

Five steps for success

A guide for businesses engaging with iTaukei communities



Introduction

Are you a company or an individual wanting to develop sustainable business relationships with iTaukei (Indigenous) village communities in Fiji? Then you will find the five-step process in this handbook useful.¹



This guide has been developed from the MDF Community Engagement Study. Click here to download the full version of the study.



1 PLACE Identify regions to engage with

First identify the potential regions and provinces to engage with, based on your type of business. Some key agencies that you should consult for assistance are:

Agency	Website	Phone no.	Contact email
Investment Fiji	https://www.investmentfiji.org.fj/	(679) 331 5988	info@investmentfiji.org.fj
Ministry of Agriculture	https://www.agriculture.gov.fj/index.php	(679) 338 4233	agrihelp@govnet.gov.fj
Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport, Department of Tourism	https://www.mcttt.gov.fj/	(679) 330 5411	madefijian@gmail.com
iTaukei Affairs Board, Commercial Unit	https://itaukeiaffairsboard.com/commercial-unit/	(679) 330 4200 / 773 0909	tab@govnet.gov.fj
iTaukei Land Trust Board	https://www.tltb.com.fj/	(679) 331 2733	info@tltb.com.fj
Integrated Human Resources Development Programme	https://www.mcttt.gov.fj/divisions/msme_fiji/integrated-human-resource-development-programme/	(679) 330 5411	iosefo.koroidimuri@govnet.gov.fj
iTaukei Trust Fund Board	http://www.itaukeitrustfund.com.fj/english/	(679) 331 9637	info@itaukeitrustfund.com.fj
Fiji Locally Managed Marine Area (FLMMA) network	https://lmanetwork.org/who-we-are/country-networks/fiji/	(679) 975 8853	info@fijilmma.org.fj

Once you have identified the region, engage with the relevant Provincial Office via the Assistant Roko.² This official will be able to provide more information on the province and the villages that may match your business requirements.



PEOPLE Research & consult to develop a communication strategy



Research and consult

Before you make a formal approach to a village, research and consult to understand the local context better. Talk to the Assistant Roko, key local agencies and key contacts from the province, other companies that are supplying or sourcing from villages in the province, and NGOs operating in the village. Research should include these five factors:

- 1 Mapping the **provincial and specific village structures**, including key decision-making bodies and individuals.
- 2 Identifying the **primary sources of income for village members**, including what time of year the bulk of income is usually received, and the main spending obligations (family, traditional, and church) of village members throughout the year
- 3 Investigating the daily or weekly **schedules of village members** in terms of their income earning activities, as well as family, traditional, and church obligations
- 4 Identifying which **individuals, tokatoka (family units) or groups in the village have a history** in terms of business, credibility with the local community, and influence with key decision makers
- 5 Checking on the **history of failed business dealings** or ventures with the village or villages, and identifying the individuals involved and what went wrong.

For each factor, speak to at least two or three sources—community leaders as well as individuals and groups within the village likely to be involved in the business activity. This may include youth groups and women.



Communicate

Use your research to develop an engagement and communication strategy. This should set out how you will formally enter the community, introductions, and how to communicate your business proposal clearly to the leaders and community members. Create a system for resolving conflicts that includes existing traditional channels in the community.

It is important to communicate the following:

- 1 How the business proposal will be able to create **social impact** for the village and benefit the individuals who will be directly involved, in terms of increased incomes, alternative livelihoods and/or time saving
- 2 **Your realistic expectations**, in terms of business dealings with the community, including the frequency of visits (weekly or monthly), and standards, pricing, expected minimum quantities, and how payments will be handled.
- 3 The **value adding process** and the effort that would be expected and income potentially derived at each stage from production to end market. This will help suppliers to understand the **risks and tradeoffs** involved at each stage until the end market.



Tips for successful engagement

- **SUPPORT FAMILIAR ACTIVITIES.** Avoid introducing new types of business activities. It's easier to promote the idea of improved markets and increased incomes from existing income earning activities villages are familiar with. Work schedules in villages are well established and anything new could disrupt the existing balance between family and community obligations.

In many villages, time spent on family and community obligations will be prioritised over new income opportunities. Also, as their schedules are well established, villagers may prioritise certain income earning activities over others, depending on the time demands of each activity, and the expected income.

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- **KEEP LANGUAGE ACCURATE.** To avoid miscommunication, ensure any written materials for communities are correctly translated into the iTaukei vernacular. If you don't speak iTaukei or are new to the area, you could hire an experienced local community engagement officer for assistance with consultative meetings—seek recommendations from government, the local Provincial Office, or NGOs. In some areas, community members are more comfortable speaking in their own local dialect than the nationally used iTaukei vernacular (the Bau dialect).



ENTRY Follow protocols for entry and introductions

Informal discussions may be held outside of the village setting during the preliminary research phase. However, before any formal business dealings can be set up, you will need to observe traditional protocols for making formal entry to the village and holding discussions with the village chief and elders. These should be facilitated through the Assistant Roko, who can provide insight on how best to present yourself and your business to the village.

Key things to remember when visiting the village:

- 1 **Always follow traditional protocols** when setting up business arrangements, even if you have personal relationships in or family ties to the village.
- 2 **Access to the village should be formal**, through the Turaga ni Koro (village headman), with a sevusevu.³ If your business is not familiar with the traditional formalities, you could be represented by the Assistant Roko.
- 3 **Use the first formal meeting** to set up the next steps of consultation and design, and gain agreement on whom to talk to next, and an appropriate time and place to do so.



Tips for successful entry

- **TAKE TIME.** Before establishing a business relationship, you will first need to invest time to build personal relationships and trust with community leaders. This will require several follow-up meetings before any business deals can be made.
- **USE LOCAL SUPPORT.** Involving the Provincial Office and the Assistant Roko will ensure that they are aware of and familiar with your business dealings with the community. Then, if anything goes wrong with the business relationship, they can help to mediate the situation.



CONVERSATION Consult on business design

Use your engagement and communication strategy as a starting point to discuss your business model with groups and individuals in the village, and validate your earlier assumptions. For the best chance of success, continually update and improve your business model.

Some actions to take:

- 1 **Consult with the Turaga ni Koro** to get background and insights on previous business deals done with the village or with specific groups (church, youth groups or women's groups), clans ("mataqali"), families ("tokatoka") or individuals. Follow up and speak to representatives from these various groups to better understand what worked and what did not.
- 2 **Share information** through both formal governance structures and smaller groups to ensure information trickles down, particularly to the groups likely to be involved in the business activity.
- 3 **Be transparent** about what the business does, how it works, what it needs, and the benefits to the village and the individuals directly involved.
- 4 **Hold multiple rounds of consultation**, with many different groups, to work out the details for work arrangements, process, timing and payment structures.



RELATIONSHIPS Maintain good relationships after implementation

Effective implementation of the business activity requires good relationship management with the village as a collective, and with individuals in the village. It is important to:

- 1 **Honour any agreement made** during the consultation and design process, to build trust and establish solid and stable ongoing relationships.
- 2 **Maintain regular contact**, visits to and/or purchases from the village.
- 3 **Be transparent** in all business processes and practices, as well as in pricing against market prices.
- 4 **Be flexible**, and change agreements based on evolving circumstances.
- 5 **Keep open two-way communication**, which will show villagers that the business is willing to share and listen to them and is invested in their progress as well as in its own.



Tips on sourcing and pricing

- When purchasing raw materials or agriculture from rural areas, it is recommended you use broad-based sourcing models; don't rely on one village only. This will reduce your supply chain risk: commercial activities in villages are often suspended to observe traditional protocols or church obligations.
- Acknowledge the business's purchase prices versus existing market prices, and explain how the prices offered to the village have been determined.
- Communicate clearly, and consider what other benefits the business can provide.
- Allow flexibility in pricing and payment structures through price matching or renegotiating. Note that people do not like to feel exploited, and if they can sell at a higher price elsewhere, they probably will.

Tips on aftercare services

- Consistently check in with village leaders and the Provincial Office on what is happening.
- Treat the village, groups, and individuals professionally.
- To settle disagreements effectively, resolve conflicts through existing village structures such as the village leaders or Provincial Office.
- If conflicts cannot be settled through formal (government) and informal (traditional hierarchy) structures, your business should consider whether it can justify its point of view, and if it makes financial sense to pursue legal avenues.

¹ These steps are based on the Community Engagement Study by the Market Development Facility (MDF), and on MDF's experiences in supporting the private sector to build sustainable supply chains and business models in partnership with iTaukei communities in Fiji.

² Assistant executive head of the provincial council responsible for making by-laws for the province within which the village is located.

³ A token or gift that visitors present a village chief to seek entry and acceptance into the village. The most appropriate 'sevusevu' offering is a bundle of kava root, commonly known as 'waka'.