

7. Post-2006 coup affirmative action: Development at gunpoint

Bainimarama's desire to forcibly remove Qarase's government started not long after Qarase won the 2001 election and in the five years before the December 2006 coup Bainimarama had made it clear a number of times that Qarase had to go (Tuatoko 2004; Fraenkel, Firth and Lal 2009). Two theories have been put forward to explain Bainimarama's persistent eagerness to usurp power. The first and more widely accepted 'official' version was that Bainimarama came to the realisation that Qarase was strongly sympathetic to the ethno-nationalist ideology used to justify the 2000 coup. This was manifested in Qarase's pro-indigenous policies including the release of coup perpetrators from prison and the proposal for the Qoliqoli and RTU Bills. Added to this was the argument that corruption and racial politics were endemic in the system and a "clean-up" campaign was imperative (Fraenkel, Firth and Lal 2009).

The second theory claims that Bainimarama had more sinister motives and used the clean-up excuse as an escape mechanism. Because of the investigation relating to his possible involvement in the 2000 coup, the death of a number of soldiers during the November 2000 mutiny and possible treason charges relating to his threats to usurp state power, Bainimarama staged the coup as a way of avoiding dismissal and prosecution which would result in possible long-term imprisonment. Those who take this line of argument have quoted 'inside sources' within the military, such as Lt Col Tevita Mara, a close associate of Bainimarama who defected to Tonga, as well as the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) Board of Inquiry's report on the involvement of the military during the 2000 coup (Republic of Fiji Military Forces 2000).

Whatever the truth is, the coup on 6 December was very much a slow and public process, with Bainimarama warning of an impending takeover if Qarase could not fulfil certain conditions such as withdrawal of the Qoliqoli and RTU Bills, and treason charges against Bainimarama, amongst others. Although these conditions were later fulfilled, Bainimarama was uncompromising and was still determined to stage the coup. Amongst the targets for his 'clean up' campaign were indigenous-based institutions and policies, including affirmative action (Ratuva 2011). This was a clear reversal of the military's initial support for the Blueprint when it was launched in 2000, as we saw in Chapter 6. In the light of this policy reversal, it can be argued that Bainimarama's opposition to affirmative action was only temporary because, as this chapter shows, pro-indigenous policies were implemented in earnest as part of the post-coup economic development policies of the regime.

Affirmative action after the 2006 coup was characterized by four major developments. The first was the attempt by the military to abolish affirmative action, at least in terms of public rhetoric; and simultaneously to weaken the indigenous Fijian middle class and those institutions which were suspected of providing support and legitimacy to the Qarase government and its affirmative action policies.

The second feature was the militarization of development, as military officers were substituted for displaced senior civilian officials in key positions in cabinet, the civil service and state corporations. Of particular significance was the deployment of military officers as regional commissioners to directly supervise rural development programs outside the cumbersome government bureaucracy and also to act as political links between the rural indigenous population and the military-led state. The term 'affirmative action', which was heavily demonized by the military, was removed from the development vocabulary and replaced with *vakatorocaletaki ni taukei* (Fijian development), the same term used to describe pro-indigenous affirmative action immediately after independence. It was a case of using a different vocabulary for the same thing.

The third feature was the creation of a consolidated national development and rebuilding framework in the form of the People's Charter (hereafter referred to as "charter"). The charter was a major framework for rebuilding a new order which was considered suited to Fiji's multi-ethnic community. However, there were contradictions within the charter which undermined its credibility.

The fourth feature related to the paradoxical shift in the regime's ideological position from opposition to ethno-nationalism to reinvention of its own brand of ethno-nationalism by proactively mobilizing indigenous Fijian support and loyalty at the grassroots level through implementation of pro-indigenous development initiatives for rural indigenous Fijians.

These four features are discussed here not necessarily in any chronological sequence' since they were taking place simultaneously and were part of the same 'clean up' process, which involved unpacking the old order and rebuilding a new one. Where possible, parallels will be drawn with the Malaysian and South African situations – however, it must be noted from the outset that one of the major points of contrast with these two countries is that, unlike Fiji, both these countries have not had coups and direct military rule, although they have experienced degrees of repression by their security forces. Thus this chapter examines the distinctive affirmative action programs under a military regime.

Paralysing the opposition and demonization of affirmative action

Upon taking over power, the military put in place a number of draconian measures to consolidate its control, thwart opposition and give credence to its rhetoric of an 'anti-racist' and 'pro-multiethnic' coup. These mostly involved weakening indigenous Fijian institutions deemed to pose a threat to the post-coup transformation process.

The first target for political control and repression was the SDL, the biggest indigenous Fijian political party. Formed in 2000 to contest the election in the same year, the SDL was no different in terms of political ideology from the SVT, which it replaced as the main indigenous Fijian party. Some leaders of the SDL were harassed, arrested and detained and the headquarters of the party was raided several times. Disabling the SDL, which had supporters all around the country both in the rural and urban areas, was critical if the military was to uproot its political influence and avoid potential grassroots mobilization against the coup. The complex military intelligence network planted within the community seriously handicapped the work of the party.

Meanwhile a systematic witch-hunt for suspected coup opponents within the state hierarchy commenced as early as one month after the coup. After the ministers were removed on the day of the coup, a number of CEOs of government ministries and government corporations, diplomats and senior civil servants also met the same fate. Within a few months, about 200 senior executives and civil servants were removed and replaced by military officers, expatriates, known civilian coup supporters or those seen to be 'neutral' and politically trustworthy. This was a highly significant process because a large number of those removed were products of educational and employment affirmative action over the years and were the cream of the indigenous educational and professional achievement. Although, the attempt to build up an indigenous business middle class did not fully succeed, as we saw in Chapter 5, it was a different story for the establishment and expansion of an educated professional middle class. Educational affirmative action created a dynamic indigenous professional class mostly in the public and semi-public sector. This group had been a major pillar of Fiji's economic and social development and also acted as a strong stabilizing force. Most of those removed were charged with 'corruption', which was to be investigated by the all-powerful Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (FICAC) which was set up to perform multiple roles including investigation, arrest and prosecution (Fiji Government 2007). Successful prosecution by FICAC has been very low because of insufficient evidence and a lack of professional competence among the legal staff.

The systematic 'dismantling' of the indigenous Fijian professional class has seriously damaged and even reversed the concerted efforts over the years since independence to provide high-level training for indigenous Fijians as part of the localization process. Because Australia and New Zealand banned members of cabinet, heads of government departments and members of government boards and their families from travelling to those countries, many professionally qualified locals refused to take up government appointments. Many qualified locals also left the country and many Pacific island states have benefitted from Fiji's loss as many professionals took up senior advisory posts in those countries.

While it was easy for the regime to remove individuals from their positions, it was not easy to dismantle existing corporations and institutions which came into being through affirmative action. For instance, Fijian Holdings Limited (FHL), with 30,464,650 communal and individual shares, still remains as the flagship of indigenous Fijian business under the patronage of the military regime (Fijian Holdings Limited 2011: 3). The original CEO, Sitiveni Weleilakeba, a close associate of Qarase, was removed and replaced by Sereana Qoro, an accountant, who was also later removed and replaced by Nouzab Fareed, an accountant. Since the 2006 coup the members of the board have all been replaced.

The breaking up of the indigenous middle class in Fiji is in stark contrast to events in Malaysia and South Africa, where there has been concerted effort to consolidate rather than dismantle the gains of past affirmative action policies. It seems that Fiji has somehow ditched the Malaysian lesson which it so meticulously and zealously followed in the 1980s.

The Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) was also targeted because a number of senior members were opposed to the coup and, also, it represented the apex of indigenous socio-cultural power both in terms of symbolism and applied power politics. The GCC has always been the major political driving force behind affirmative action. FHL, for instance, was first conceived by the GCC; and scholarships for indigenous Fijian students funded by the Fijian Affairs Board were ultimately sanctioned by the GCC. Although the GCC operated on the basis of consensus, that consensus concealed the deeper power dynamics within the institution.

Amongst the competing chiefly blocs were the Mara and Ganilau faction on the one hand and the Cakobau family and its allies on the other. Prior to the coup, Ratu Epeli Ganilau was removed as chair of the GCC; however, later, as Minister for Fijian Affairs (which had responsibility for GCC) he used the opportunity to get back at his adversaries in the GCC by carrying out Bainimarama's order to suspend the institution. Subsequently, two committees were set up to oversee

the reform of the indigenous Fijian governance system – one was to review the GCC and another to review the Fijian administration system generally, including the role of the Fijian Affairs Board and the provincial councils.

The recommendations of both committees were accepted by the regime. One of the recommendations of the GCC review was that only formally installed chiefs were to be members of the august body (GCC Review Committee Report 2007). This meant that a large number of high chiefs, including those of the Cakobau family, supposedly Fiji's most paramount chiefly family, were ruled out. Because of the long-running dispute within the Cakobau clan over the Vunivalu titleholder, this provision may see their removal from the GCC and thus weaken their national significance considerably. Ironically, Ganilau later resigned from cabinet as Minister for Home Affairs due to differences with Bainimarama over the deportation of a Fiji Water company executive. The GCC was eventually de-established by the I-Taukei Affairs Revocation Decree on 16 March 2012. While some indigenous Fijians may see this as an act of cultural sacrilege, Bainimarama justified his decision saying:

The Great Council of the Chiefs (sic) is a product of our colonial past and Fiji must now focus on a future in which all Fijians are represented on the same basis. If all Fijians are to have their say during the consultations for Fiji's new constitution, we must ensure every voice is equally heard and equally represented (Fiji Ministry of Information 14 March 2012).

Instead of nipping ethno-nationalism in the bud, as it were, the abolition of the GCC simply spawned a new wave of protest and nationalist agitation through the media and blogs. Now that the public emergency decree was being relaxed, the stage was set for more public debate on the issue. One of Fiji's leading paramount chiefs, Ro Temumu Kepa wrote to Bainimarama complaining that the abolition of the GCC was based on a "serious error of judgement," as the GCC "lives forever in the hearts of the people." The letter asserted that the GCC was a "stabilizing factor for Fiji and they have helped to control the ethno-nationalism and helped facilitate ethnic conciliation in Fiji" (Ro Temumu Kepa 2012). The regime had underestimated people's loyalty to the GCC and the potential destabilizing effect it could create and this could be a critical factor in determining Bainimarama's fate in the 2014 general election.

The GCC controversy coincided with the announcement on 9 March 2012 of the appointment of a five-member constitutional review committee chaired by Prof Yash Ghai, an internationally renowned constitutional expert with a long association with Fiji. Other key components of the constitutional reform process included a national civic education process to take place from May to July; consultation between the constitutional commission and citizens (2 July to 30 September); collation of public submissions (October to December); convening

of the a constituent assembly to receive, discuss and endorse the draft (January 2013) and promulgation by the president in February 2013 (Fiji Ministry of Information, 9 March 2012). This process was to produce a new constitution after the old one was overturned in 2009. The draft constitution duly emerged in late 2012, only to be rejected by the government and replaced in early 2013 with a draft of its own.

The suspension of the constitution on 10 April 2009 was one of the most dramatic acts by the military regime to eliminate opposition and entrench once and for all the military regime's hegemony. This was in response to the decision on Thursday 9 April by the Fiji Court of Appeal, regarding the litigation brought by Qarase and the SDL, that the Bainimarama regime's December 2006 takeover of executive power was unlawful. In response to this the president declared the Fiji Constitution abrogated and put forward a number of proposals for a "new legal order." The declaration by the president also terminated all judicial and other constitutional appointments and nullified provisions relating to the role of the GCC and affirmative action. To the regime, the removal of the constitution was a blessing because it basically formalized its intentions to "wipe the legal slate clean and start again" (Iloilo, J. 2009). The newly proposed constitution is expected to have some "non-negotiable" provisions in the form of non-ethnic representation and the reduction of the voting age to 18 years. The electoral system is also expected to be based on the proportional representation model and there is expected to be a multi-party cabinet as a way of sustaining an institutionalized multi-ethnic order.

Another powerful indigenous institution, the Methodist Church, also became a target of military censure because of its close links with the SDL and its long association with indigenous ethno-nationalism since the 1987 coup. The military's strategy was to dent the Methodist Church's nationalist political base by demanding the removal of the leaders, who were well known ethno-nationalist sympathisers, and also to undermine the influence of the Methodist Church (to which 53% of the total indigenous population adhere) on the community by disallowing it from holding its annual conference as well as restricting its public activities under the Public Emergency Decree in 2009 (Fiji Government 2009b 2009). This had a crippling effect on the institutional operation of the church, which relied on the money raised from the fundraising during the annual conference to pay for its administration and outreach activities. Even after the lifting of the Public Emergency Decree on 7 January 2012 and its replacement by the equally draconian Public Order Act 2012, the church was still refused permission for an executive meeting. It might be relevant at this stage to note that Malaysia had similar draconian legislation in the form of the Emergency Public Order and Prevention of Crime Ordinance 1969, which was repealed on 24 November 2011, and the Internal Security Act of 1957. Both were used to suppress opposition and also to push affirmative action legislations forward unilaterally.

The weakening of indigenous Fijian institutions was further reinforced by media restrictions under the Emergency Decree and later reinforced by the Media Decree 2010. Force or its threat was widely used to silence opposition and a large number of people were arrested, detained and some were physically abused. Within this general atmosphere of repression, opposition took the form of blogging and other “underground” forms of resistance (Walsh 2009).

In the beginning the crippling of the indigenous Fijian institutions was often represented as a necessary ‘clean up’ measure to rid Fiji of ethno-nationalism and race-based politics. The next step was to abolish policies, such as affirmative action, which were considered contrary to multicultural values. Affirmative action was seen to be associated with ethno-nationalism, Qarase’s government, the GCC and the indigenous professional middle class, the very institutions which had been targeted for reform. Chaudhry, who was a strong critic of affirmative action as leader of the opposition prior to the 2006 coup, took the opportunity as Minister of Finance to help phase out affirmative action and shift the policy focus towards poverty alleviation. For example, in a highly publicized case, under the pretext of an “ownership issue,” Chaudhry personally intervened to stop the government from renting Kadavu House, an office block owned by an indigenous development company linked to the province of Kadavu and acquired through an affirmative action loan from the Fiji Development Bank (*Fiji Times*, 9 February 2008).

Initially, many Indo-Fijian supporters of the coup saw Bainimarama’s attack on indigenous institutions as politically justified “vengeance” against nationalists who staged the 1987 and 2000 coups, in which Indo-Fijian-led governments were overthrown and Indo-Fijians victimized. The Methodist Church and GCC were two of the prime players in the wave of anti-Indian politics after the two coups. The view that the coup was “pro-Indian” and “anti-Fijian” slowly changed as Chaudhry himself was removed as Minister of Finance because of allegations of money laundering and tax evasion and also because of the increasingly trans-ethnic nature of those supporting or opposed to the coup. The support for Bainimarama amongst some groups was due largely to the regime’s pro-indigenous rural development initiatives.

Militarizing indigenous development

With affirmative action officially declared moribund and with the loss of significant Indo-Fijian support for the coup due to Chaudhry’s dismissal, one of the regime’s urgent tasks was to put in place development initiatives which would serve two important political purposes. The first was to appease the indigenous Fijian people and chiefs who felt betrayed and insulted by

Bainimarama's attack on the GCC, Methodist Church and other indigenous Fijian institutions. Bainimarama needed indigenous support to make up for the loss of Indo-Fijian support, however small it may have been, and also to dispel the general belief that the coup was anti-indigenous. Secondly, the regime needed to provide something concrete or at least needed to be seen to be doing something substantive to give credence to the 'clean up' rhetoric.

Rural development was a major strategy to achieve both of these purposes; and the most convenient way to go about this was for Bainimarama to be directly in charge of all government matters relating to indigenous Fijians, rural development and information. To further speed up and ease the process, military officers were appointed heads of department, chairs of boards and regional commissioners to carry out Bainimarama's direct orders.

Chaudhry's removal made things easier for Bainimarama as he was now directly in charge of funds as Minister of Finance. In addition he was also responsible for the Ministries for i-Taukei Affairs, of Provincial Development and of Information, three key ministries which would ensure his direct access to and influence amongst indigenous Fijians. As Minister for i-Taukei Affairs, Bainimarama was in charge of the entire indigenous governance structure at the state, provincial, district and village levels and as Minister for Provincial Development he was directly responsible for the infrastructural developments and delivery of services to indigenous Fijians in the rural areas. Bainimarama's control of the Ministry of Information allowed him to directly influence the contents and method of delivery of information to the people.

The officers appointed as commissioners at one stage were Commander (Navy) Joeli Cawaki for the western division, Colonel Inia Seruiratu for the northern division, Colonel Mosese Tikoitoga for the central division and Colonel Ifereimi Vasu for the eastern division. There have been changes in these posts over time as colonels have been moved from position to position. The commissioners assumed multiple roles as regional administrators, development advisors, public relations experts and political commissars of the regime. In many respects they were powers unto themselves over and above the normal state bureaucracy and were directly and dually accountable only to Bainimarama, who was both their ministerial head and their military commander.

Despite breaking almost every normal civil service regulation and procedure, this militarized structure ensured that delay in the implementation of development projects – a common feature of the previous system – was reduced considerably and services were directly delivered to targeted groups. The system also minimized corruption by civil servants, some of whom had amassed fortunes by milking the previous system, which often lacked proper accountability and transparency. Because of this, many rural people who were

often cynical about the efficiency of the government bureaucracy became converts to the new militarized system. Another reason for popular support was that the new authoritarian structure allowed for greater accessibility of the ordinary people to Bainimarama himself, who continually received personal requests for infrastructure and accolades for his “man of the people” generosity during his rural tours.

Bainimarama’s rural tours became frequent and were seen as important in terms of public relations for the regime. It was an opportunity to personalize and sell the human face of the coup with the hope of mobilizing political support at the village level. In an atmosphere of media censorship, these trips were widely publicized not so much for their news value but for their political and strategic purposes. The strategy seemed to work as chief after chief from different provinces declared public support for Bainimarama and asked for forgiveness for their initial opposition to the coup. This has given Bainimarama confidence that he would “win” the 2014 election if he stands (*Sky TV Australia*, 3 March 2012). Qarase responded saying that he still commanded support and would “win” (*Radio Australia*, 13 March 2012). However, Qarase’s political future is in doubt after he was imprisoned for abuse of office in 2012.

While Bainimarama’s tactical manoeuvre appeared to be working favourably for him, one should not dismiss the rural people as merely an ignorant and passive audience. In the context of traditional indigenous politics, the rural villagers would no doubt be playing their own *politiki gata* (sharp politics). This consists of the dual approaches of *veivakabekabei* (public glorification) often followed by the stealth strategy of *liumuri* (backstabbing). This well-rehearsed, age-old political tactic involves publicly elevating someone’s ego through noble words at the manifest level and later pulling the rug from under their feet at the latent level – a tactical ploy indigenous Fijians routinely play on each other in either humorous or serious situations. For some, singing praises to Bainimarama was a way of attracting more development, while for others it was a genuine expression of gratitude for direct and quick provision of services that past elected governments failed to deliver.

Another effective means of changing the perception of villagers was the use of the large number of retired soldiers in villages as links between the commissioners and villagers. The link between the military regime and the local communities were strengthened by the fact that almost every indigenous Fijian had a relative in the military. In fact many indigenous Fijians believe that soldiering is a natural profession for them.

No doubt both the indigenous rural communities and the military regime have benefitted from the development initiatives. However, the militarization of the development process (that is the use of military officers as well as military-style decision making and norms) would have broader consequences in the long run.

First, overdependence on authoritarian decision making outside the normal bureaucracy could breed collective sympathy and preference for military and authoritarian governance over democracy and thus has the potential to nurture pro-coup sentiments in the future. In fact, a number of chiefs had openly stated that Bainimarama should be in power for as long as he wanted since, based on past experience, an elected government would not have the will and honesty to fulfil its promises to the people.

Second, the militarized development process and circumvention of normal government structure has undermined the systems of accountability and institutionalized decision making which were once the hallmarks of constitutional state governance. After the 2014 election the civil service governance process will need to be re-established and reformed for greater efficiency and public servants need to be re-trained and re-programmed to fit back into the normal civil service procedures and culture.

Third, by responding so readily and generously to direct requests by the community, the regime is in danger of creating a “cargo cult” mentality predicated on the belief that requests will always be honoured by the regime. Ironically, while the regime has been generous with disbursement of development resources, Bainimarama has also been advising people in no uncertain terms not to rely on handouts but to work hard to achieve things for themselves.

Fourth, rural development projects, like the SDL’s affirmative action policies, are unevenly distributed amongst the provinces. The most favoured provinces tend to be those on the island of Viti Levu, especially Tailevu and Naitasiri. The regime is determined to appease these two provinces through rural development because of their well-known opposition to the 2006 coup.

Fifth, one of the consequences of military-based development has been that projects tend to be too ad hoc, rather than being part of a coherent development design with a systematic sequence of implementation. This is because of the tendency to speed up the project implementation process to mobilize people’s support and loyalty through making visible changes before the 2014 election, in which Bainimarama is expected to stand.

Sixth, many civil servants have withdrawn into themselves or silently rebelled by refusing to commit themselves fully to their work because of the new authoritarian military work culture. Many continue to work in an environment of fear and suspicion after many were sacked and detained for making statements

deemed by the military to be provocative and undesirable. Bainimarama has denounced the lack of commitment by civil servants as one of the biggest obstacles the regime is facing in its desire to move Fiji forward.

The direct involvement of the military in the conceptualization, framing and implementation of the rural development projects for indigenous Fijians has redefined the structure and modus operandi of the state's engagement with the community. While it has distorted the regular procedures, it has also sped up the implementation process. However, because the colonels do not have any economic and social development qualifications or experience, the effectiveness and sustainability of these projects need closer scrutiny. The desire to deliver is incompatible with the available skills and qualifications of the military decision-makers. This has been a major dilemma faced by the coup-makers since 1987 and one of the solutions adopted by the military has been to hire willing civilian collaborators and even reluctant followers to carry out skill-based jobs. This is not to downplay the high level of training and the expertise of senior military officers. Many of them hold Masters-level degrees, but most of their skills revolve around military-related areas such as strategic studies, political analysis, security studies and, for some, engineering.

After the 2014 election, the military officers will have to make a choice either to remain in civilian service and maintain links with the military or return to the barracks with significant skills learned in the field that could be used to transform the military into a more development-friendly institution. Either way, these factors would have significant implications on the civil-military relations in Fiji in the long run.

From affirmative action to national development: The People's Charter

One of the dilemmas Bainimarama faced after systematically demolishing opposition and neutralizing the power of state and indigenous institutions of governance was to provide an alternative system to move Fiji forward towards the non-racial utopia he had promised. Part of the initiative to fulfil this promise was the setting up in January 2008 of the National Council for Building a Better Fiji (NCBBF) an organization consisting of cabinet ministers and "moderate" community leaders from different ethnic and religious groups (see Table 7.1), which was charged with putting in place a framework for change and reconstruction, popularly referred to as the People's Charter. The assumption was that for any credible change to take place there should be visible broad participation by representatives of the different communities.

Table 7.1 Composition of the National Council for Building a Better Fiji

Name	Designation
Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama	Co-Chair, Interim Government
Archbishop Petero Mataca	Co-Chair, Civil Society
Mr Mick M. Beddoes	President, United People's Party
Mr Daniel Urai	President, Fiji Trades Union Congress
Mr Patrick Wong	Fiji Islands Hotel and Tourism Association
Mr Desmond Whiteside	President, Fiji Manufacturers Association
Mr Dijendra Singh	Chairman, Fiji Gimit Council
Mrs Lorine Tevi	President, Fiji Council of Social Services
Mr Dewan Chand Maharaj	President, Shree Sanatan Dharm Pratinidhi Sabha
Mr Kamlesh Arya	President, Arya Pratindhi Sabha of Fiji
Rev. Akuila Yabaki	Executive Director, Citizens' Constitutional Forum Ltd
Mr Tarterani Rigamoto	Chairman, Council of Rotuma
Mr Teatu Rewi	The Chairman, Rabi Council of Leaders
Mr Rajeshwar Kumar	The President, Fiji Local Government Association
Mr Daryl Tarte	President, Media Council (Fiji) Ltd
Mrs Penelope Moore	President, Womens' Action for Change
Ratu Jolame Lewanavanua	Chairman, Lomaiviti Provincial Council
Ratu Filimoni Ralogaivau	Chairman, Bua Provincial Council
Ratu Wiliame Katonivere	Macuata Provincial Council
Ratu Meli Bolobolo	Chairman, Ra Provincial Council
Ratu Josateki Nawalowalo	Chairman, Kadavu Provincial Council
Atunaisa Lacakabuka	Chairman, Serua Provincial Council
Josefa Serulagilagi	Chairman, Tailevu Provincial Council
Mr Rupeni Silimaibau	Provincial Youth Forum of the Fiji Islands
Mrs Selina Lee Wah	Female social worker, Labasa
Mr Filipe Bole	Minister for Education, National Heritage, Culture & Arts, Youth and Sports
Mr Mahendra Chaudhry	Minister for Finance, National Planning, Sugar Industry and Public Utilities (Water & Energy)
Mr Joketani Cokanasiga	Minister for Primary Industries
Ratu Epeli Ganilau	Minister for Defence, National Security and Immigration
Dr Jiko Luveni	Minister for Health, Women and Social Welfare
Ratu Epeli Nailatikau	Minister for Foreign Affairs, International Co-operation and Civil Aviation
Mr Tom Ricketts	Minister for Industry, Tourism, Trade and Communications
Mr Aiyaz Saiyed-Khaiyum	Attorney General and Minister for Justice, Electoral Reform, Public Enterprises and Anti-Corruption
Mr Netani Sukanaivalu	Minister for Lands, Mineral Resources and Environment

Source: National Council for Building a Better Fiji 2008.

However, despite attempts to create an ethnically balanced council, the membership was heavily slanted towards indigenous Fijians and “other” minority groups. Out of the 34 members, 18 were indigenous Fijians, 5 were Indo-Fijians and 10 were ethnic minorities. As Table 7.2 shows, the minority groups were over-represented and Indo-Fijians were extremely under-represented. The gross disparity may have been due to difficulties in recruiting people to join the NCBBF, but in terms of public symbolism it undermined the very principle of equal participation and representation which the NCBBF claimed to represent.

Table 7.2 Proportion of membership of NCBBF

Ethnic group	Number	% Membership	% Population
i-Taukei	18	54%	57%
Indo-Fijians	5	16%	37%
Other minorities	10	30%	6%
Total	34	100%	100%

Source: National Council for Building a Better Fiji 2008.

Nevertheless, the main task of the NCBBF was to put together the charter, a summary document derived from a collection of commissioned papers that were earlier published under the *State of the Nation Report*. Over 250,000 copies of the charter were published in English, Fijian and Hindi and distributed throughout Fiji. The NCBBF claimed that 65% of the population supported the charter but critics argued that people were literally coerced into endorsing it. It should be noted here that the charter was similar to the Malaysian New Economic Policies (NEP) in the sense that it was meant to be a “bible” for “structural” transformation. However, the differences were that the charter addressed both political and socio-economic transformation while the NEP dealt only with socio-economic transformation. Furthermore, while the NEP was driven by ethnic-based affirmative action, the charter attempted to remove ethnic preferences in favour of class-based preferences.

The overarching objective of the charter was to “rebuild Fiji into a non-racial, culturally vibrant and united, well-governed, truly democratic nation; a nation that seeks progress and prosperity through merit-based equality of opportunity and peace” (National Council for Building a Better Fiji 2008: i). These objectives were guided by the following principles: “a just and fair society; achieve unity and national identity; merit-based; equality of opportunity for all Fiji citizens; transparent and accountable government; uplifting of the disadvantaged in all communities; mainstreaming of the indigenous Fijian in a modern, progressive Fiji; and sharing spiritualities and interfaith dialogue” (Peoples Charter 2008: ii).

The provisions which perhaps related directly to affirmative action were: firstly, “uplifting of the disadvantaged in all communities” and secondly,

“mainstreaming of the indigenous Fijian in a modern, progressive Fiji.” These two policy statements were meant to displace preferential indigenous development in favour of a national development framework.

The first statement no longer identified indigenous Fijians as a disadvantaged ethnic group as the Blueprint had, and instead the term ‘disadvantaged’ was defined in trans-ethnic socio-economic terms. The intention was to take ethnicity out of development. Indeed the economists who drafted the economic development papers were hostile to affirmative action as a form of ethnic preference. This position was a major shift from the 1997 designation of affirmative action target groups, namely indigenous Fijians and “other disadvantaged groups.”

While the first statement may be commendable, the second one, which suggested “mainstreaming” indigenous Fijians, may have been ideologically contentious. It was tantamount to the colonial social-Darwinian stereotype that indigenous Fijians were backward *jungali* (bush people) who needed to be “modernized” and “civilized” to reach a higher stage of human progress. Sadly, it may have reflected some of the latent ethnic prejudices still prevalent in Fiji. This perception failed to recognize the fact that indigenous Fijians were already politically, economically and culturally mainstreamed into the global community. However, their local and international success stories and achievements in the fields of education, commerce, technology and other areas have not been highlighted sufficiently to show that they had potential to be just as competitive as any other ethnic group in the world. The problem was not about mainstreaming indigenous Fijians into modernity but identifying the right development model, right leadership style, right environment and appropriate skills’ level to further enhance their achievements.

The charter’s shift from preferential development to national development was a reversal of the Blueprint but, ironically, it might even be beneficial to the poor and disadvantaged indigenous Fijians. As we have seen in previous chapters, the corruption and scandals associated with affirmative action under Rabuka and Qarase (see Chapters 5 and 6) were often linked to well-placed individuals and groups using affirmative action resources not on the basis of need, but to satisfy their own economic and political interests. Amongst the major beneficiaries were middle-class indigenous Fijians who did not need affirmative action at all.

Another major dilemma of the charter was that its claim to “Affirm that our Constitution represents the supreme law of our country” became void after the removal of the constitution by the President Iloilo, acting on behalf of the military, in April 2009. This was after the Supreme Court declared the 2006 coup, the action of the president in appointing a new government and post-coup decrees, including amnesty for the military coup leaders, illegal. The removal of

the constitution effectively meant that the affirmative action provisions under the constitution were no longer lawful. It was replaced by the development strategy under the charter.

Moreover, although the affirmative action proposals of the Blueprint and 20 Year Plan had been replaced by the charter, affirmative action had not been completely removed. Perhaps one of the last elements of affirmative action to continue is the provision of scholarships for indigenous Fijians and for economically disadvantaged minorities. There has been talk of disbanding ethnic scholarships in the future. If this happens indigenous Fijians will have to work extra-hard to get their children through university. Because higher education scholarship is the most successful affirmative action policy and the most important means of social mobility, poverty eradication and socio-economic progress for indigenous Fijians (despite the failure of business and development affirmative action), the termination of Fijian Affairs Board scholarships might have a profound impact and could be a recipe for instability in the future.

While there has been loud public rhetoric since 2006 to phase out affirmative action policies in the name of multiculturalism, ironically, the regime has for pragmatic political reasons made a policy commitment towards indigenous Fijian development, but without using the term “affirmative action.”

Reinventing affirmative action for indigenous Fijians

In his speech to the UN General Assembly in September 2011, Bainimarama said:

Communal philosophy has not served our people well. Affirmative action policies which were not based on acceptable definitions of disadvantage, but on racial origin alone, created a more divided society, and one in which many depended on handouts rather than on personal enterprise. Politicians represented particular ethnic groups, and drove policies which were intended to further divide the people of our nation. As in all parts of the world, ethnic origin and religious divisions simply became a tool to maintain power. I am determined that our society will remove the narrow walls of ethnicity and communalism to create unity and strength as a nation (Bainimarama, Speech to UN General Assembly, 22 Sept 2011).

Most of the contents of the speech were highly commendable in principle, except that, on closer examination, by the time of his address to the world

leaders, Bainimarama had initiated a development process which was pro-indigenous for all intents and purposes. A detailed reading of the various policy documents relating to national development (see Table 7.3) shows that while the term ‘affirmative action’ has been eliminated and ethno-nationalism cast as a political scourge, the actual implementation process of the development initiative reveals a different story.

Table 7.3 Levels of development policy making

Policy-making level	Focus
People’s Charter	Broad philosophy for change
Strategic Framework for Change	Key milestones to be realized with specific timelines to be achieved leading up to the elections in 2014.
Government Roadmap for Democracy and Sustainable Economic Development (2009-2014)	Sets out a framework to achieve sustainable democracy, good and just governance, socio-economic development and national unity.
Strategic Plan (3 years)	Sets out specific strategies and objectives to be developed within 3 years (e.g. 2009-2011).
Ministry Corporate Plan (Yearly)	Individual Ministry internal priorities based on Strategic Plan.

Source: National Council for Building a Better Fiji 2008. 2008; Fiji Government 2009c; Fiji Government 2009d.

The five hierarchies of development policies summarized in the table above were based on the trickledown effect from the charter to the ministry’s corporate plan. However, behind the technical language were latent political interests. For the regime, two important political considerations were at stake. The first was how to “sell” the coup and its “achievements” to the indigenous Fijian audience, many of whom opposed the takeover on the grounds that it appeared to be anti-indigenous and pro-Indo-Fijian. Bainimarama no doubt wanted to leave behind a legacy as a “man of the people,” a term often used to describe him (*Radio New Zealand*, 18 January 2012) and the only way he could do that was to make exceptions to the non-discriminatory spirit of the charter and directly implement pro-indigenous development policies. The second issue was that Bainimarama, who is likely to contest the 2014 election, needed something substantive to attract voters during the coming election campaign.

To fulfil these two aims, the regime has made it a priority to focus on very visible infrastructural rural and outer island development programs. Table 7.4 provides a summary of the rural and island budgetary allocation for 2007, 2008 and 2009. It shows that the allocation increased in 2008 and decreased in 2009 as the financial squeeze forced the government to cut down on expenditure. Except for the multi-ethnic affairs allocation, most of these budgetary rural allocations were directed primarily at indigenous Fijians.

Table 7.4 Allocations towards rural and outer island development programs: 2009 Budget (FJ\$ million)

Sector	2007 (FJ\$m)	2008 (FJ\$m)	2009 (FJ\$m)
Fijian Affairs	0.92	0.90	0.90
PM's Office (for village improvement)	1.12	0.80	-
Agriculture	10.55	16.15	21.40
Fisheries & Forestry	1.8	2.4	1.15
Provincial Development	10.5	8	5.5
Multi-Ethnic Affairs	1.6	1.6	1.60
Lands & Mineral Development	0.23	0.23	0.40
Youth Development	-	-	0.20
Health	3.8	5.2	2.50
Infrastructure & Works	80.1	80.15	38.30
Total	110.62	115.43	71.95

Source: Fiji Government 2009a.

Rural infrastructure developments covered a wide range of sectors and geographical areas including electricity developments such as the Nadarivatu hydro dam, Buca and Taveuni hydro scheme, and electrification works in Tailevu, the interior of Naitasiri and Macuata. Roads were built in Wainibuka, Sigatoka, Kadavu, Naqali and Serea and will soon be built in the interior of Nadroga and Ba. A number of schools were also built and health centres were improved in places like Navua, Kadavu and Cuvu. A new development was the building of a bio-fuel plant on Koro Island to convert coconut oil into engine fuel. Many of these projects were funded through Chinese aid. China has already pledged more than \$500 million worth of aid to Fiji (Fiji Government 2012).

About \$200 million worth of road projects have been planned for 2012, including the 10-kilometre Buca Bay Road in Vanua Levu, the 19-kilometre Sawani-Serea Road in Naitasiri, the 15km Sigatoka Valley Road in Nadroga and the sealing of 5km of the Moto Road in Ba (*Fiji Sun*, 8 March 2012). These roads are very crucial for agricultural production and would benefit indigenous Fijians greatly. In addition, government has announced financial assistance for three hundred home owners around the country through a \$2 million grant from government and, in addition, 92 families had their home loan accounts completely written off in 2011 (*Fiji Times*, 14 January 2012). Most of these are indigenous Fijians.

One of the most explicitly pro-indigenous policies of the regime was in the form of concessions first outlined in the 2009 Budget, without, of course, the use of the contentious words "affirmative action". Bainimarama stated that the state would transfer ownership of thousands of hectares of mature mahogany

forest to indigenous landowners. In addition, tax holidays were to be offered to investors who established partnerships with indigenous Fijians in the areas of tourism, agriculture, forestry and fisheries (Fiji Government 2009a).

Other areas of potential indigenous development include resource-based projects such as the Bua bauxite mine, which opened in 2011, the planned huge Waisoi copper and gold mine in Namosi province, the proposed iron ore sand mining near the Ba River and a few other mining projects. These are major projects worth billions of dollars, in which Bainimarama has directly been involved either to intervene in compensation disputes between a company and landowners, as in Namosi, or to help facilitate the process to make it easier for the company to invest and maximize economic benefits for landowners, as in Bua.

Another issue which the current regime has been very sensitive about is land. Previous governments since independence had seen indigenous land both as a blessing and a curse. However, none of them succeeded in devising a system which could advance the socio-economic development of indigenous Fijians. Even the current regime, despite the introduction of new concepts such as the land bank, continues to perpetuate commercial land arrangements which led to the neo-colonial servitude of indigenous Fijians in the past. The exploitative division of labour during the colonial and post-colonial period was characterized by provision of land for mining and dumping waste as well as the provision of cheap, unskilled, manual labour by landowners, while the mining companies provided capital and expertise and were allowed to accumulate and repatriate massive profits.

Perhaps one of the most progressive policy initiatives by the regime was the suggestion for shareholding in and joint-ownership arrangement of the mining operations. One way of making this possible is to use land as an equity share for landowners but legislation (or a decree) has to be in place to make this happen. To enhance and facilitate shareholding and joint-ownership, the mining company should provide scholarships for locals to study relevant aspects of mining at the degree level (for example mining engineering, environmental science, mining economics, resources development, social and economic policy analysis) as a way of empowering locals to progressively assume a greater share and control of the mining operations. This is a way of consolidating the partnership between the landowners, company and government in the future. A full partnership cannot be realized when there is a large skills, knowledge and power differential.

One of the most contentious development policies of the regime is land reform. The regime hopes that reform will speed up agricultural production and help indigenous landowners:

Land reform in particular in relation to resource-based sectors is paramount. Issues pertaining to the ailing sugar sector, the need to diversify into other crops and the imperative to have commercial farming can only be addressed in a meaningful way if more land is available for productive use on long and secure tenure basis (Fiji Ministry of Information 2010).

Land reform is part of the broader development framework encapsulated in the Ten Point Economic Plan (TPEP), which sets out specific targets to be achieved by 2020. These are: (a) GDP to be increased two-fold; (b) balance of payments current account deficit to be eliminated; (c) poverty to be reduced from current levels to less than 5% of population; (d) visitor arrivals to increase to 6 million; (e) financial sector to be liberalized with a view to eliminating exchange controls; (f) Fiji to grow its communication services sector business by 100%; (g) Fiji to achieve self-sufficiency in rice, meat and liquid milk; (h) Fiji to convert up to 90% of all electricity generation from fossil to renewable sources; (i) Fiji to convert up to 80% of all arable land area into productive use; and (j) Fiji to reduce unemployment rate to less than 3% (Fiji Ministry of Information 2010).

While these targets are impressive, they are not clear in terms of the role of the landowners. Of particular interest here is the land bank, which has been used as an example of breakthrough in inter-ethnic cooperation in land development. While the idea of “depositing” land in the “bank” is novel, the underlying principle has not changed from the colonial and neo-colonial arrangement where landowners gave up their land for lease and the tenant farmers worked on the land. This arrangement contributed to the retardation of commercial participation of indigenous Fijians because, as landlords and recipients of lease money, they were not encouraged to develop their commercial farming skills and expand their business acumen. Since independence, government after government under a succession of prime ministers – Mara, Bavadra, Rabuka, Chaudhry, Qarase and now Bainimarama – perpetuated this landlord and tenant agreement, first under the Agricultural Land Tenancy Ordinance or ALTO (1966), then ALTA (1976) and now under NLTA, all of which locked indigenous Fijians into the role of passive providers of land rather than active entrepreneurs.

More innovative options for land use have not been explored. One suggestion would be to form business partnership arrangements between Indo-Fijian farmers and indigenous landowners in the form of cooperatives or other forms of commercial enterprises, which would entail development and sharing of skills, knowledge and resources by both sides. The same partnership model should be encouraged in urban-based industries where Indo-Fijian and indigenous Fijian entrepreneurs can engage in commercial collaboration to ensure sharing of skills, expertise, resources and wealth as well as contributing to multiculturalism and inter-ethnic goodwill. The government can encourage this by granting

tax concessions for companies which are based on inter-ethnic cooperation. Accepting and reinforcing the stereotype through policies that assume that only Indo-Fijians are business-minded and indigenous Fijians are not will continue to be divisive and potentially destructive.

However, while there is political aspiration for indigenous Fijian development, there is an absence of conceptual skills to define a new development paradigm that is forward-looking, relevant and sustainable. This deficit is partly due to the current and previous governments' flirting with neoliberal development thinking, inspired by the IMF's constant prodding for neoliberal reform. Part of the liberalization approach is the freeing up of indigenous land for international investors through the regime's land bank policy. One of the latent results of the land bank policy is that it redefines the role of the state as a land agent to facilitate international investment.

The last issue is the most worrying, especially when large international companies gain control of local land and use it for intensive farming to send food back to their countries in a process that is known globally as "land grab". Instead of benefiting indigenous Fijians, the land bank concept can potentially undermine their development aspirations in the future as good land is taken up by foreign investors.

Fiji's land reform is in direct contrast with land reform in Malaysia and South Africa. While land reform in Malaysia was inspired by raising the level of entrepreneurial engagement and the skills of Malay farmers to alleviate poverty, in South Africa it was based on how to redistribute 87% of commercial farmland owned by 13% of the population (whites) to the other 87% of the population (blacks, coloureds and Asians). In both cases, the idea was to enhance commercial agriculture for the indigenous population – the land bank in Fiji does not have this in mind.

A way forward for Fiji would be the formation of business partnerships between foreign business and landowners for agricultural development, using land as equity. Again, as suggested in the case of mining, laws should be changed to enable this to happen. Another way forward is to begin to move away from the notion of land protection and rights towards land innovation. It has been established by law that native land cannot be removed from native ownership. With this in mind, the next step is to cultivate a culture of innovation by sponsoring students for high-level post-graduate training in land utilization, agricultural engineering, crop science, food technology and legal patents to raise land development to a higher level of entrepreneurial innovation. Some of the innovative initiatives such local experts might produce are in the areas of crop engineering for patenting, crop and vegetable preservation techniques for export and value-added food processing. These will take care of four major

concerns: effective use of land, development of innovative skills, empowerment of landowners and increased agricultural production, all of which would be good for the national economy.

For those reasons the NLTB should move away from its protectionist and bureaucratic role to one based on innovation and productivity. Increasing the land rent, as the Qarase and Bainimarama governments have advocated, is a minimalist and very short-term solution and does not solve the problem. Effective reform must not be driven solely by the neoliberal notion of liberalizing landownership; rather, it should be driven by considerations centred on innovation, empowerment and sustainability.

While the Bainimarama regime has spent significant resources, effort and time on indigenous development, as we have seen, it must be asked how much that expenditure has lifted the indigenous Fijian population out of poverty. Poverty eradication and social protection was a priority for the regime. The question can be partly answered by Table 7.5, which shows that there was a decrease in the level of poverty between 2002-2003 and 2008-2009. The level of poverty amongst indigenous Fijians decreased by 10% and amongst Indo-Fijians by 11% during that period. The decrease may have been due to a number of factors, including an improved method of data collection or a change in the definition of 'poverty'. If neither of these changed during the period under review, then it may be concluded that the reduction in the incidence of poverty can be associated with government policies. However, based on the figures presented, such a judgement is inconclusive.

Table 7.5 Percentage of population in poverty

	2002-2003	2008-2009	% Change
Fiji	35%	31%	-10%
Urban	28%	19%	-34%
Rural	40%	43%	8%
I-Taukei	35%	31%	-10%
Indo-Fijian	36%	32%	-11%
Others	24%	25%	4%

Source: Fiji Bureau of Statistics 2011.

The Bainimarama regime may take credit for the decrease in the incidence of poverty; however, the 31% poverty rate amongst indigenous Fijians is still very high and needs to be reduced even further.

Conclusion

Despite public denial, Bainimarama's pro-indigenous development initiatives are tantamount to affirmative action and tend to be very similar to the Qarase government's approach. The only difference was that Qarase was more explicit about his pro-indigenous policies while Bainimarama is less so. While Bainimarama has been careful not to contradict his purported multicultural ideology, he is under immense pressure to put in place pro-indigenous policies as a way of mobilizing indigenous support and loyalty. However, his pro-indigenous development initiatives perhaps betrayed the ethno-nationalist side of him, which he has often concealed and even denied. The major difference between Bainimarama's and Qarase's versions of pro-indigenous policy is that Qarase tries to appeal to the indigenous sense of culture and identity through use of the mainstream institutions such as the GCC, the Methodist Church and provincial councils. On the other hand Bainimarama tries to appeal to people's sense of socio-economic need by directly engaging and influencing the indigenous people himself through personal appeal and rural projects while weakening indigenous institutions which he thinks are in the way. With the 2014 election looming, Bainimarama and other potential indigenous Fijian leaders will be in competition to win indigenous Fijian seats, and one has to play the ethno-nationalist game strategically. This is despite the new proportional open-list electoral system, which is meant to nullify ethnic mobilization and promote trans-ethnic voting. Bainimarama has been doing his own indigenous mobilization through rural development initiatives, despite the well-rehearsed rhetoric of multiculturalism and opposition to ethno-nationalism.

Despite the crippling of the old order and the attempt to re-create a new one, very little has changed in terms of the development paradigm for indigenous Fijians. No innovation in land development and indigenous entrepreneurship has occurred. The same rural division of labour based on leasing indigenous land, which kept indigenous Fijians economically marginalized, persists, and it could even be deepened by the land bank project. Indigenous Fijians continue to be tools of political manipulation by their own elites to serve their economic or ethno-political interests. As this book has demonstrated, all the coups since the first one in 1987 have made insignificant changes to the lives of indigenous Fijians generally, although some individuals were direct beneficiaries.

Like Rabuka, Qarase and Chaudhry, Bainimarama has missed another important opportunity to raise indigenous development to another level of innovation. His major problem was not his lack of commitment to reform or enhancement of indigenous interests, but rather his contradictory approach: preaching against ethno-nationalism and affirmative action but practising them at the same time under different guises. Affirmative action under Qarase, as we have seen, was

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subject to abuse. However, because of heavy censorship of the media, possible abuse under Bainimarama cannot be fully ascertained and things may surface later after the eagerly awaited 2014 election.