also in relation to warfare, gang activity, church, non government organizations (including women's groups), youth, formal politics and cargo cults.

However, Pacific leadership has historically been understood within the context of political organization, with an emphasis on ascribed and achieved leadership or what is more commonly known as the 'big men' vs. 'chiefly' systems (Sahlins, 1963; McLeod, 2007). Big man leadership occurs when individuals acquire status through the demonstration of skills that are seen as positive leadership qualities and the distribution of wealth. Chiefly power, however, resides in the position not the person and is inheritable. Whilst achievement affects the attainment of the title, chiefs possess authority over permanent groups.

In the Pacific, both achieved and ascribed forms of leadership in their formal sense are dominated by male adults while women have important support functions. This is well illustrated by McLeod (2007), who stated that:

The status of women in 'traditional' leadership roles has a direct correlation with the status of women in institutionalized leadership roles. For example in Fiji and Samoa, where women are able to hold chiefly title, women's participation in both politics and government significantly outstrips the participation of Melanesian women in public life, where status is primarily achieved via the accumulation and distribution of resources to which they have limited access.  
(p.11)

More specifically Sanga and Walker (2005) observe that there are two pictures of Pacific Leadership. One picture portrays leadership as weak, discouraging and in a state of crisis with the second exemplary leadership slowly consolidating its place. Exemplary leadership is characterized by vitality, courage and integrity particularly at village level. According to Sanga and Walker (2005), these two different pictures of Pacific leadership exist because leadership is complex and at time too much focus on negative issues. There has been very little appropriate research published on Pacific leadership, in addition, the wrong questions have been asked about leadership or researchers are looking in the wrong places for information. There has been no attention paid to community and communal leadership.

Cammock (2003) discusses leadership in terms of relation to public and private sectors and highlights an approach to leadership that integrates tasks, skills and personal qualities. The

notion that leadership is distributed among actors is appealing in the Pacific, where community decision-making and action is more important. Hassal and Bibi (2009) suggest that there is no single desirable leadership model and that scholarship is important in exploring contemporary leadership practices with a view to maintaining the diversity of experience and to examine how leadership has been developed and exercised across the Pacific.

### **Young People and Leadership Challenges**

In the Pacific young people generally occupy a subordinate position and there is abundant literature to demonstrate this (Monsell-Davis, 1986; Ravuvu, 1988; Adinkrah, 1995; McLeod, 2007; Vakaoti, 2007). This social status affects their participation in many facets of life. Of particular concern in this literature review is the notion of young people being underrepresented in leadership initiatives and decision-making (McLeod, 2007).

In writing about leadership in the Solomon Islands, Sanga and Walker (2005) identified that leadership challenges existed at the village and national levels. Specific challenges at these levels included those relating to choice, justice, relationship, the economy, diversity and ideologies. Whilst the discussion was very general the issues appear relevant when identifying challenges to youth leadership. In fact other specific challenges can be identified, however, there appears to be little known as a result of the scarcity of available literature on youth leadership in the Pacific. This may in a way be responsible for the absence or lack of youth leadership initiatives in the region. Where initiatives and programs exist, these have been driven outside interests and needs, a practice McLeod (2007, p. 32) suggests, “should be avoided entirely”.

In Fiji a specific challenge to successful youth leadership development can be traced to the absence of role models at the national level for young people (Fijilive, 2009). This concern is not new and attempts to address this challenge both at the regional and national level prompted the development of case studies of ‘contemporary Pacific leadership’ by the Pacific Leadership Development Network. The case studies explored and revealed “some unique, innovative and important aspects of leadership styles, dynamics, concepts and approaches operative in the Pacific islands context” (Pacific Islands Governance Portal, 2009). In Fiji case studies were

written about leaders such as Imrana Jalal, Kuini Lutua and Waisale Serevi. Waisale Serevi transfers his leadership skills and knowledge through sports, however, in the case of others leadership skills and knowledge transfer is unknown.

### **What Young People Want?**

Nonetheless young people play active leadership roles in the areas of “sport, education, the arts and community awareness programs (e.g. HIV/AIDS prevention), as well in less palatable activities such as gang crime” (McLeod, 2007, p.11). At the regional level young people are aware of their marginal situation and have collectively articulated this as reflected in the *Pacific Youth Charter*, the outcome of the first Pacific Youth Festival (PYF), held in Tahiti in 2006. The Charter highlighted the shared desire of young people to be recognized and supported as they play an integral role in the building of the future. The young people resolved to create and strengthen existing programs that enabled them to understand politics and good governance<sup>1</sup>. One such resolution highlighted the need to establish youth assemblies and parliaments in every country in the Pacific where young people can be free to express themselves (Pacific Youth Charter, 2006). This is the challenge for elders and current leaders but one that particularly educated leaders are receptive to (McLeod, 2007).

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Pacific Youth Festival, held in Suva in 2009, brought together more than 300 young people from 13 Pacific Island nations and territories. The deliberations during the weeklong event were centered on four thematic areas<sup>2</sup>, the culmination of these deliberations was the *Pacific Youth Festival Suva Declaration 2009*<sup>3</sup>. In the areas of Governance, Peace and Security, the youth identified the following issues relating to youth leadership:

- Lack of involvement of young people in all sectors of national development processes and little understanding of the importance of such and negative impacts of not being involved.

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<sup>1</sup> Other areas for concern for young people included active citizenship, education and training for all, social and professional integration, sustainable development, cultural diversity, health equity for all and peace promotion.

<sup>2</sup> The four thematic areas were: promoting healthy living, Pacific identities, climate change and adaptation and governance, peace and security.

<sup>3</sup>This report has not been made public as yet.

Traditional and cultural values and expectations hinder the active and effective participation of young people;

- Negative attitudes towards supporting youth and women in political participation and decision-making, including few gender equality policies in the region;
- Few resources are allocated for the engagement of youth in development;
- Integrity and other important virtues are not widely practiced amongst our leaders nor constituents. Many leaders have failed to deliver their promises to young people;
- Inadequate mechanisms for young people to engage in development agendas.

The Declaration proposes the following recommendations from the young people:

- Encourage gender equality in male dominated professions including the political and leadership arena;
- Continue to establish student councils or bodies in schools and tertiary institutions;
- Advocate for the establishment of National Youth Councils;
- Establish participatory mechanisms such as national youth parliaments or national youth festivals (that link to regional youth events) to inform national development directions. Ensure participatory structures have fair and equal representation of young people including marginalized and disadvantaged groups;
- Ensure good governance principles are practiced by leaders in particular the principles of participation and responsiveness to ensure national stability;
- Utilize our diverse cultural values and practices such as traditional conflict resolution to work towards peace-building and unity. Empower young people to become peace-builders;
- Allocate sufficient resources for youth development and youth focused programs through additional investment or redirecting and refocusing existing investment;
- Include youth representatives in national advisory committees in government ministries.

## **Leadership Training**

Leadership training is not new in Fiji. Even early colonial administrators were aware of the need to consolidate and develop a cadre of leaders through the Great Council of Chiefs and the establishment of schools to groom children from chiefly families for future leadership (Ravuvu, 1988; Norton 2009 in Firth, Fraenkel & Lal, 2009). This gave way to the demands of modern society, however, culturally relevant leadership training has been suggested as necessary for existing and emergent leaders but they should be based upon locally identified needs (McLeod, 2007).

While leadership studies in the Pacific have explored the changing leadership landscape many have failed to discuss the need or basis for skills transfer and training. There has been much effort in convening conferences and workshops, with little apparent behavioral change or leadership development. Many leadership programs focus on management and project skills more than on actual leadership training.

This gap has only until recently been realized and contribution to this area has been forthcoming in the work of Sanga and Walker (2005) and through organizations like the Pacific Governance Network and the Pacific Leadership Development Network (PLDN). Short term training courses for civil society actors can be found across the Pacific, there are also short-term training courses for leadership in the Public Sector, in the Churches and in other state agencies. The PLDN newsletter reported that last year alone saw various leadership training initiatives in Fiji. Two of these included training for Catholic Priests of the Marist Order and an in-house training for senior police officers of the Fiji Police. Training for the priests was done with the purpose of “upgrading leadership skills of members...as being more efficient and effective, both to their communities and society at large” (Pacific Leadership Development Network [PLDN], 2008). The in-house police training was conducted with the intention of enhancing the officers understanding of leadership and governance issues (PLDN, 2008).

Directed youth leadership training is also developing and gaining much recognition in the Pacific. In Fiji, established and highly visible programs include Leadership Fiji (and now

Leadership Papua New Guinea), and the Emerging Leaders' Forum conducted by the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) and PIANGO has been offering its *Pacific Graduate Diploma in Not-for-Profit Management* in collaboration with the UNITEC Institute of Technology (Auckland) since 1999. In the Solomon Islands, the ANU-based Centre for Democratic Institutions has been working with ACFID and Development Services Exchange (DSE) to deliver an "NGO Leadership Training Project." At the regional level youth leadership training initiatives include organizations like the "the Pacific Future Environment Leaders Forum" and "the Pacific Emerging Leaders Dialogue".

## Research Methodology

This exploratory study was designed to map youth leadership models that exist in the Fiji Islands. This section highlights the research process and methods involved in the data collection process.

### Participants

#### *Programs*

A total of 24 leadership programs were involved in the study via purposive and snow ball sampling. Table 1 reflects the general location and number of organizations that participated in the research. Majority of the organizations were Suva based reflecting where leadership programs existed.

Table 1: Location and Number of Organizations<sup>4</sup>

Location	Number of Organizations
<b>Suva</b>	22
<b>Lautoka</b>	1
<b>Taveuni</b>	1
<b>Totals</b>	24

#### *Program Participants*

Current and alumni members of each of the participating programs were encouraged to participate in the research about the respective programs they attended. The inclusion of these participants in the research was intended to supplement information derived from the program providers. In particular current program participants and alumni members offered useful information regarding program relevance and effectiveness. Table 2 presents information on the breakdown of participants from the different programs who took part in the research.

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<sup>4</sup> For a full list of organizations that took part in the research see Appendix 1

Table 2: Current Program Members and Alumni Members by Organization<sup>5</sup>

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Current members</b>	<b>Alumni members</b>
<b>Fiji Girl Guides Association</b>	4	
<b>Seventh Day Adventist</b>	6	
<b>CATD (Nadave)</b>	13	
<b>Ministry of Education</b>	10	
<b>Ministry of Youth</b>	9	
<b>ECREA</b>	5	
<b>Leadership Fiji</b>	8	2
<b>Emerging Leaders Forum</b>		1
<b>UNAIDS</b>		1
<b>Total</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>4</b>

## **Research Methods**

The research qualitative in nature adopted the following data collection methods; in-depth interviews with program providers and questionnaires for both current and alumni participants. The sections below further explain these processes.

### *Ethics*

Ethical considerations were adhered to in this research. Once the proposal was accepted by the Pacific Leadership Program (PLP), the researchers approached the Ministry of Health’s National Health Research Committee. Whilst the research did not require ethical clearance from this committee, the committee was a useful means of ensuring that the research was ethical in nature. An informed consent form was completed by participants answering questionnaires to address confidentiality concerns. Interviewees gave verbal consent to being part of the research. Each participant had access to a ‘basic information sheet’ and from time to time raised questions with the researchers, regarding the purpose of the research, the selection criteria and research outcomes. These questions were addressed on a case by case basis by the researchers.

<sup>5</sup> For sex desegregated data on the respondents please see Appendix 2

### *In-depth Interviews<sup>6</sup>*

In-depth structured interviews were conducted with program providers. These interviews generally lasted between thirty minutes to one hour depending on the amount of detail the interviewees wished to share and the nature of the program itself. In some cases the interview guide was adapted to reflect the nature of specific organizations or in cases where much information has already been made available through electronic and print sources. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed, the researchers then read through this, and noted follow-up questions which they clarified with the original respondents.

In allowing flexibility for the interviewees, the researchers provided individuals with the option of either answering the interview questions via electronic mail or face-to-face. For convenience a few individuals preferred to answer the questions via electronic mail. It should be noted that the use of available technology such as electronic mail as in the case of this research strengthened the research process, specifically the exercise of information gathering and sharing.

### *Current and Alumni Questionnaires<sup>7</sup>*

Questionnaires were developed to gather relevant information from participants (both current and alumni) about the relevance and effectiveness of youth leadership training programs. Two versions of each questionnaire were developed, an electronic version made available to those who preferred responding via email and a paper copy which was administered by the research assistants with the help of program providers.

Program providers were vital in organizing access to current and alumni members. Most program providers with the consent of their participants and alumni members released to the researchers respective names and email addresses. Similar to the interview process, where possible the questionnaires were sent to the participants via electronic mail, and the participants responded in the same manner.

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<sup>6</sup> See Appendix 3 for interview guide

<sup>7</sup> See Appendix 4 for the current members questionnaire and Appendix 5 for the alumni members questionnaire

Alternately, some organizations requested paper copies of both (current and alumni) questionnaires to be delivered to their offices and then collected at an identified and agreed time. The dual nature of disseminating and collecting the questionnaires was convenient for the researchers and gave participants the comfort of choosing the most suitable response method.

## **Data Analysis**

### *Interviews and Questionnaires*

The interview data was analyzed using a thematic analysis, allowing the researchers to maintain the complexity and richness of the data collected. Interview questions were mostly identical across program providers and allowed for a greater ease in identifying the common and salient themes. Data from the questionnaires were used to supplement the interview data and were integrated into the relevant thematic categories.

### *Directory*<sup>8</sup>

Data from the study was also used to produce a directory on existing youth leadership programs in Fiji. Most organizations stated that they were unaware of other service providers and failed to interact and network with existing providers. In doing so they acknowledged the need, importance and possibility for such an interaction. The directory seeks to address this challenge, assists those seeking to enroll in training initiatives and donor agencies that assist leadership training programs.

## **Opportunities and Challenges**

### *Opportunities*

This study offered stakeholder respondents, current program participants and alumni members the opportunity to reflect on leadership initiatives and learning involved in programs. This was useful as many organizations do not conduct structured evaluations of their programs and its accompanying learning component. The research findings will help contribute to a greater understanding in this area and other areas of leadership as one stakeholder mentioned “perhaps your study will help us towards that path” (W. Naisara, personal communication, August 13, 2009).

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<sup>8</sup> See Appendix 6 for a copy of the directory

In addition involvement in the research gave participants the opportunity to reflect; for program providers on how to strengthen their programs; for current participants the relevance of leadership training; and for alumni members how to better utilize the learnt skills and knowledge in a post-program environment. In essence the participants found the process educational and empowering.

During the course of the research the researchers conducted a workshop<sup>9</sup> with twenty young people on Youth Leadership at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Pacific Youth Festival was held in Suva, Fiji Islands, from 13-17 July, 2009. The workshop offered researchers the opportunity to share information on the research, the importance of researching youth leadership and to listen to leadership and youth leadership issues from the youth participants<sup>10</sup>.

### *Challenges*

The attitude of some individuals has been a challenge in this research. A few organizations were at the outset hesitant to participate, stating that they have been ‘over researched’. Other concerns from organizations focused around outside researchers engaging in unethical research practices particularly that which involved researchers leaving with local knowledge without any meaningful engagement with communities and organizations concerned about research findings. As a result one particular organization initially declined to be part of the research.

In responding to these challenges, the researchers made clear the research process and intended outcomes. Organizations were grateful that a direct outcome of the research would be the development of a directory of organizations providing youth leadership programs and training. Thank you cards were sent to organizations once key-respondents were interviewed and participant questionnaires completed. These cards also included contact information for organizations to indicate their desire to receive a final copy of the report.

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<sup>9</sup> To facilitate the workshop the researchers compiled a participant’s booklet entitled *Youth Leadership: Our Turn*. The booklet and a post-workshop report was made available to PLP.

<sup>10</sup> The workshop consisted of twenty young people from Fiji, Samoa, American Samoa, Papua New Guinea, Tonga and Vanuatu. A hearing impaired young person was also part of this workshop. Results from the discussions and comments from the young people during this workshop have been integrated into this research in the form of quotations.

## Research Findings and Discussion

### The Landscape of youth leadership programs

*“Youth leadership or programs should be recommended to all young people; it helps young people learn and understand the relevant issues.”<sup>11</sup>*

The study revealed that there are youth leadership training initiatives and programs in Fiji. The programs are offered by government through the Department of Youth and Sports, faith-based groups, non-government organizations (NGO’s) and training institutions<sup>12</sup>. The Department of Youth and Sports identified two specific programs; the National Youth Service Scheme and the Duke of Edinburgh Award<sup>13</sup> aimed at developing youth leadership (S. Mohammed, personal communication, August 10, 2009). Faith-based organizations have traditionally been involved in leadership training as part of their membership grooming and development process. Training and educational institutions have only recently been involved in leadership training initiatives.

The study revealed that there were three main categories from which programs originated. These are internally developed programs, internally adopted external programs and universal programs. Within the above mentioned categories exists specific programs offered by organizations like the Young People’s Department of the Methodist Church, the Youth Ministry of the Seventh Day Adventist Church (SDA) and the Fiji Muslim Youth Movement (FMYM) which is affiliated to the Fiji Muslim League (FML). Other faith-based organizations have loose structured programs for young people but which do not necessarily focus on leadership training.

Newer and targeted programs are being offered by NGO’s like Leadership Fiji (LF), Emerging Leaders Forum (ELF) of the Fiji Women’s Rights Movement (FWRM), Fiji Girl Guides Association through its Gold Program, ECREA’s Youth Peace and Development Programme

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<sup>11</sup> Respondent from YPDP, male, 21-25 years of age

<sup>12</sup> A full list of organizations offering leadership training programs who took part in this research is provided in Appendix 1

<sup>13</sup> The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award Program was first introduced in Fiji in the 1960’s and has only recently become a strong component of the Department of Youth’s activities. It is made up of three phases; the Bronze, Silver and Gold awards. The program is for those aged 14 to 23. The age breakdown for the different stages is as follows; Bronze (14-23 years), Silver (15-23 years) and Gold (16-23 years).

(YPDP) and training institutions like the Centre for Appropriate Technology and Development (CATD) and the Marist Training Centre in Tutu, Taveuni. The Leadership Development Program based at the University of the South Pacific's School of Governance and Development Studies is perhaps the only program that offers needs based leadership training. In addition to youth leadership training the program also includes training for the public and private sector, women and traditional leadership (H. Bibi, personal communication, August 14, 2009). These newer programs in essence have been established specifically in response to the absence of leadership development training and leadership challenges.

### **Programs as a response to leadership challenges**

*“Leadership programs should be developed for all levels; women, young people and traditional leaders...”<sup>14</sup>*

#### *Resource use and economic disadvantage*

One of the main challenges for any society is the question of how to engage young people in productive activities. Some organizations old and new recognize this challenge and have either been actively engaged in working to address this or following suit with new initiatives. The Marist Training Centre of the Catholic Church based in Tutu, Taveuni is an example of an organization that uses an entrepreneurial farming model to empower young people. According to the Training Centre's Director the program is “not really leadership [training] but it ends up teaching leadership skills like hard work, planning, personal development, and character development” (M.T. McVerry, personal communication, June 25, 2009). In addition FRIEND, a Lautoka based NGO is working on implementing a program aimed at developing leadership skills through income generating projects for young people.

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<sup>14</sup> Ni Vanuatu Participant at the *Youth Leadership: Our Turn* workshop

### *Women and leadership*

*“...We still have the traditional way of living, everything that we (the young people) do still has to go through the elders – they have the last say. We have leadership programs for women and children, but the elders and the people up there have the last say. We need to change the mentality of the elders back home. There are also a lot of stereotypes especially about women and women’s issues...”<sup>15</sup>*

The lack of or absence of women particularly young women from leadership positions is globally and regionally recognized. In Fiji, the subordinate status of women is supported by the ideological connections of a patriarchal culture and religion. Programs for young women exist but are in most instances about reinforcing gender roles. These include things like “home improvement...sewing, cooking or flower-arranging classes” (M. Reddy, personal communication, June 19, 2009). The Fiji Women’s Rights Movement views this as a major challenge to equitable leadership and the enhancement of the women’s status and addresses this through the Emerging Leaders Forum.

### *Character and youth leadership development*

Good leadership rests on desired and nurtured positive characters in individuals. In light of this, stakeholder representatives particularly those from faith-based organizations identified character development as a significant leadership challenge. Programs are offered by the Seventh Day Adventist Church’s Youth Ministry, the AOG Church, Christian Mission Fellowship (CMF) and the Girl Guides impacts the character development aspect of potential young leaders. The Department of Youth’s Duke of Edinburgh Award and the NYSS are also aimed at developing character. Character development builds confidence and self esteem for young people and prepares them for leadership roles<sup>16</sup>. However, this depends on elders giving young people the chance to lead (W. Ramoce, personal communication, September 4, 2009).

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<sup>15</sup> Ni Vanuatu Participant at the *Youth Leadership: Our Turn* workshop

<sup>16</sup> “Improves my public relations with society” Respondent from YPDP program, female, 15-20 years of age; “Grown as a person that is being able to relate and embrace the differences (tolerant) etc” Respondent from YPDP program, male, 21-25 years of age.

### *Context savvy*

Fiji boasts one of the highest young professional populations in the Pacific region. However, according to Leadership Fiji, “they are very career focused, driven and doing well, however, did not have the time to think about issues facing Fiji” (D. Tarte, personal communication, June 24, 2009). This challenge is taken up by Leadership Fiji in light of the view that Fiji is dependent on these individuals for future leadership roles. Modern leaders are not only expected to be qualified but also knowledgeable about socio-political, cultural and economic issues.

### *Leadership Research*

*“There needs to be follow up for both programs and research that organizations do with communities.”<sup>17</sup>*

The study found that two research based leadership initiatives exist in Fiji. The first, the Leadership Development Program (LDP) based at the School of Governance and Development Studies at USP was established to provide research based leadership development training. This was decided in response to the dearth of leadership literature in the Pacific (H. Bibi, personal communication, August 14, 2009). The second research based leadership program is linked to the ‘Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative’ (RPEI)<sup>18</sup>. Although established in 2000, the program in Fiji is in its early formation stages and aims at developing context specific leadership frameworks (F. Koya, personal communication, July 20, 2009). Organizations such as the LDP and RPEI, anticipates that the development of research informed knowledge would in turn inform effective and relevant training programs. This challenge is not limited to youth leadership training but extends to other sectors and aspects of leadership.

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<sup>17</sup> Fiji Participant at the *Youth Leadership: Our Turn* workshop

<sup>18</sup> RPEI was the outcome of discussions by a group of Pacific educators in 2000. Currently the initiative is a collaborative one between the Victoria University of Wellington and USP. The two major strands of rethinking Pacific education are; Pacific research models and leadership education.

## **Leadership Models**

The study adopted the achieved vs. ascribed leadership models in assessing the focus of leadership training programs. All training programs identified in this study adopted an achieved leadership focus with an emphasis on varying degrees of transformational leadership. Some reasons for the choice of this model include:

We do not focus on ascribed patterns of leadership because that would limit young women's participation. The ascribed [model] tends to favor males. We aim to empower ALL women – looking at it from a human rights approach, using or focusing on ascribed leadership would limit the participation of young women (M. Reddy, personal communication, June 19, 2009).

We use achieved... leadership is about grooming, if they have the best grooming then they'd make the best leaders. If you look at the ascribed model, we hardly challenge our chiefs, we'd be suppressed, so we adopt an achieved leadership structure where we can challenge our leaders (W. Ramoce, personal communication, September 4, 2009).

The approach enables you as an individual to discover what you can do. The Transformational Leadership Development Program (TLDP) teaches and provides participants with tools to transform themselves to be a better people. The TLDP utilizes gender and HIV-related cases to create a better understanding of how everything is linked to each other, and how by putting yourself in the position of women and people living with HIV and AIDS you discover ways to change yourself and others around you (S. Vete, personal communication, July 5, 2009).

### *Training program participants*

Participation at the training programs vary from organization to organization. Faith-based organizations are very inclusive in terms of youth participation. Christian denominations like the Methodist Church and SDA have youth ministry structures for all young people within their respective churches. The latter in particular follows a universal model of youth ministry that caters for young people between the ages of 6 and 31 years. Targeted programs however differ and use either gender, professional qualification, resource ownership or a combination of these in accepting participants. For example ELF and the Guides Gold Program are exclusive to young

women with ELF specifically for those between the ages of 18-25 years. YPDP adopts the same chronological guideline but attempts to be inclusive of young people from the different genders, religions and geographic locations<sup>19</sup>.

Leadership Fiji accepts those with a professional background and the CATD uses resource ownership as one of its main selection criteria<sup>20</sup>. At the time of this study, the University of the South Pacific (USP), in association with the Leadership Development Program, is developing a formal university paper on 'Leadership in the Pacific', to be offered from 2010. The paper targets university students, civil servants and the general public (H. Bibi, personal communication, August 14, 2009). In addition the RPEI focuses on working with university students because they claim that a university education prepares young people for the workplace but not for leadership (F. Koya, personal communication, July 20, 2009).

#### *Program Focus, structure and activities*

Identified programs either have a generic or specific leadership focus. Some faith-based organizations and the Department of Youth's NYSS and Provincial Youth Forums provide the former. They offer young people a forum and avenue to discover and develop leadership abilities. The latter involves organizations that are actively and directly involved in youth leadership training. These specific programs include Leadership Fiji, the Emerging Leaders Forum (ELF), YPDP, the Girl guides Gold Program and Transformational Leadership Development Programme (TLDP) delivered by UNAIDS. Apart from the transformational programs, YPDP engages in a skills based approach<sup>21</sup> to leadership development. According to Ramoce (2009):

we get these young people to look at our leaders of today and provide views on what the young people think are good styles of leadership and good characteristics of leaders... we get them to think about how would they be a leader, we try to equip them with skills through the modules

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<sup>19</sup> A strength of the YPDP program is "picking youth from different backgrounds" Respondent from YPDP, male, 21-25 years of age.

<sup>20</sup> CATD accepts those between the ages of 18-35 years and prefer single people because married people have family commitments and thus may miss out on some stages of the program.

<sup>21</sup> YPDP have developed 5 training modules that the 16 youths they recruit every year are expected to complete. The modules include culture, communication styles, conflict analysis, leadership and the art of transformation. The program includes a one week residential training every month for the first six months and in the remaining six months work on developing their community project (W. Ramoce, personal communication, September 4, 2009).

and the workshops and the forum because they will be leaders themselves (W. Ramoce, personal communication, September 4, 2009).

The YPDP is an example of the few leadership programs that offer skills based training. In fact some program providers have seen this as limitations in their own programs. As one stakeholder respondent mentioned, “maybe we should include skills? Maybe that’s a limitation, however, skills are not part of the Leadership Victoria<sup>22</sup> model either” (D. Tarte, personal communication, June 24, 2009). The choice of program focus rests with the respective program providers, however, the above highlights the need to contextualize programs particularly those externally adopted.

According to the study only LF and the ELF approach leadership training from an issues-based perspective. The ELF apply a feminist orientation to the issues identified for the program in a particular year. Past issues identified for discussion have included public speaking, environment conservation, human rights, feminism, violence against women, trade, media and many others. Specifically ELF is aimed at young women between the ages of 18 to 30 years. Upon selection participants meet once a month for either a day-session, site visit or retreat that focuses on a specific topic. Experienced guest speakers, with special knowledge on the topic, facilitate the sessions and activities which are very participatory. The program is offered without a cost to but ELF requires a significant level of commitment from participants. A major part of ELF is an advocacy campaign where participants are expected to design, develop, implement and report on their advocacy project. The advocacy campaign projects are expected to be completed by the time the participants graduated. The 2008-2009 ELF participants worked on advocating issues relating to sexual and reproductive health and rights (M. Reddy, personal communication, June 19, 2009).

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<sup>22</sup> “Leadership Victoria was established in 1990 in Melbourne, Victoria. Due to the success of the program, there have been 11 community programs established through Australia using a similar model, with necessary changes made to reflect the different community interests, infrastructures and profiles. This is also what took place in adapting the Leadership Victoria program for the Fiji context” (D. Tarte, personal communication, June 24, 2009).

## Advocacy Campaign Project of ELF 2008-2009

One group worked on creating awareness about cancer, in particular breast cancer and cervical cancer, through an information session. They invited guest speakers from the Fiji Cancer Society, Colonial War Memorial Hospital, and Dr Mary Schramm from the Ministry of Health. The Information Session was held on Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2009 for 17 people. As a result of the initiative, ELF graduate Taina Ratucadra has joined the organising committee for Fiji's Biggest Morning Tea, an annual event to raise funds and awareness about cancer.

The second group's campaign was to encourage women to regularly get Pap smears, for early detection and treatment of cervical cancer. The group organised a mini information session, conducted by Dr Garimella from the Oxfam Health Clinic, who also carried out Pap smears for the women who attended. There were 15 women at the session, and 12 of them got the tests done. The group plans to hold this campaign annually, where women who experienced this first information session will bring two more young women for the next round of Pap smear tests. Every year the number of young women who will take Pap smear tests will increase, and they will get to learn more about their bodies.

(M. Reddy, personal communication, June 19, 2009).

### *Program Challenges*<sup>23</sup>

*"People come to our country, run the program and leave and there is no follow up...They have workshop and no follow up."*<sup>24</sup>

### *Access*

*"In Fiji we need to share the light, we need to take the programs to the rural areas because there is very little for young people who live in rural areas and in the islands"*<sup>25</sup>

A major challenge to the development of youth leadership is the ability of young people to access leadership programs. As one young person puts it, "We need more leadership training programs and to open it up for more participants" (Male Respondent SDA Church, 26-30 years

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<sup>23</sup> Other challenges are integrated in the 'research findings and discussion section'. The three challenges identified here those identified as being specific to many programs.

<sup>24</sup> Ni Vanuatu Participant at the *Youth Leadership: Our Turn* workshop

<sup>25</sup> Fiji Participant at the *Youth Leadership: Our Turn Workshop*

of age). The study found that youth leadership programs are available to young people on the basis of religious beliefs, gender, geographical isolation and information sharing. For instance many programs often take place on Saturdays which means that participants, members of the Seventh Day Adventist church would be unable to participate. This is more so for programs that mandate that participants need to attend a number of meetings and retreats as a prerequisite to successful completion (M. Reddy, personal communication, June 19, 2009).

The study also found that apart from some faith-based and NGO training programs, others are based in Suva thus discriminating against those in other locations. Leadership Fiji has been able to attract some participants from Lautoka and Nadi, however their rural leadership component was not successful because of resource limitations and logistical issues (D. Tarte, personal communication June 24, 2009). Other potential participants are excluded because of the selection criteria required by training organizations. While some programs accept participants by virtue of their membership others like LF and ELF are more selective admitting only professional individuals with ELF restricted only to female professionals. This has been interpreted as elitist and could be seen as ascribed leadership in a new form with 'professional' as opposed to 'birthright' as the major determinant for future potential leaders.

### *Networking*

One unique feature about the landscape of leadership training in Fiji is that most program providers operate independently of each other. This has been identified by many stakeholder respondents as a major challenge:

There is a lot of things happening all over the place, and perhaps they need to be coordinated, they need to perhaps map the leadership programs with the youth development landscape and see whose doing what...for the benefit of young people... rather than they not being aware of what the opportunities are in terms of leadership (W. Naisara, personal communication, August 13, 2009).

There is a lack of linkages between existing youth leadership programs and also a lack of knowledge between program providers about who is providing what, if there is scope to link we should so we do not duplicate (M. Reddy, personal communication, June 19, 2009).

## *Societal attitudes*

*“If they (elders) don’t listen then we can’t do much. But we can do our side, we can start off small, they (elders) will see what we are doing, then as we do better and get bigger, they will see that and turn their heads and look at us and then help us.”<sup>26</sup>*

Societal understanding of training programs was also identified as an obstacle for program providers. For example the Marist Training Centre continuously notes that parents are unaware of what their children do at the Centre. According to M.T. McVerry (personal communication, June 25, 2009), this it is very common in the Fijian way that parents don’t seriously consider children and young people’s worth. To address this ignorance the Centre invites parents for what can be called ‘an awareness experience’ where parents are informed of the training their children go through and is also an opportunity for parents to recognize the potential these young people have.

### Parental Awareness Experience – Marist Training Centre Tutu, Taveuni

We bring parents in and take them through some sessions....we know them all because we have been visiting them in their homes situation. We don’t bring the parents in until their children are in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year and by now we already know where issues are. Usually on the third day we go to the boy’s farm, and then there they cry. Most ask, “is that my boy? I never realized that”.

So when they return from the farms the boys are all washed and dressed up.... then they have a nice meal together. Then the boys have a one on one session with their parents, they pull out their files, some of them in picture form have their five year plans for the future. Most parents are amazed and then there is a budget too....the parents start to treat them more seriously.... (M.T. McVerry, personal communication, June 25, 2009).

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<sup>26</sup> Fiji Participant at the *Youth Leadership: Our Turn* workshop

## *Program Strengths*

*“Nadave is the only University for Indigenous Fijians. The Centre for Fijian Millionaires and Businessmen of tomorrow. If you would like to change a Fijian way of thinking, then introduce and sponsor a Diploma Program for Entrepreneurship”<sup>27</sup>*

Respondents identified a list of strengths of the programs they either offer or have been through. Both program providers and alumni members agreed that leadership training programs are relevant for youth development. Firstly participation in the programs contribute to the development of a network of friendship for program participants<sup>28</sup>. This friendship in-turn strengthens and sustains programs. The programs also offer the opportunity to network with other organizations enriching collaborations and content depth. Secondly programs have also been identified to assist in individual and personal development<sup>29</sup>, assisting young people make responsible choices and enhances their abilities to attain improved life chances<sup>30</sup>. In some instances participants have gone on to attain promotions at their work places or acquired ‘better’ employment opportunities elsewhere. As one Leadership Fiji Alumni puts it, “I changed my job after the program. This came about after a self-assessment exercise prompted by the program. My new job entails a lot of decision making, organizing and delegating”.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Respondent from CATD, male, 26-30 years of age.

<sup>28</sup> This friendship is reflected in what W. Ramoce (personal communication, September 4, 2009) said about the YPDP, “our programme includes people from different ethnic groups and this helps build intercultural relationships which is important for our country.” A female YPDP respondent, 21-25 years of age said this in relation to the networking opportunity offered by the program; “I’ve joined and made many contacts through several youth networks”.

<sup>29</sup> “It’s changed my attitude in doing business and daily activities, how to manage time, make use of my talents and resources” Respondent from CATD, male, 21-25 years of age; similarly “I’ve become more outspoken and the level at which my mind processes is a lot quicker” Respondent from YPDP, male, 21-25 years of age; and “improving my skills in public speaking and communication” Respondent from Seventh Day Adventist Church, male, 26-30 years of age.

<sup>30</sup> Many NYSS respondents talk about the strength of the program as giving them a chance to get employment; “It gives a chance for school leavers to get employed” Respondent from NYSS, female, 21-25 years; “I applied to the program because I would like to get a job, to be employed” Respondent from NYSS, female, 21-25 years of age.

<sup>31</sup> Leadership Fiji Alumni respondent, female.

Thirdly training programs have also been noted to increase individual participant's critical awareness of issues and enhanced their civic engagement<sup>32</sup>. One particular ELF Alumni noted, "I am currently a volunteer at the Pacific youth Festival and have been given the opportunity to organize an event for the Pacific identity category. The skills that I have learnt have helped me to delegate work and overcome difficult situations that may arise". Fourthly participation in programs have led to increasing membership for some particular organizations. In making reference to the strengths of their Gold program the Guides association had this to say:

This program got more girls interested in guides, its boosted our membership. More girls are getting involved, this is because it's a fun way of learning different things – leadership, about different cultures and guiding activities and games. Also, the guide companies in different parts of Fiji are now becoming more active to become part of this program and to involve their girls. We have had increased financial membership because of these, girls are paying their subs and so are leaders (T. Bolabasaga, personal communication, June 22, 2009).

### *Program Evaluation*

Structured and directed programs like that of LF and ELF have in-built monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the program's quality and participant learning. The study suggests that the latter is assessed, via formative and summative evaluations. In the case of ELF participant learning evaluation takes the form of identifying 'most significant changes'. This involves interviews with participants at the beginning, during and at the end of the program. The evaluations focus on personal and knowledge development. The program structure itself is reviewed at three year intervals (M. Reddy, personal communication, June 19, 2009).

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<sup>32</sup> "While traveling with the team, I was amazed at the young leaders' enthusiasm to get as much from the project and how eager new leaders were to return to their schools and try out some activities and strengthen their guiding knowledge and leadership skills" Respondent from Fiji Girl Guides, female, senior.

## *Networking*

Despite the earlier mention of identification of poor networking as a challenge some level of networking exist. These are between programs at the local level and between local programs and other partners at the regional and international level. The most notable example of local networking exists between LF and ELF particularly during the setting up of the latter's leadership training structure. According to D. Tarte (personal communication, June 24, 2009), the ELF "used the same concept [to that of LF], but just adjusted it to suit their context". Other programs from time to time would invite relevant government ministries or NGO's when discussing issues based topics in programs which on most occasions have a developmental rather than leadership focus. For example ELF has links with DAWN, UNIFEM, ECREA's Youth Peace and Development Program (YPDP) and the Rotaract Club of Fiji. According to ELF:

the nature of these links include sharing resource people. We run sessions for these organizations and in turn where/when possible, they do sessions for us. We also send our participants to trainings, seminars and workshops run by these organizations. In turn these organizations also send their participants to our activities. We also help each other design our programs, share technical expertise, skills and (human) resources (M. Reddy, personal communication, June 19, 2009).

Local and regional or international networking is evident in the Guides Gold Program which is conducted with the assistance and support of Girl Guiding UK and New Zealand respectively (T. Bolabasaga, personal communication, June 22, 2009). In addition the ELF has links with the Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative – Leadership Pacific and the Commonwealth Youth Leadership Program. The nature of these links, are similar to that held with local partners.

## **Training Programs and Culture**

*“We need to move away from the traditional way of living and more towards democracy, we need to allow for change.”<sup>33</sup>*

The study found mixed reactions to the relevance and inclusion of culture in leadership training programs. The absence of any program to mentor those in positions of ascribed leadership reflects the attitude towards traditional and cultural aspects of leadership. The approach to culture is influenced by the different program positions with the study identifying three general program approaches to culture. The first focuses on an analysis of issues in relation to culture. Organizations found to be adopting this approach include ELF and the business development program of the CATD at Nadave, the SDA youth ministry, YPD, CMF, UNAIDS and the Department of Youth’s Duke of Edinburgh Award. These organizations identify the place of culture and more so how culture impedes on development and empowerment. The programs stress the need for participants to develop skills pertaining to good judgment in cases where culture and tradition are concerned. This is illustrated by the ELF representative who stated that:

We include culture and religion by having sessions that look at how aware the participants are about their cultural and religious beliefs and practices, the origins of these beliefs and past and present practices. We also explore how culture and religion can suppress women in taking up leadership roles, how these have an influence on empowerment or how they impede empowerment and how young women can work around these issues. The approaches and strategies are entirely dependent on the context and as such the young women need to work around these. There are good and bad aspect of culture and religion and participants are encouraged to make their own judgements about this (M. Reddy, personal communication, June 19, 2009).

The above approach is similar to that which is taken by the UNAIDS program “it is left up to the participants to make the content culturally relevant or at least discuss it” (S. Vete, personal communication, July 5, 2009).

The second approach has inbuilt cultural aspects inbuilt in the training program. This is evident in the case of YPDP and the Marist Training Centre in Tutu, Taveuni. At the centre “the boys

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<sup>33</sup> Participant at the *Youth Leadership: Our Turn Workshop*

are all taught how to traditionally present and receive yaqona and all of those things” (M.T. McVerry, personal communication, June 25, 2009). In the YPDP program participants have a module on culture. According to W. Ramoce (personal communication, September 4, 2009) this helps the participants “value and respect their own culture...they will also be able to relate to other cultures better. Culture is included in the [training package] because there needs to be more understanding of others.”

Thirdly some programs do not include any culture specific content in their programs but allow cultural discussions to emerge from participant interaction. The FMYM and LF are examples of such organizations. In the case of the FMYM, “culture is seen as an outcome driven by faith” (A. Mohammed, personal communication, July 20, 2009). Leadership Fiji works from the position that culture is not directly part of the program. “However, [they] strive for a mixed and dynamic group, and these people spend a lot of time together, often even after the program, so there is that element of cultural learning. They are able through their interactions with others better their understanding and cultural growth” (D. Tarte, personal communication, June 24, 2009).

### **Traditional Leadership and Modern Institutions**

*“Traditional leaders also need to evolve, the institutions need to evolve in order to adopt the global environment so modern forms of leadership need to be adequately integrated”<sup>34</sup>*

Perceptions about the place of traditional leadership in modern institutions mirror positions taken by organisations in relation to the place of culture in training programs. Two clear stands exist, the first which rules out any relevance of traditional leadership and the second which believes in a contextualized leadership strand that acknowledges traditional leadership. Leadership programs who are strong advocates for the first position include ELF and the Guides. For example according to the Guides:

Those who are well educated or experienced enough or have the knowledge should be leaders in any context. They need to deserve to be there. If there is a chief who meets that criteria and

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<sup>34</sup> W. Naisara, personal communication, August 13, 2009.

deserves it then it is fine but chiefs shouldn't be leaders just because they are chiefs. In Fiji we have seen the outcome of letting people lead just because of their traditional title, they haven't done anything and just used the position for themselves (T. Bolabasaga, personal communication, June 22, 2009).

More organizations, however, feel that aspects of traditional leadership are relevant. Those<sup>35</sup> who support this position believe that there are strong aspects of traditional leadership that should not be discarded but maintained to supplement modern forms of leadership. In this context S. Vete (personal communication, July 5, 2009) affirms that:

Traditional leadership notions that are firmly based on service to the people, meeting their needs in a rapidly changing environment can be integrated into modern institutions. These are based on principles of serving others (not just yourself), especially those less fortunate. Traditions that do not adapt become irrelevant and end up in museums. There will always be room for traditional leadership notions that serve the evolving needs of the people. [These are] based on universal principles of love, care, compassion, serving others, peace, equality, non discrimination and stigmatisation (inclusiveness), discipline, team work and so on.

In essence traditional aspects of leadership should be accommodated on a case by case basis. From the study these organizations feel that this is appropriate when developing community networks especially in situations when modern leaders need to work in communities with traditional leaders. An understanding of traditional leadership is vital in such collaborations (J. Nawaikula, personal communication, July 6, 2009). From a business perspective another organization indicated that:

As long as it does not interfere with business principles for these cannot be compromised. If it is used to promote and give it the support it deserves it may be safe to say yes but there must be a limit to prevent abuse and nepotism that could arise. Traditional leadership could be used to support projects...and create the necessary network expansion and growth (J. Bola, personal communication, July 15, 2009).

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<sup>35</sup> This includes stakeholder's respondents from YPDP, the Provincial Youth Forum, CATD, YPD and ELF.

## **Program Alumni**

Only LF and ELF have alumni organizations. The former program has had 150-160 graduates, however formal membership is small (S. Fong, personal communication, July 3, 2009). At the time of the study the LF alumni group independently exists as an individual organization with its own constitution and organized activities<sup>36</sup> (D. Tarte, personal communication, June 24, 2009). The ELF also has an alumni group which is under the ambit of the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM). The study found that the ELF alumni is loosely organized, do not meet often and most of their discussion is email based. The members are, however, involved in activities such as contributing monthly articles for *Mai Life* magazine, contributing to the FWRM tri-monthly newsletter *Balance* and writing letters to the editor in newspapers. ELF Alumni members also attend meetings and conferences on behalf of FWRM (M. Reddy, personal communication, June 19, 2009).

The case study below discusses LF Alumni's visions, their activities, challenges and proposals for the way forward. Although in its infant stage the alumni case study offers former participants of other organizations lessons and best practices to draw from when developing their own alumni groups. The study found that strengthening alumni groups would ensure the sustainability of leadership programs and networking across alumni bodies strengthens members engagement in leadership and community initiatives.

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<sup>36</sup> Refer to the case study for a more detailed description of the current status of the LF Alumni

## *Case Study*

### **Leadership Fiji Alumni**

Membership of the Leadership Alumni group is voluntary with a membership fee of twenty dollars. Currently the numbers are rather small about 30 members but with a good mix of gender and ethnicities. There is an alumni executive committee that includes two members from the Western division. The others are Suva based.

The Alumni's vision is to develop and enhance the quality of Fiji's leaders by building relationships characterized by respect, trust, integrity and understanding amongst Fellows and the Community. This is currently being realized through members networking and our commitment to their community projects developed during their time with the LF program. Networking is encouraged through social lunches, called 'Lunch and Learns'. The lunches offer alumni members the chance to socialize with each other and also listen to invited speakers who discuss local and internal issues. The sessions have a question and answer segment that draws on Chatham House rules and encourages free flowing discussion. Some discussed issues include protocol and diplomacy, politics and constitutional issues and high performance teams and management.

Much of the alumni's work is internal. The alumni group is not connected to existing programs other than individual association with their community projects, nor is there a relationship with other youth training alumni groups. There aren't any funding connections and there is no funding from Leadership Fiji. The alumni body does not run any sessions for the Leadership Fiji program. However, a proposal is in place for a session to talk to current LF participants and to encourage them to join the alumni upon completion of their program. Our proposal also includes developing a Skills Bank (directory) as part of the Leadership Fiji Alumni website. The directory can be accessed by organizations, communities and individuals who may need assistance with the help of the group's skills and knowledge. The idea of a Leadership Summit every two years is also been floated.

The strength of the alumni group lies in the ongoing networking opportunity created with fellow participants and members. Our main limitations relates to access to our activities for members in the Western division. In addition the organization is young but is growing. There is a need for a Secretariat to help better facilitate the organizing of activities and members.

There is the need to create better linkages between the alumni and LF and current LF participants in order to maintain networks and develop future opportunities. The sharing of resources is important for example both organizations could share a secretariat so activities can be better communication and coordination.

(S. Fong, personal communication, July 3, 2009)

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

### *Conclusion*

This study as one of the first attempts to explore the landscape of youth leadership training programs has presented three significant results. Firstly, youth leadership programs exist in Fiji, however, their goals, scope and activities vary across program providers. Generally the programs are constrained by issues of access (related to cost, gender, professional and educational qualification) and program focus, however, the strengths of the programs are many. Most significant in this aspect are the contributions made by programs in addressing the identified leadership challenges and offering young people the opportunity to access leadership training.

Secondly, leadership training in Fiji is reflective of shifting positions and approaches to governance. Whilst some program providers acknowledge the significance of cultural and traditional influences on leadership others do not. This signals a conscious but subtle shift in the emphasis placed on ascribed leadership. It is evident that programs either directly or indirectly favor the ideals of achieved leadership. Whilst this reflects the current reality the relevance of leadership training and competence of future leaders lie in a critical awareness of leadership in the context of Fiji's history, culture and tradition. Leadership evolves and perhaps through this process organizations will be able to develop sound and relevant youth leadership training structures to meet present and future challenges.

Thirdly, the study has identified the potential and need for a collaborative and research informed approach to youth leadership training in Fiji. The Leadership Development Program at the University of the South Pacific offers a platform from which this can be achieved. This will ensure that youth leadership needs and challenges are meaningfully identified and adequately addressed. Additionally, the government needs to take a more active role in spearheading and supporting leadership initiatives.

The study in an exploratory way has provided a snapshot of the landscape of youth leadership programs in Fiji. It is against this reality that the following recommendations are made:

## *Recommendations*

1. Some best practices were identified in the study. Three significant ones include the focus on character development, community connectedness through community development projects and a critical engagement with culture in some programs. These approaches need to be recognized and supported. At the same there is the need to be open to developing leadership programs for the disabled and other minority groups.
2. Women's programs should not place emphasis on traditional gender 'role constructs' like cooking and sewing. Leadership programs for women need to be open to new possibilities and offer avenues that would enhance women's contribution in the many diverse areas of leadership.
3. The need to develop a strong link between leadership training programs and research. Organizations can begin by documenting their experiences and evaluating programs as a way of developing context specific and relevant programs. There is the need to develop links with the Leadership Development Program for consistent monitoring and evaluation purposes. In addition there is potential in exploring the need for similar studies in other countries of the Pacific region.
4. Encourage program providers and participants to develop alumni groups as they offer a sound platform from which leadership initiatives can be sustained. The research findings show that existing alumni groups are in their early formation stages and show positive signs of growth. Resources need to be directed towards supporting alumni initiatives.
5. A network or cluster of youth leadership program providers should be established to create better understanding and dialogue and to develop future collaborations. The government should take the responsibility in spearheading this initiative. The cluster can as its initial project build on the directory of youth leadership training providers developed from this initial study.

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