



# Nai COKONAKI



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FTA **CO-OPERATIVE THRIFT LIMITED**

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## Promoting Indigenous Cultural Education and Sustainability in Fijian Education



Mr. Iosefo Volau

### Chairman's Message

In a globalized world, preserving and celebrating indigenous cultures is crucial to maintaining cultural diversity and promoting sustainable education systems. Recognizing this, a significant milestone was achieved during a visit to Wellington/Victoria University, where two key objectives were established. FTACTL/FTAWN have delved into the aims and outcomes of the visit, focusing on the exchange of Indigenous Cultural Education pathways to assist in the Fijian Education future sustainability and the reassessment of Indigenous progress in Education in specific areas.

The visit was to conduct a comprehensive reassessment of Indigenous progress in Education in specific areas. This evaluation aimed to identify the strengths, challenges, and opportunities faced by the Fijian Indigenous community in accessing and benefitting from quality education. The reassessment involved a rigorous examination of key indicators, such as enrollment rates, retention rates, academic achievements, and cultural inclusion within educational institutions. Additionally, qualitative data, including the perspectives of Indigenous students, teachers, and parents, was gathered to

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**Evereli**  
(April)

**Vula i Gasau**

- Tau vakalevu na uca
- Tekivu keli na uvi
- Dreu na moli kei na molikana
- Cucula na vuata ka matua na dilo
- Lala na kai ni waidranu ka ra vuka lesu na dilio kina nodra vanua



gain deeper insights into their experiences and aspirations. The findings of the reassessment offered critical insights into the current state of Indigenous education in Fiji, highlighting areas of improvement and potential gaps. This knowledge will serve as a foundation for developing targeted interventions and policies to address inequities and elevate the educational outcomes of the I Taukei community.

The visit to Wellington/Victoria University marked a significant step forward in promoting Indigenous Cultural Education and sustainability in the Fijian Education system. The exchange of Indigenous Cultural Education pathways enabled a rich cross-pollination of ideas, fostering a deeper appreciation for the I Taukei community's wisdom and heritage. This will undoubtedly contribute to a more sustainable and culturally relevant education system that empowers future generations of Fijians.

Furthermore, the reassessment of Indigenous progress in Education highlighted the importance of acknowledging and addressing the unique challenges faced by the I Taukei community. By recognizing these challenges, Fiji can chart a path towards inclusive and equitable education for all, ensuring that no one is left behind.

Moving forward, continued collaboration between Wellington/Victoria University and Fiji's educational stakeholders will be instrumental in implementing the lessons learned from this visit. By nurturing a mutually beneficial relationship, we can strive towards a brighter and more promising future for Indigenous education in Fiji - one that is firmly rooted in cultural heritage, sustainability, and inclusivity.

## Exchange of Indigenous Cultural Education Pathways

The visit was to foster a meaningful exchange of Indigenous Cultural Education pathways between Wellington/Victoria University and the Fijian Education system. This exchange aimed to explore the rich educational practices and traditions of the I Taukei community, the indigenous people of Fiji, and draw inspiration from their time-tested methods to enhance educational sustainability. The I Taukei people have long been the custodians of their land and have developed a profound understanding of their natural environment, culture, and history. By incorporating their indigenous knowledge into the Fijian Education system, we can impart a sense of pride and belonging to the younger generations, reinforcing their cultural identity.

During the visit, educators, policymakers, and cultural representatives engaged in collaborative workshops, discussions, and experiential learning sessions. The exchange focused on various elements, including traditional teaching methodologies, holistic learning approaches, and the integration of indigenous wisdom into the curriculum. Such an exchange ensures that the education system remains relevant, respectful, and sensitive to the needs and aspirations of the I Taukei community, while also preparing students for a rapidly changing world.







# Editorial Opinion

By Mr. Meli Yabakivou **FTACTL Board Secretary**

## ***“I-Taukei Education - Let’s Talk About It More”***

This was one of the purpose of our FTACTL Board and Staff trip to the land of the long white clouds - New Zealand. Learning from the Maori community was indeed a blessing. We looked at:

- a. Indigenous Cultural Education Pathways.
- b. Building relationships rooted in shared vision.
- c. Enhancement of cultural identity, traditions and values through school programs for sustainability.
- d. Paving better dreams for I-taukei to pursue studies in Maori/NZ Education Institutions.
- e. Bridging cultures.
- f. Negotiated on a program for I-taukei teachers with Auckland University.

One of the most impactful aspects of our visit was witnessing the deep collaboration between Maori institutions, local communities, and the New Zealand government. Their commitment to funding indigenous education initiatives ensures that Maori students not only receive academic knowledge but also grow with a strong sense of belonging and pride in their heritage.

Additionally, our discussions with Auckland University marked a significant step toward expanding educational opportunities for I-Taukei teachers. The potential collaboration aims to provide specialized training and exposure to innovative teaching methods that align with cultural preservation and academic excellence. By bridging cultures and learning from the best practices of the Maori community, we aspire to implement programs that will uplift I-Taukei students, educators, and future leaders—ensuring that our traditions remain a source of strength in an ever-changing world.

You may join us in our next trip if you want.

Vinaka vakalevu.



# Strengthening Education for Fijians: Learning from Maori/New Zealand Community

The Fijian Teachers Association Co-operative Thrift Limited (FTACTL) Board and the FTA Women's Network recently embarked on a successful and insightful trip to New Zealand. This visit was initiated and facilitated by the Teachers Union of New Zealand (TUNZ), reflecting a shared commitment to enhancing and protecting I-Taukei education through collaboration and knowledge exchange. Over a span of two weeks, the delegation engaged in meaningful discussions, training, and site visits, all aimed at fostering a strong working relationship between the two unions to advance the quality and sustainability of education in Fiji.

As part of their long-standing practice, the FTACTL Board and the FTA Women's Network provide comprehensive reports on their overseas visits during the COPE Triennial Conference. These reports serve as crucial resources for assessing progress in education, cultural preservation, and collaboration between New Zealand and Fiji. Through these engagements, both unions seek to develop strategic initiatives that align with the values and aspirations of the I-Taukei community. By drawing from the successes of the Maori education system, they aim to implement programs that ensure Fijian education remains deeply rooted in cultural identity while adapting to modern educational standards.

The invitation from TUNZ provided an opportunity for the two unions—the New Zealand Teachers Union and Fiji's Teachers Union—to unite in their efforts to enhance I-Taukei education. This partnership emphasizes knowledge exchange, the sharing of best practices, and the development of innovative educational approaches that incorporate indigenous knowledge and traditions. The collaboration is built upon a shared vision for the betterment of Fijian education, with a focus on reinforcing cultural values, strengthening identity, and fostering a sense of belonging among I-Taukei students.

A remarkable aspect of this initiative was the dedication shown by the FTACTL Board and the FTA Women's Network, as they self-funded their trips to New Zealand. Their financial investment underscores the seriousness of their mission and their commitment to fostering sustainable and impactful education reforms. The visit involved hands-on learning experiences at Maori educational institutions, offering firsthand insights into how indigenous communities in New Zealand have successfully integrated traditional knowledge into modern curricula with full government support. This experience served as an eye-opener, revealing the potential for similar models to be implemented in Fiji.

One of the key takeaways from the visit was the structured and well-funded approach of the Maori education system. The New Zealand government actively supports indigenous learning institutions, ensuring that Maori students receive a quality education while remaining connected to their cultural roots. Schools in Maori communities incorporate language revitalization programs, indigenous leadership development, and traditional knowledge systems into their academic frameworks. This level of investment and commitment from government bodies has resulted in a thriving education system that strengthens Maori identity while preparing students for success in various fields.

In contrast, the Fijian education system faces significant challenges, including limited resources, insufficient government support for indigenous-focused education, and a growing disconnect between modern schooling and traditional values. The trip to New Zealand highlighted the urgent need for policies that better integrate I-Taukei cultural knowledge, language preservation, and com-

community involvement into the education system. By learning from the Maori model, Fiji has an opportunity to develop educational frameworks that empower students with both academic excellence and a strong cultural foundation.

Furthermore, an important milestone from the visit was the negotiation of a specialized program for I-Taukei teachers with Auckland University. This initiative aims to provide professional development opportunities, equipping teachers with skills to integrate indigenous education methodologies into their teaching practices. Strengthening teacher capacity is a critical step toward ensuring that Fijian students benefit from an education system that is both academically robust and culturally enriching.

The collaborative efforts initiated during this visit hold great promise for the future of education in Fiji. By bridging cultures and fostering strong international partnerships, Fiji can create a more sustainable and culturally relevant education system. The FTACTL Board and the FTA Women's Network remain committed to advocating for policies that support indigenous education and empower I-Taukei students. Their dedication, along with the lessons learned from New Zealand, serves as a foundation for transformative change—one that ensures education in Fiji not only preserves cultural identity but also paves the way for a more prosperous and well-educated generation.



# Bridging Cultures

Through Quality Education System



The FTACTL Board and the FTA Women's Network's visit to New Zealand was more than just an observational trip—it was an initiative aimed at establishing long-term educational and cultural collaborations. Beyond studying the Maori education system, this visit sought to compare, learn, and build bridges between the Maori and I-Taukei communities by finding ways to integrate indigenous knowledge, traditions, and language into mainstream education. The key takeaway was the realization that education plays a crucial role in cultural preservation, and without proactive efforts, indigenous knowledge risks being lost with time.



One of the critical challenges in today's education system is the gradual decline of indigenous languages and customs among younger generations. In both Fiji and New Zealand, Western-style education has often taken precedence over traditional learning, causing a disconnect between students and their cultural heritage. While Maori institutions have made great progress in revitalizing their language and traditions through government-supported immersion programs, the Fijian education system still lacks structured initiatives to incorporate I-Taukei language, customs, and values into everyday learning. The visit emphasized the importance of not just teaching about indigenous culture as a subject, but fully embedding it into the education system, ensuring that students see their heritage as a living and evolving part of their identity.

Another significant focus of the trip was exploring ways to connect students from both communities through cultural exchange programs. By fostering educational partnerships between Maori and I-Taukei institutions, young learners could develop a deeper appreciation for their shared Pacific heritage. Programs such as student exchange initiatives, digital learning platforms, and shared curriculum development could serve as powerful tools to promote cultural understanding. Furthermore, collaborative teacher training initiatives could equip Fijian educators with the skills and strategies needed to develop culturally responsive teaching methods, mirroring the success of Maori-led educational reforms in New Zealand.

With globalization rapidly influencing education and lifestyle, it is imperative that indigenous cultures take active steps to preserve, protect, and promote their identities through education. The FTACTL Board and the FTA Women's Network's visit to New Zealand was not just about learning—it was about action. Their commitment to fostering sustainable educational models in Fiji, based on the lessons learned from the Maori community, is a testament to their dedication to ensuring that Fijian students grow up with a strong sense of cultural identity while receiving a world-class education. Through continued dialogue, policy advocacy, and institutional collaborations, the path toward a more inclusive, culturally enriched, and future-proof education system for I-Taukei students is now within reach.

## **Educational Backgrounds: Fiji and Maori/New Zealand**

### **Fiji's Education System and Indigenous Languages**

Fiji's educational landscape is characterized by its cultural diversity, with English serving as the primary medium of instruction. This emphasis on English has often overshadowed indigenous languages such as Fijian (iTaukei) and Hindi, leading to concerns about their declining use among younger generations. While there have been discussions about incorporating indigenous languages into the curriculum, significant challenges remain in effectively implementing these initiatives.

The current system tends to marginalize indigenous knowledge systems, focusing predominantly on subject-based learning aimed at higher education or employment. This approach often overlooks the importance of cultural education and sustainable living practices inherent in indigenous cultures.

## Maori Language Revitalization in New Zealand

In contrast, New Zealand has made significant strides in revitalizing the Maori language, Te Reo Maori, within its education system. Initiatives such as Kohanga Reo (language nests) and Kura Kaupapa Maori (Maori immersion schools) have been instrumental in preserving and promoting Maori language and culture. These programs immerse students in Maori language and traditions from an early age, fostering a strong sense of identity and cultural pride.

The Maori Language Act of 1987 marked a pivotal moment by granting Te Reo Maori official language status, leading to increased support for Maori language education and broadcasting. This legislative backing has been crucial in normalizing the use of Te Reo Maori across various sectors of society.

### Strategies for Language Preservation and Cultural Integration

To address the challenges faced by indigenous languages in Fiji, a multifaceted approach is necessary:

- **Curriculum Development:** Integrate indigenous languages and cultural studies into the national curriculum to ensure that students gain proficiency and appreciation for their heritage languages.
- **Teacher Training:** Provide educators with the necessary resources and training to effectively teach indigenous languages and incorporate cultural content into their lessons.
- **Community Engagement:** Involve local communities in the development and implementation of language programs to ensure they reflect the unique cultural contexts and meet the needs of indigenous populations.

Drawing inspiration from New Zealand's experience, Fiji can develop policies and programs that promote the use of indigenous languages in educational settings, thereby preserving cultural identity and fostering a more inclusive society.

The comparison between Fiji and New Zealand's approaches to indigenous language preservation in education highlights the importance of proactive policies and community involvement. By learning from New Zealand's successes, Fiji has the opportunity to revitalize its indigenous languages and ensure they remain a vibrant part of its educational landscape and cultural identity.







## Visitation to the

# MAORI COUNCIL

The FTACTL Board paid a visit to the Maori Council in New Zealand. The invitation to participate in this momentous occasion was warmly received by the FTACTL Board, who represented the FTA on this auspicious occasion. The meeting between the two Indigenous groups was characterized by emotional and spiritual connections, as both parties welcomed each other in their languages and traditional observances, fostering a profound sense of unity and belonging. The FTA saw this as an exceptional opportunity to strengthen ties and share experiences with fellow Indigenous educators and advocates. As the FTACTL Board arrived in New Zealand, they were met with a warm and heartfelt welcome, setting the tone for the meaningful interactions that followed.



Tears flowed freely as both Indigenous groups embraced each other in their languages and traditional observances. The depth of emotion expressed during the welcome highlighted the significance of the meeting and the shared history and struggles that bind Indigenous communities together. The exchange of heartfelt greetings served as a powerful reminder of the resilience and strength of Indigenous cultures in the face of challenges and adversity. Throughout the meeting, a profound sense of spiritual connection was palpable, transcending language barriers and geographical distances. The interactions between the FTACTL Board and the Maori Council members evoked a higher level of understanding and empathy, symbolizing the deep-rooted kinship that exists between Pacifica communities. The words spoken, chants, and welcoming gestures fostered a sense of unity, welcoming all participants into the extended Pacifica family.





# For Māori, Governed by Māori, Delivering for Māori.

The New Zealand Maori Council (NZMC) stands as a testament to the power of indigenous-led governance in shaping educational outcomes. With a structure comprising 48 members from 16 District Maori Councils and over 120 Maori Committees, the NZMC ensures that Maori voices resonate from the grassroots to the national stage.

In 2018, recognizing the pivotal role of education in empowering Maori communities, the NZMC established a National Taskforce on Education and Training. This initiative addresses the entire educational spectrum—from primary schools to tertiary institutions—emphasizing lifelong learning. Key focuses include:

- **Revitalizing Maori Trade Training Programs:** Reintroducing vocational pathways that align with Maori aspirations.
- **Advocating for Te Reo Maori:** Promoting the integration of the Maori language in schools to preserve and celebrate cultural identity.
- **Ensuring Equitable Access:** Striving for Maori representation in degree programs, notably in fields like medicine.

This holistic approach underscores the belief that education, rooted in cultural identity and community involvement, is instrumental in achieving te mana motuhake o te iwi Maori—self-determination for the Maori people.

## Reflections for Fiji: Embracing Indigenous-Led Educational Reforms

Fiji's recent educational initiatives mirror some of the NZMC's strategies, highlighting the importance of community-centric reforms:

1. **Significant Budget Allocation:** The Fijian government has earmarked \$778 million for education and skills development in the 2024/2025 budget, emphasizing the need for quality teaching, appropriate curricula, and inclusive partnerships.
2. **Infrastructure Development:** With support from Australia, Fiji is investing \$33 million to enhance educational infrastructure, addressing challenges like classroom overcrowding.
3. **Curriculum and Policy Reforms:** Efforts are underway to tailor curricula to societal needs and address dropout rates through early intervention programs.
4. **Bridging Education and Employment:** Initiatives like the Tertiary Scholarship and Loan Scheme (TSLS) aim to align educational outcomes with industry needs, offering scholarships and support to students facing financial hardships.

While these steps are commendable, Fiji can further enhance its educational landscape by:

- **Empowering Indigenous Voices:** Establishing bodies akin to the NZMC to ensure that indigenous perspectives shape educational policies.
- **Cultural Integration:** Embedding indigenous languages and traditions into the curriculum to foster a sense of identity and belonging among students.

- **Community Engagement:** Encouraging active participation from local communities in decision-making processes related to education.

By embracing these strategies, Fiji can cultivate an education system that not only imparts knowledge but also preserves and celebrates its rich cultural heritage, ensuring a brighter future for generations to come.



## Exploring Cultural Enrichment: Reflections from the 2023 NZ Tour by FTACTL Board Members

In 2023, members of the FTACTL Board embarked on an eye-opening tour of New Zealand—an experience that not only broadened perspectives but also deepened appreciation for cultural heritage, education, and the potential for national development. From museum halls steeped in history to the awe-inspiring landscapes that define Aotearoa, every moment offered lessons and inspiration for how Fiji can continue to grow and evolve.

One of the standout highlights of the trip was a visit to the Wellington Museum, located in the heart of the capital city. The museum presents an immersive journey through New Zealand's rich and multifaceted history. As they walked through its exhibits, we were transported through time—from the deeply rooted traditions of the Maori, to the impacts of colonization, and the growth of modern-day New Zealand. What stood out most was how the museum respectfully and intentionally celebrates the Maori worldview alongside the broader national narrative.

Through vivid storytelling, artifacts, and multimedia displays, the Wellington Museum brought to life the trials, resilience, and contributions of New Zealand's indigenous people. For us as Fijians, this experience emphasized the importance of preserving our own cultural heritage—not just as a legacy, but as a living, breathing identity that







continues to shape our people and our nation.

As part of the tour, they also embarked on a scenic road trip through the North Island, marveling at the natural beauty that unfolded before us—snow-capped mountains rising majestically in the distance, rolling hills, and peaceful rural towns. These sights offered more than just visual wonder; they provided moments of calm, reflection, and hope for what is possible when a country invests in both its people and its environment.

## Comparing Cultural and Historical Education: Fiji and New Zealand

Our journey also led us to consider the role of history and cultural education in shaping national identity. In New Zealand, the integration of Maori history and perspectives into mainstream education has created a more inclusive and balanced understanding of the country's past. The Treaty of Waitangi, te reo Maori, and indigenous leadership are not sidelined—they are embraced and taught as core components of New Zealand's story.

In Fiji, we too acknowledge our indigenous roots and colonial history, but our educational system often lacks the structured integration and national promotion of Fijian culture and history in the same way. Fiji has a rich and diverse heritage—rooted in the traditions of the iTaukei people, the arrival of Indo-Fijians, and the colonial era—but we are still working towards a more cohesive and comprehensive approach to teaching it.

The NZ experience showed us the power of representation—when a nation's indigenous culture is made visible, honored, and central to the national identity, it fosters pride, unity, and resilience in future generations.

## Lessons for Fiji: Inspiration from Aotearoa

The 2022 tour reminded us that education is not just about formal classrooms—it is about what a society chooses to remember, celebrate, and teach. Museums, public spaces, language preservation, and inclusive curricula are all part of nation-building. New Zealand's commitment to honoring its Maori heritage offers a roadmap for Fiji as we seek to elevate our own cultural identity and historical awareness.

The FTACTL Board returns from this journey with renewed motivation to advocate for an educational framework that strengthens cultural awareness, national unity, and long-term development in Fiji. We look forward to sharing more insights and working alongside community leaders, educators, and government bodies to ensure that our own stories are not just preserved—but celebrated.

***Thank You New Zealand!***



# Snapshot from the FTACTL Board NZ Tour



2023