



Fiji: the Challenges and Opportunities of Diversity

Research Approach and Methods

The research approach was social constructivist meaning that the researchers recognized that ethnic identity formation is socially constructed and is ever changing (it can be argued that the so called 'races' in Fiji have been 'socially constructed' and ethnic relations are part of social relations that can undergo significant social transformation over time). Policies of inclusion or exclusion relating to access to opportunities and resources, the enjoyment of human rights (social, cultural, political and economic), forms of representation and addressing disadvantage impinge on inter-ethnic relations. They can promote integration, common identity formation and the sense of equitable citizenship or the very opposite processes and outcomes. This approach is best served by qualitative data collection methods.

Research began with a survey of critical literature and documents followed by field research which included in-depth interviews of key persons representing ethnic and religious groups, government representatives, NGO leaders, members of the diplomatic corps and multilateral organisations such as UN agencies, and non-expert respondents of different ethnicities, age and gender. An interview schedule was prepared in consultation with the MRG/CCF/Conciliation Resources/NGO members of the 'Joint Programme Platform'.

Sampling

The qualitative research was based on purposive, and convenience sampling. Potential respondents were identified by categories such as ethnic group, government representative, NGO representative, male-female, diplomatic corps and international agencies, and rural and urban

residents. A clear majority of the interviews were held in Viti Levu (Suva, Nadi and Lautoka). In order to obtain a range of views about ethnic relations, locations known for relatively friendly inter-ethnic relations such as Levuka and Savusavu were included, as well as areas known for poorer relations. Purposive sampling also meant that very deliberate efforts were made to find respondents from as many of the minority communities as possible. A clear majority of the respondents came from the indigenous Fijian community but there were more men willing to speak (who were ethnic and religious leaders) than women. This gender disparity also occurred among Indo-Fijians, Melanesians, Banabans, and Tuvaluans. Among Part-Europeans and Europeans, a majority of respondents were women. There was gender parity for Chinese Fijian and Rotuman respondents.

While the sampling approach did obtain respondents from a representative category of Fiji's population, it cannot be said that the views expressed by interviewees are those held by all persons of that ethnicity or religion. The total number of 86 respondents is far too small to make generalisations about Fiji's people as whole. However, the views of the respondents do provide a sense of what persons of different ethnicities, religious groups and other categories included in the sample felt about the various issues and topics discussed in the interview process.

It should be noted that MRG's usual report methodology is to provide a historical, political and social analysis of the issue, based on desk research and interviews with community leaders, experts and decision-makers. This report followed the same methodology, but complemented it by including perceptions and opinions of non-elite members of the communities concerned.

Interviews were then held with local and government officials, representatives of ethnic/religious communities including CSOs, representatives of international organisations, academic researchers and representatives of donor, diplomatic and inter-governmental communities (divided according to 'Asian', 'Pacific Islands' and 'Western'). Here, the views of the interviewees were sought on:

1. Relations between ethnic/religious communities
2. Reasons for poor relations if applicable
3. Local/regional variations/dynamics with regard to inter-community relations

4. Discrimination against ethnic/religious communities with regard to enjoyment of economic, social, and cultural rights, and civil and political rights
5. Participation of ethnic/religious communities in political decision-making at the local and national level
6. An assessment of current and previous governmental-level proposals to improve inter-community relations and enjoyment of human rights by all communities
7. Ideas/proposals for improvement in ethnic relations and enjoyment of human rights (for instance phasing out of racial names to school inherited from the era of segregated schools and the teaching of vernacular languages to all students)
8. Good practice with regard to inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations and participation in decision making

The field research was carried out over 3 weeks in September, 2012 and involved the principal researcher (an Indo-Fijian male), and two research assistants (a female of mixed indigenous and Indo-Fijian descent, and an indigenous Fijian male).

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