

## Ecocultural Practices related to Sustainable Food Systems in Coastal Communities in Fiji

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Ecocultural practices demonstrate the wisdom and knowledge in understanding the relationships between ecological change, cultural practices, and livelihoods that contribute to the sustainability of the traditional food system.

In Fiji, this is based on the traditional lunar calendar (*vula vakaviti*) and its value systems. This traditional lunar calendar is associated with ecological changes in the food system and how they are regulated accordingly. Hence, this calendar is used as a guide to determine and manage monthly foods across the entire food system with associated activities. This is identified through observed ecological changes in the food system of various agricultural and marine foods species.

The traditional lunar calendar identifies specific foods or plants and related activities in an annual lunar cycle. The annual lunar cycle helps to rotate the use of various food resources throughout the year to reduce the over-use and over-harvest of one resource, and that allows recuperation and environmental healing for resource growth. The lunar cycle begins plentifully with rabbit fish—*vula i nuqa levu* (large schools of ‘rabbit’ fish)—followed by *vula i sevu* (first harvest to the chief and church), *vula i kelikeli* (harvesting and storage of yams and other rootcrops), *vula i gasau* (flowering of reeds), *vula i doi* (flowering of doi shrub or *alphitonia* spp.), *vula i werewere* (weeding for the planting of yams), *vula i kukicuki* (digging and planting of yams), *vula i se-ni-drala/kawakawa* timber trees flower and spawning of grouper fish, *vula i vavakada* (yam sprouting), *vula i balolo lailai* (first appearance of edible sea worm (*nereis*), *vula i balolo levu* (larger appearance of edible sea-worm (*nereis*), and ends again with the rabbit fish but low school volume or *vula i nuqa lailai* (small schools of ‘rabbit’ fish). The name of each lunar season symbolizes the importance accessing and nurturing those agricultural and marine resources that also accompanies other marine- and land-based resources.

Furthermore, the declaration of *tabu* (no take) or a temporary closure of a section of a land or community’s fishing ground for a certain period; the use of traditional farming and fishing methods, such as *vucivuci* and *yavirau*, respectively; and barter systems between coastal and highland people are also ecocultural value systems that act as adaptation techniques in preserving and healing of the environment to allow increases in breeding and growth of various food resources as well as the exchanging and sharing of goods. While the traditional lunar calendar and its value systems were useful, the impact of climate change today and the apparent loss in the value systems have limited their usefulness and applications, which warrants further investigations and research.