

Good afternoon and Thank you for the invitation to speak at the 4th World Summit for the Arts.

Culture and Development. What Culture and whose development?

This title can speak volumes about the debates that arise not only about culture, not only about development but also about culture and development being in the same sentence. With culture often being seen as a hindrance to development, and development detrimental particularly to indigenous cultures.

Today I speak about my indigenous Pacific cultures and how development has impacted at a grassroots level. I speak centered in a Pacific context and with the knowledge and experience gained as an indigenous artist and as a community arts advocate, living and working in the Pacific community.

Development for many in the Pacific cultural community is a word that often invokes images and the feeling of a 'new wave of colonisation'. The threat of being moved towards something that is not ours, the push to take on models that further bring us into the globalised world, the push to become western and civilized. It is yet another threat on our already vulnerable cultural knowledge systems, structures, languages and art forms.

However the reality for many in the Pacific creative and cultural community is that our resources to protect our culture, and to provide platforms for creative expression, for the majority, comes in the form of development aid. For much of our creative community, this is the only path in which we are able to gain support to build our communities and further our work.

Growing up, living and working in the Pacific, we know what our people need. We know how to make our lives sustainable and what our communities strive to achieve. We see imbedded in our society evidence of the models and tools needed to enhance our peoples survival while still ensuring our land and our seas are protected. However many of these knowledge systems, models or methods don't fit the application forms for donor funding, or don't match against the many criteria that these models assume will ensure youth empowerment, women equality, justice, governance, and sustainable livelihoods. The irony though is that many of these cultural systems, models and the use of the arts does generate peace, community building, social justice and equality, just not with quantitative indicators that can be easily measured.

The key to development is the models placed upon beneficiaries to utilise in order to receive the aid that is distributed. Many of the models have failed for

the simple reason that they are not sustainable because the beneficiaries are unable to match these models in a practical way to the environment, to the particular people and their cultural practices. In many cases models that have been developed and worked in Asia or Africa are assumed to be able to be transplanted to the Pacific community.

The frightening thing, is that even we with international experience, often find ourselves in compromising situations, and often we allow these models to be transplanted giving faith to these agencies because they are international experts. We chose to ride on the wagon called 'development' in the hope that by proving our work and worth, we will eventually be listened to, and that somewhere along the way this cooperation will eventually give us self-determination.

What happens though to our psyche when we begin to talk about culture and development in the same sentence? For our indigenous culture is something sacred, it is our particular knowledge and way of living that binds our people together, that ensures our uniqueness but that keeps us connected to a community. After colonization wiped out and banned so much of our indigenous cultures, what we did have left was protected by UN declarations, by treaties and legislations. Cultural custodians and artists have protected this knowledge fiercely during the insurgence of indigenous people and cultures in the past decades. It was something that would no longer be touched by 'civilisation' by the hands of 'development'. It was kept within the confines of our family; pass down from generation to generation and protected actively by its communities.

Now indigenous culture comes to the forefront of international agendas, to be at the core of development and to have our cultural models put into inventories for the sake of protection, advancement and education. They have discovered that our culture is innovative, evolving and our knowledge is deeply rooted in sustainability, balance and connectivity; they have discovered that indeed in our world we have solutions to some of the worlds problems – health, poverty, food crisis, crime and conflict. That perhaps amongst the abolished relics, the dances and songs banished and destroyed in times of colonization, the languages and knowledge systems deemed as tribal and primitive, that perhaps we did after all have the solutions for sustainable development, environmental conservation, poverty alleviation, health and community empowerment.

Indeed there is much negativity, animosity and perhaps resentment attached to 'development' particularly for indigenous people who have been told for decades that they need to develop, to become civilized, it is yet another directed action - to be developed into something that is not us. What does

development equate to? big, fast cities, convenience at the touch of a button, microwave food, pizzas in 8 minutes flat, TV conversations, the nuclear family, solo life in the fast lane, all measured by monetary wealth and material abundance. But to many of our Oceanic people development is measured by the happiness of the family, and of our people as a whole. We are a practical and resourceful people and we look to find balance and common sense in our existence, rather than one way over the other. Oceanic people are people of the ocean and therefore people that adapt everyday to the tides, to the changes in the earth, to the unpredictable weather. We find solutions that are practical and that will enable all around us to move towards a state of fulfillment. For us development is to get to the place where our families have a home, have abundant food on their tables, where our communities and villages are thriving, where we can be healed, where we can live and die in dignity, where we are connected to the earth, moving with the sea and praising and rejoicing in the people that we are, and where we have a choice.

However there is a stark reality that not all in our region hold the same sentiments and as we sit in international arenas being acknowledged for our work in culture and development, still much of our government and wider private and public sector philosophies are based on assimilation, civilization and modernization. Support and funding for methods of sustainable development often come from the outside and the reality of our Pacific governments commitment to culture as a vector for development is far from the reality. Investment into cultural, creative and artistic infrastructure is minimal, support for the protection of intellectual property rights goes only as far as it doesn't get in the way of tourism and economic development.

However we must start from the small things and slowly build the foundations, proving at each point that our methods and models do work to build our communities. With the resources we have, the inspiration and motivations we gather we make slow but strong steps towards achieving our goal. Our biggest threat is time, the time to be able to protect and revive what we do have left of our cultural knowledge, our art forms and ocean cultures, and the time to ensure that we don't move into another state of directed social change.

In my work then I chose to work with the community, seeking advice from our elders, dialoguing and exchanging ideas with our youth, and through this develop models that can effect change, no matter how small.

Through the Fiji Arts Council and through a wider regional network like the Pacific Arts Alliance we as a small team of artists and administrators have begun to provide a benchmark and simple, practical models for social change, and what culture and development could mean. We are developing models

that will not only enhance the potential of the individual artist and enable them to fulfill their dreams, but ensure that as individuals with a god given gift, that they are able to feed their families and be counted as a worthwhile part of society. There are at all times key factors we must consider when working with our artists and the community - their economic potential, their spiritual needs, their community contribution and their abilities to make choices and respond to opportunities.

In the early stages of the year as we began to develop the first Strategic Plan for the arts in Fiji, Lingikoni Vakauta, one of our prolific master artists and I led a Talanoa (dialogue) session with senior artists and discussed the models that needed to be put in place to ensure the complete development of our artists. The programme was to be called Professional Pathways and the focus of our conversation was on models that ensured the technical, economical, social and spiritual development of each individual. We were very aware in all of our discussions that we were in a society where nothing is independent of the other. Where you come into the world connected to everything around you and therefore an awareness of how important it was to develop models that were holistic, practical and engaging. Models needed to address the need for technical skills, many which would need to be imported, the sacredness and protection of the mana and the spirit of each artist, their connection and obligations to their communities and their responsibility to pass this knowledge on.

Lingikoni came up with the perfect concept or pacific name to explain this programme, a pacific concept that embodied all that we talked about.

'Cara Maka' or "Ta Hala" (Pave the Way) - *Cara Maka or Ta Hala* is a Fijian/ Tongan concept that refers to paving the way or setting the example for those that follow. This concept can be directly applied literally to making roads but it can also apply to a way of life.

From this concept we developed the initiative, which is about mentoring and capacity building. The general premise on which this initiative is built is the belief that paving the way for artists can only come about through direct and concerted mentoring and continued support for artists. This will not only enable artists to develop new skills and knowledge but will in effect break existing barriers between communities and provide alternative opportunities for employment. The development will not only be one of the individual but with their family and community circumstances and needs in mind. This way the artist is valued in their contributions and therefore upheld and motivated to continue to be creative. This is and was an ancient model of the master and the apprentice and in a space and time where the status of the artist was upheld amongst that of doctors, chiefs and priests. And because of artists contributions to the community they were well looked after. Gifted with land, a home, a family and a community that serviced their needs and upheld their knowledge and mana. This was wiped out during colonization where the artists and the cultural custodian, who held the key to the community and their

power, was abolished. For the only way you could take ownership of a community was to divide and disintegrate the very belief systems that bound them together and artists embodied these systems.

Cara Maka is also a model of leadership and governance, as we were also well aware that respect is earned, people follow because you have proven yourself, and you have paved the way and earned the right to lead. It is not a concept taken lightly and often has much more weight than the merit of a formal qualification. The key however is to find balance, and provide the platforms to develop and support artists to be leaders who have earned their qualifications both in the formal sector and through the Pacific way.

However while this concept exists in 'traditional' communities, it is not a concept that has been supported in the wider community. As many of these mentors do not have the qualifications and therefore not considered suitable to teach. However in the Pacific context these are our masters, their knowledge and gift is god given, and nurtured and recognized through the community. Through their leadership our artists are given not only a platform of technical skill but they are given the spiritual and emotional grounding that they need in order to be confident in expressing their visions, they learn discernment, to know how and when to express, in what form and with always the communities welfare at heart.

3 other models developed alongside Cara Maka but as with the Oceanic way, all connected and where each artist should at some point in their career be a part of. Vu'Ata – Vu the place where our knowledge comes from, where our mana and skills are given to us, and 'Ata our heart, where our expression and our voice is held and nurtured. This programme looks at the spiritual development of our people, nurturing the importance of difference, the importance of knowing what is sacred and that, which can be shared. It is at the core of our people, and without it 'development' programmes will be detrimental. Without our culture, without our language and knowledge systems at the core of 'development' models, we ourselves perpetuate cycles of destruction, poverty and disillusionment.

Vu 'Ata is about identifying, protecting and preserving that knowledge and ensuring mechanisms for it to be passed on safely and wisely to our children, and to find the right models to enable this knowledge to be shared with others around us. The third element is about conflict. Breaking Barriers – Arts for Social Change and Talanoa sessions is about arts as a tool to enable free expression, to provide that safe space to deal with issues and enable community building, peace and dialogue.

Our Creative industries programme takes care of the economic needs of the artist and looks at entrepreneurship, trade and contact with the world market. It is a natural instinct for our people to be entrepreneurial as they traded for years through their voyaging canoes. The creative Industries is an ancient industry, however one that has been diminished because of the placement of borders and the dividing and fragmentation of the Pacific. As with all we do, these models adapt along the way as we work with different communities and individuals, but we have a base from which to work from and provide our people with an understanding to create their own programmes.

In spite of all our reservations, we are however in a time of possible positive change. There is much being done to strengthen platforms for cultural diversity, freedom of expression and the protection of indigenous cultures such as with the Commonwealth Group for Culture and Development, the ACP/ILO/UNESCO/EU and UNCTAD joint programmes for strengthening the creative industries and protecting culture, and regionally through the Secretariat of the Pacific Community and the Pacific Arts Alliance.

The key factor is that through the arts and through the cultural sector, we now have a strong platform to advocate for self- directed development. We are in a position now where we are able to advocate and be a part of a system that we can influence and motivate. We as Pacific people have much to offer, and we must be confident in our knowledge, in our mana and in our oceanic spirit. Our cultures are amongst the most ancient in the world and we must be confident in that wisdom, confident in the wisdom of our ancestors and as oceanic people utilise that wisdom to adapt, change and move towards a future that is safe and secure for our families and our communities as opposed to a future of convenience and assimilation. However it is crucial that we as advocates of our cultures and the voices of our people and their spirit, that we come together to make our governments listen, to not just place culture on their agenda, no that's not enough they must make culture and integral part of all their mandates.

Culture and its knowledge systems must be at the core of health policies so that our people understand how they are begin treated, so that they have right and access to modern medicine but have the choice to also utilise natural methods. Cultural systems must be at the core of agriculture so that our people are encouraged and supported to cultivate their own natural foods and with methods that protect our lands and seas. Culture must be at the core of education so that our children learn our histories, our languages and skills alongside that of our colonized and immigrant history. Culture must be at the core of economy so that arts and creativity as a natural resource is taken seriously and invested into, supported and given the platforms and infrastructure to grow. Culture and creativity must be at the core foreign policy so that on an international level we learn to work with others in respect and admiration of diverse, vibrant and creative cultures, so that we find

similarities in our music, our languages our arts rather than difference in our politics. Where we appreciate peoples rights to govern themselves, to find independence and to move and grow in ways that will enhance their own countries as well as be able to interact internationally. Where human dignity, collective responsibility and humility are at the core of interaction.

Culture must be at the core of justice, governance and social development so that those at risk are protected and find platforms for acceptance and change. So that our deviants and criminals find a path in which to rehabilitate and merge back into the community, serving the community for their crimes rather than being isolated and therefore continuing a perpetual cycle of violence. Where mental health is healed through positive expression, dignity and patience. Where our street kids can gain hope and faith in a world that they are begrudged, where communities find ways to heal, to rebuild. Where ethnic and racial tension can somehow be addressed with the simplicity of a photograph, music or dance. Perhaps these are the words of an idealist, but then everything starts with a vision and develops and grows with perseverance, hope and truth.

Development then should be simply about creating the platform to enable one to chose their own path, it is about providing one with the tools and skills that they need to determine their own future, to build their homes and communities, it must be self-directed, but guided with wisdom and support.

Culture is the human element, and if we are to create a world that is focused on dignity, humility and cooperation then people and their culture must be at the core of this. Culture is who and what we are, it is our spirit it is our mana, it gives us the ability to adapt and change but the ability to also be aware of those around us, to be aware of how our actions affects our people, our land, our seas and heavens and therefore is at the core of our individual and collective development. However it is always evolving and changing and as we ground ourselves and have confidence in our own cultural knowledge and systems, we can then appreciate other cultures and build bridges based on empathy and respect.

The key for this roundtable is that my presentation should bring dialogue, debate and discussion. I have by no means the answer but simply a vision, hope and many ideas and I look forward to our exchange, to our Talanoa.