

Rugby players, fish boards, Facebook and more as Fiji reimagines conservation campaigns to shift social norms and create durable change

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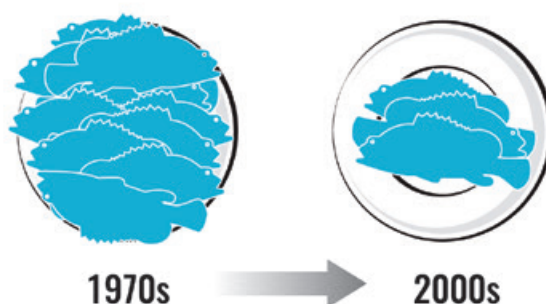
There is a story about a father in a rural Fijian village who is attending church on Sunday. At the end of the service, the church deacon reads the family names of those who have not yet given the church levy. The man, hearing his family name read out in church, immediately heads out to the village tabu area (marine protected area) and starts fishing to earn the money he needs to get his name off that list.

The point of the story, which we share at workshops to develop behavioural change approaches, is that until fishing in the tabu area is more shameful than hearing your name on the church list, we are going to have a hard time advancing sustainable fisheries management solutions.

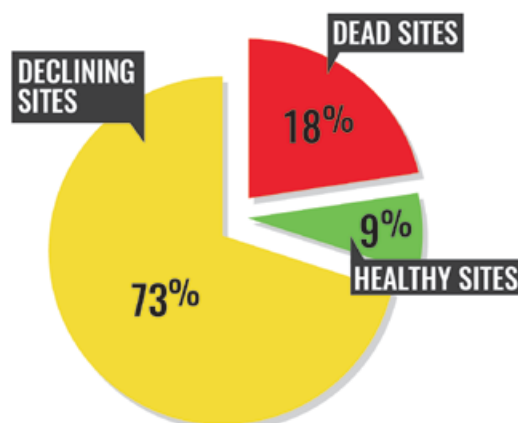
In Fiji, and across the Pacific Islands region, the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem health is increasingly threatening the well-being of rural communities that are heavily reliant on natural resources to meet their basic needs. Despite these vulnerabilities, short-term needs often drive decision-making at the community level as populations and incomes needs increase.

Because of this, cChange³ in collaboration with Fiji's Ministry of Fisheries (MoF) and Locally Managed Marine Area Network (FLMMA), launched an awareness campaign in 2014 with the underlying goal of shifting social norms around fishing. The campaign was specifically designed to reduce fishing pressure on rapidly declining grouper fisheries in Fiji. Commonly known as *kawakawa* and *donu* in Fijian, these A-grade fish support the livelihoods and food needs of communities nationwide and are culturally important to all Fijians.

Fiji saw a 70% decline in the landings of *kawakawa* and *donu* (grouper) over the past 30 years.



Of 22 breeding sites surveyed in 2003:



Two infographics used by the campaign to describe the grouper fishery decline in Fiji. (Images: ©cChange)

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³ cChange is an international non-governmental organisation dedicated to improving the lives of Pacific Islanders through strategic communications and behavioural change initiatives. <https://cChange.no/>

**“ I DON'T WANT TO BE REMEMBERED AS THE GENERATION THAT ATE IT ALL.
I WANT TO BE REMEMBERED AS SOMEONE WHO THOUGHT NOT JUST ABOUT
HIMSELF BUT ABOUT OUR FUTURE GENERATIONS. ”**

Waisale Serevi King of 7s

Say **NO** to harvesting, selling,
buying, possessing & exporting
Kawakawa and Donu, June
through September.

IT'S THE LAW.

Let them breed. Eat more later.

SEREVI
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Photo Courtesy of SEREVI ©

Inspirational poster with Fiji rugby legend, Waisale Serevi, a champion carrying out a simple message that goes beyond science. (Image: ©cChange)

In workshops and meetings in 2013, cChange worked with MoF and FLMMA partners to use a behavioural approach to address the underlying challenges and barriers to advancing fisheries management in Fiji. This approach targets activation points and incremental change. In simple terms: If you ask someone to do 10 things, they are likely to not do any of them. But if you can motivate someone to do just one thing to improve fishing grounds in Fiji, they will begin to self-identify as someone who takes action for healthier resources and will be more likely to take more actions.

As part of the campaign, we also wanted to create broad public support for improved fisheries management. In the

political realities of Pacific Islands, fisheries management is often less of a priority for communities than calls for roads, educational opportunities, and access to markets and health care. Government agendas typically reflect that reality. If the broad changes (and funding increases) needed for improved fisheries management were to take hold, there would need to be broad public demand for fisheries management in Fiji.

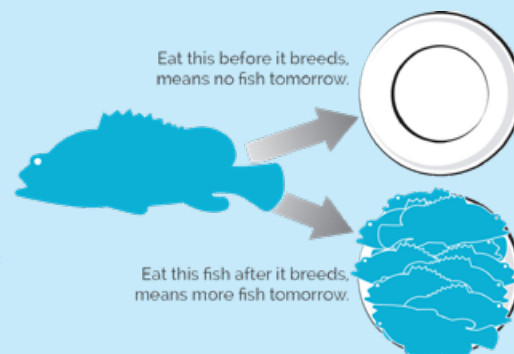
With declining grouper fisheries, we found our activation point. While it was not the most pressing issue in Fiji, it was an issue that was likely to change mindsets and build a foundation for long-term change.

Here were some of our key criteria:

Clear, simple message

To help groupers, we could ask the public to simply let the fish breed. Let them release their eggs, and we would have more fish later. In our market research in Fiji, and from market research from other regions, fish reproductivity often resonated better than other overfishing messages. For example, intuitively, people have a harder time believing that a few local fishers could cause so much damage to a big ocean. But stopping fish from having babies: that message was visceral. And it can be explained in minutes. No workshop needed.

IT'S SIMPLE
MATH



Science boiled down to simplicity. The campaign communicates the problem in simple terms and empowers people to make a difference. (Image: ©cChange)

Simple, relatively low-cost request

Working with MoF researchers and Yvonne Sadovy of the University of Hong Kong, we narrowed the amount of time to forego fishing for groupers to four months. These are the peak months for spawning (June through September) so it had the largest benefit for the least opportunity cost. The public request was for individuals from all walks of life to pledge not to eat, buy or sell these fish during their peak spawning months. In our messaging, we talked about the four months break being a little longer than a traditional fishing tabu (100 days) that is put in place after the death of a chief, a ban that has been practised for generations.

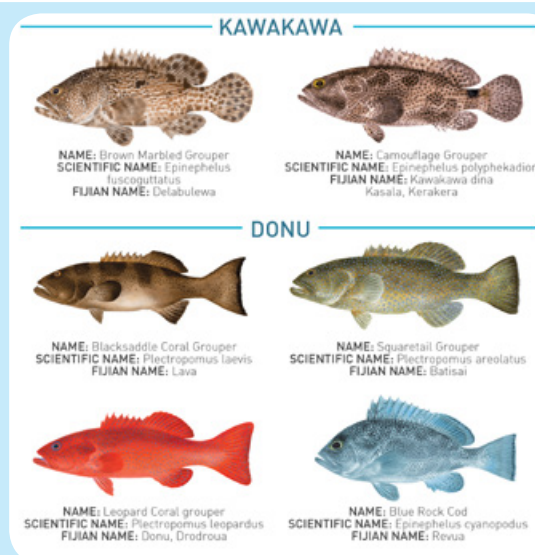


The campaign is asking people from all walks of life to take a simple pledge: 'I will not eat, buy or sell *kawakawa* and *donu* from June through September'. (Images: ©cChange)

Provides an activation point for creating a broad constituency for sustainable fisheries management

Groupers are culturally and economically important species, both to indigenous Fijians (*iTaukei*) and Fijians of Indian descent. A simple personal pledge makes it possible to help save something local people really care about. And, if people could come together to save their favourite fish, they would be more likely to help save other species from overharvesting. And if enough people backed the campaign, it would also elevate fisheries issues to a political level.

The campaign is designed to boost awareness about fish species known locally as *kawakawa* and *donu*, commonly called groupers in English. (Images: ©cChange and SPC)



Role modelling change

In March 2014, in partnership with MoF, we launched the '4FJ, A Movement to Protect Our Way of Life', at the De Vos on the Park, a hotel in downtown Suva. The 4FJ brand was designed as a hip mobile text abbreviation of its inspirational call to take action 'For Fiji'. People were asked specifically to take the 4FJ pledge to forego eating grouper during its peak spawning months.



The 4FJ brand, a short for 'For Fiji'.



As part of the 4FJ campaign strategy, champions were recruited to explain why action was needed. The campaign engaged with traditional chiefs, church leaders, fishers, political leaders, celebrity chefs, sports stars, beauty queens, and the list goes on. (Images: ©cChange)

The next critically important decision the campaign made was recruiting the right messengers to deliver the message. So, at the dais on 4FJ's launch day, there was a spectrum of local leaders, including a traditional chief, a pastor, a fisher, and a celebrity chef.

We recruited champions from all walks of life and all demographics, people who are well known or respected in Fiji. These were individuals who had far more influence over key demographics than any technical expert. And as the campaign rolled out, we shared just enough science to validate the problem and focused instead on why the champions were taking action, why they were going to the pledge for Fiji. We knew overfishing issues mattered, but they were too often lost in technical, abstract discussions. So, with 4FJ, we opened the door for Ratu Filimoni Ralogaivau, a traditional chief, to talk about the obligation each *iTaukei* had to maintain the things (groupers) that were part of their culture and identity.

Epeli Saukuru, a pastor at the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Suva, talked about the need to be a good steward of God's creation. Lisala Waqalala, a long-time fisher from Ra, talked about how groupers helped provide a good diet and pay for schooling.

One of the most prominent campaign champions, Fiji rugby legend, Waisale Serevi, connected the campaign to his village upbringings, where groupers were centrepieces at Sunday meals and community events. Serevi, who was not at the launch, in his press statement talked about two pillars that guided him as he travelled the world with rugby, *i tovo vakavanua* (traditions) and *lotu* (faith), and wanting the next generation to experience the same. These fish were inextricably linked to that upbringing, he said.

Repetition, repetition, repetition

The campaign was rolled out with national media. This meant promoting the champions to print and broadcast media, and appearances on talk back radio, which is more effective in reaching rural areas in Fiji. Repetition was key to our success. People rarely act after hearing a message once. There is typically no 'Aha!' moment in behavioural change. Change takes time as people are already inundated with messages and their own obligations and aspirations. People need to hear a message again and again.

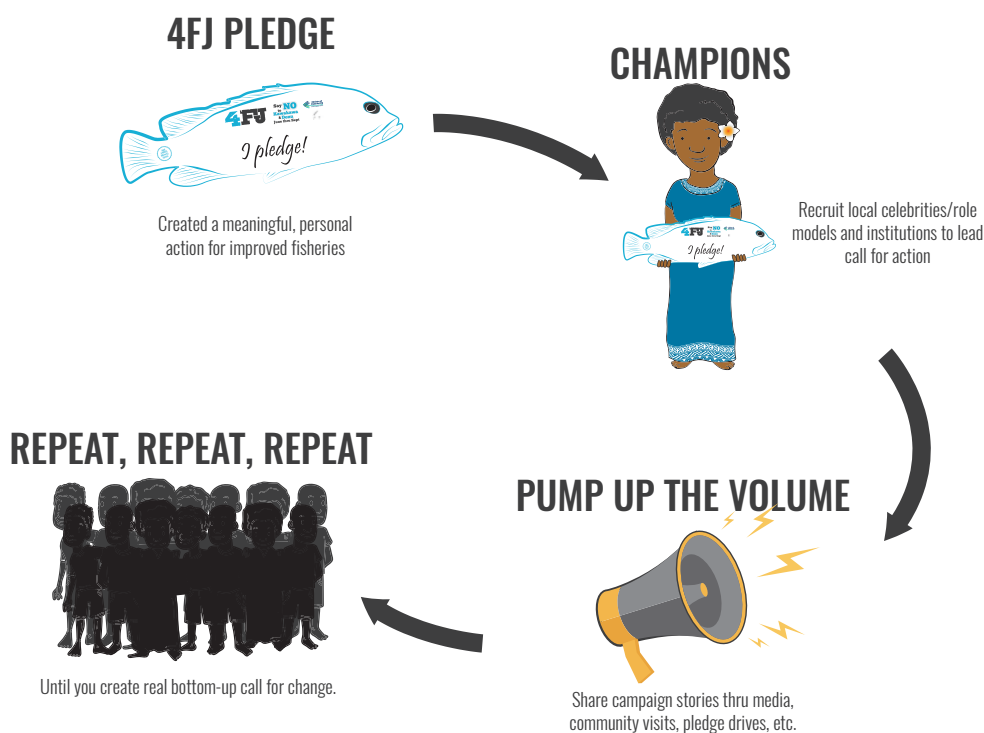
So, new champions were released nearly weekly during the spawning seasons. We also invested time in promoting the champions on social media, with a focus on Facebook, where usership is high and the campaign flourished with minimal resources. For example, on Facebook you can boost a post for as little as USD 5. We boosted a pledge photo for two days of Fiji 7s captain and Olympic gold medallist, Jerry Tuwai, taking the pledge with his family for USD 10. That post reached 70,000 people on Facebook in Fiji, receiving nearly 10,000 'likes'.

In addition, we conducted 4FJ pledge drives at public events, including the series of national festivals that occur during the peak spawning months, such as the Hibiscus Festival in Suva. Individuals visiting our booths, which were supported with volunteers, learned about the issues. People were then asked to write their name on a fish board shaped like a grouper and have their photo taken. Converts took photos individually but also with their friends, family, sports teams or work mates. Then, individuals signed a commitment sheet, which recorded their name, village/town and their pledge. We then posted the thousands and thousands of pledge photos on Facebook to help ensure individuals kept their pledges and spur others to follow. This was arguably the most successful campaign tactic because it allowed people to take meaningful action – right here, right now – to make a difference. Environmental outreach can often leave people overwhelmed and unsure how to make a difference. The 4FJ pledge was empowering.



The picture of Fiji rugby legend Waisale Serevi that was used to create the poster (Image: ©SEREVI)

Finally, we worked with an impressive group of community-based partners to conduct outreach directly to communities and key stakeholders. This was led by MoF, the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, and FLMMMA partners. For that, we developed a simple outreach toolkit that supported partners to give short talks about the campaign during evening sessions or at lunch breaks. And we conducted presentations for businesses and institutions and worked with MoF in subsequent years to visit fish sellers and exporters in all of Fiji's major towns.



The 4FJ approach includes recruiting champions, engaging media, and seeking pledges. (Image: ©cChange)



Champion fisherman Lisala Waqalala convinced all the *mataqalis* (traditional clans) to get behind the campaign. (Image: ©cChange)

Fiji hears the call

The public and community response was immediate and positive. The simple message of letting the groupers breed, voiced by Fiji role models, resonated.

Here are a few snapshots.

4FJ fisher champion Lisala Waqalala spoke at the launch. Unbeknownst to the campaign, Lisala was so inspired by the event that he went back to his village and shared the 4FJ message. He convinced all the *mataqalis* (traditional clans) to get behind the campaign, and met several times with fishers to also gain their support. His village, Vitaw, became the first village in Fiji to make the 4FJ pledge and establish a traditional ban on fishing *kawakawa* and *donu* during the peak spawning months.

Another memorable story came from the remote island group of Lau, where traditional chiefs had banned the fishing of groupers during the peak spawning months after hearing about the issue on a national radio programme in 2014. Since that date, the chiefs have similarly banned the fishing of mullet fish and goatfish around locally identified key spawning months. The campaign did not learn about the chiefs' actions until 2018.

There were also institutional partners, which were critical to the campaign's growth. For example, the Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma was an early institutional champion. The largest religious institution in Fiji found the campaign a strong platform to meaningfully share its message of environmental stewardship.

Large businesses, such as Morris Hedstrom and Newworld IGA, both of which operate national supermarket chains, pledged to forego fish sales revenue to support the campaign. The tourism sector, led by the Fiji Hotel and Tourism Association, similarly got behind the campaign and passed a resolution to share it with members nationally. Inspired by the outpouring of support, Jacks of Fiji partnered with the campaign to print and sell 4FJ t-shirts in all its stores, at its cost, with a small portion of the proceeds coming back to the campaign.

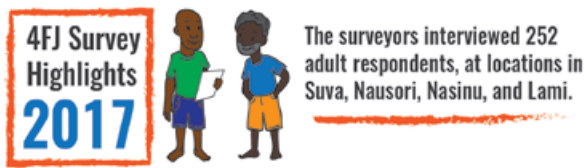
The campaign also spread virally. In the first part of the campaign, for example, two Hibiscus Festival queen contests incorporated grouper images into their sarongs for a competition, without any coordination with the campaign. We found out with the rest of the viewers as they sauntered across the stage. It was also captured in part on Facebook where people shamed friends if they posted pictures of eating grouper during the peak spawning months.

By the third year of the campaign, pledge drives had garnered more than 15,000 in public pledges (today it is 25,000).

*25,000 have already pledged to not eat,
buy or sell kawakawa or donu (grouper) June through September.
Let them breed. Eat more later.*

cChange conducted a public opinion survey in the Suva–Nausori corridor in 2017 to gauge support for the ban and the impact of the campaign. The surveyors interviewed 252 adults at locations in Suva, Nausori, Nasinu and Lami. The sample size was based on population figures from the Fiji census.

The survey highlights included:



- 93% of those surveyed supported a proposed Fiji government four-month seasonal ban on *kawakawa* and *donu*.
- 71–76% of those surveyed believed *kawakawa/donu* species were overfished.
- Two-thirds thought *kawakawa* and *donu* were less available today in the markets, and were smaller and more expensive than they were a few years ago.
- 90% of the people who were aware of campaign, were more supportive of fishing rules and regulations; and
- 86% of the people who were aware of the campaign also wanted to know more about what they could do about overfishing.

Bottom-up change

From the onset of the campaign, supporters asked why the government could not simply ban fishing of groupers during the peak months, instead of asking for voluntary pledges. But top-down regulation rarely works because compliance is a key factor to success. The campaign target was to engage individuals and communities to understand the need for management measures and let a ban be driven by public support instead. Three seasons in the campaign, we were inundated with complaints when people saw egg-filled groupers on sale in markets.

In June 2017, buoyed by three years of the 4FJ campaign, the Government of Fiji submitted a voluntary commitment at the United Nations Ocean Conference 7, to ban the fishing, sale and export of all grouper species in Fiji from June to September, the following year. Then, in June 2018, a national four-month ban was implemented through a Public Notice from MoF.

As part of the implementation, MoF worked with cChange to develop new tools to raise awareness and compliance, namely a grouper ban factsheet, a ban poster listing all 27 types of groupers, a PowerPoint presentation and a 24-minute documentary that aired nationally. The factsheet was translated into iTaukei, Hindi and Chinese, and new champions, such as the Chinese Business Association of Fiji partnered with cChange to distribute materials through their networks. FLMMA partners also took the information materials out to communities.

Demonstrating the incremental change, new partnerships emerged through for compliance and enforcement. With public support high, we approached Fiji's town councils (who oversee and permit vendors at all formal markets), the Fiji Police Department and Customs, and the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service to collaborate on the ban's implementation. All were onboard. Led by MoF, three compliance and enforcement trainings were held, and these new partners actively conducted outreach activities to fish sellers and middlemen and communities, and assisted later with enforcement. This meant market masters visiting all vendors in their markets, and inspiring reports of community police officers taking pledge boards into villages. This was an unprecedented collaboration between these key government bodies and is expected to provide an important platform for MoF enforcement efforts in the future.



The grouper ban factsheet was one of the information tools used during the campaign (Images: ©cChange)



The Set Size flipbook. (Image: ©cChange)

of undersize fish. Social norms will again be a critical component of success.

To address these issues, cChange has started creating video vignettes of fishers talking about sliding baseline and serial depletion, but in personal stories about the changes they have seen in their fishing grounds, with fish they use to catch but do not anymore, and the increased distance and time it takes them today to catch smaller and smaller fish. While research is critical, fisher testimonials are often more powerful in focusing local discussions. We are also piloting tools that portray fish at actual sizes to more effectively communicate the issue of undersize fish. For example, we have designed a banner that displays the most common food fish in Fiji at actual size, which can hang in a community and fish market. And we developed community-friendly tools, such as an illustrated A4 booklet on the drivers of overfishing, the impacts of overfishing, and the need for fish to reach Set Size, where enough fish are reproducing to ensure good stocks year after year.

Of note, the Set Size campaign also presents new opportunities for simple fisheries assessment tools for communities to check the health of their species of concern and take a host of local management actions beyond sizes, such as gear restrictions, protecting nursery grounds, limiting fishing effort, and establishing marine protected areas. With a simple traffic light system, communities can potentially assess their species of concern by measuring the sizes to determine the number of undersize in their catch and use that as a platform to discuss management options, if necessary. With science advisor support, including that of Dr Jeremy Prince of Biospherics, this is expected to be piloted in communities in upcoming months in collaboration with FLMMA.

Finally, the next phase of the campaign will be a key opportunity to engage with commercial fishers through forums, to ensure a broader dialogue with those most impacted by new regulations. MoF is also working to advance fisher forums that present the ministry's vision for supporting fishers to improve their livelihoods and to create safe space to discuss challenges with current and future regulations.

Beyond 4FJ

The question arises as to why there are not more campaigns like 4FJ. One of the biggest challenges to creating such campaigns is the scarcity of funding for outside-the-box initiatives to tackle changing mindsets. Most funding delegates communication as a support service for sharing science and project results, and does not allocate resources to support behavioural change approaches that meaningfully motivate action. In the case of 4FJ, with the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, cChange was able to secure thoughtful and sustained support to use behavioural change approaches for improving food security and livelihoods of coastal communities.

Of note, another key challenge cChange has experienced in other countries and territories is forming the kind of broader partnerships that made 4FJ successful. It is often difficult to form such collaborations as there are many competing initiatives and objectives in most countries and territories and most often limited resources. Because, while this article is focused on pulling the curtain back on the 4FJ social marketing strategy, it is important to acknowledge that the campaign is a product of sound strategy but also its part-

nerships, starting with strong leadership at MoF, which is the public face of the campaign, and the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs and FLMMA partners. In countries with sprawling rural areas, networks matter.

That said, it is a worthy effort, whether it is a full-flown campaign or a small programme that simply takes a step back to rethink how it is engaging with stakeholders. Focusing on behavioural change forces programmes and projects to focus intensely on key stakeholders, what they care about, their aspirations and their challenges, and helps to create meaningful opportunities for them to create their bottom-up change.

In Fiji today, during peak grouper spawning, it is unlikely if someone hears their family name read at church on Sunday, they will be headed to a spawning aggregation site. And that is a very good start.

Acknowledgements

The 4FJ campaign, developed by cChange in support of Fiji's MoF, would not have been possible without the active and efficient collaboration of MoF, the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs through its Conservation Unit, and the partners of the Fiji Locally-Managed Marine Area Network, which includes large international non-governmental organisations, as well as national organisations and community-based organisations and advocates. The authors would also like to thank Dr Yvonne Sadovy of the University of Hong Kong and the Science for Conservation of Fish Aggregations organisation, who has served as a science advisor to the 4FJ campaign, and Dr Jeremy Prince, of Biospherics, who was the science advisor for the development of the Set Size outreach tools.



The Methodist Church of Fiji was an early institutional champion for the 4FJ campaign. (Image: ©cChange)

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