

## Supplementary Material

### **Considerations for early career conservation researchers seeking to engage across communities and cultures**

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### **1. Positionality Statement**

We, the authors, first met in 2019. Joe had travelled to Fiji to deliver an education capacity building project. Erame was asked by his lecturer to attend some of the training that was on offer and to assist the visiting academics. Since that first interaction Erame has participated in two significant outreach projects alongside Joe, he has moved from an observer to an active participant, facilitator and professional collaborator.

#### **1.1 Joe**

In sharing my reflections, it is important to also acknowledge my privilege and positionality. I am not part of a minority, nor have I ever been victimised or vilified because of my race, religion or sexual orientation. Because of this privilege I have been given the opportunity throughout my career to work across a range of cultures and community contexts in the Global South. The nature of my identity and circumstances mean that many of the examples and tips given below are done so from the point of view of a white male outsider seeking to engage a group that they do not belong to, and thus seeking to cross barriers of language, culture and knowledge generation.

I strive to follow the lead of Guenther et al.(2016) and acknowledge the risks associated with attempting to portray the standpoint of cultures and communities that I am not a part of and recognise that given my position as an outsider, my experiences are often very different to that of the stakeholders with whom I work and conduct research (Berger 2015). I attempt to recognise the inherent bias of my position and the deep-seated history of colonial interference within the Global South, particularly in many of the communities with whom I seek to collaborate (Tuck and Yang 2012; Anthony-Stevens and Matsaw Jr 2019).

I have worked in capacity building projects across cultures and with communities in rural and remote Australia, Samoa, Fiji, Tuvalu, Kiribati Southern Africa and other locations. Throughout this

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process I have learnt, as many of us do, through trial and error. As a result I have made many mistakes in my professional career. In this paper and the stories below I summarise and reflect on some of the key learnings from those mistakes.

### **1.2 Erame**

I am a third year Environmental Science student studying at Fiji National University. I grew up on Kadavu a small island about a 6 hour boat ride from Fiji's largest Island, Viti Levu. My primary and secondary education took place on Kadavu and I continue to maintain connections with the island, I have a small kava farm there and many family members still live there. I left the Island to live and study in Suva, Fiji's capital in 2017. I am an I-taukei (Indigenous)Fijian that has interacted and built relationships with many outsiders that have come to Fiji, from Peace Corps volunteers building sea walls through to capacity building teams focussing on education. Throughout these interactions I have experienced many different approaches to relationship building. I am sharing my experiences here, with a focus on my work with Joe, so that it may help other people that travel to work or research in places like Fiji – but I am also doing this to ensure that the groups that are being worked with can benefit from the interactions.

Relationships with foreign researchers and practitioners, if conducted appropriately, can have benefits for all participants. I see this as a key element for Fiji as it can lead to shared learning, increased trust between stakeholders, increased creativity in addressing challenges that can lead to economic benefits and – I also see these as an opportunity to develop my own cross-cultural understanding at the same time as sharing my culture and place with outsiders.

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### **2. Examples from lived experience**

#### **2.1 Joeon consultation vs coproduction**

In 2019 I attended a workshop where a Yawuru woman and Indigenous rights advocate was giving a seminar on building solidarity and collaborative relationships in climate adaptation. Her talk was brilliant, informative and extremely well received by all in attendance. Before leaving she stopped to convey one final take home message:

*“Stop consulting with us!”*

The sentiment here was that outsiders were continually approaching first nations peoples and using consulting as a way to tick the box of participation without taking on board feedback or adjusting approaches. The presenter was instead calling for collaboration, sharing wealth and power, and making space and time for Indigenous guidance and leadership. This should serve as a warning for ECRs wishing to work with cultures that they are outsiders to: consultation may be your only choice – but without clear communication and shared understanding it can be problematic.

#### **2.2 Erame on the importance of the power balance**

Within Fijian culture, respect is key. Respecting your elders and respecting those in positions of authority. As a young Fijian you generally do not like to be singled out or made an example of in front of your peers or colleagues.

My very first interaction with Joe was when he was demonstrating science experiments to a number of lecturers from my University. I was sitting with my classmates observing. We had not met formally and did not know each other at this stage.

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Joe asked me to come up onto the stage and participate in an experiment – regardless of whether I wanted to participate, I felt I had to show respect to the lecturers and the Kaivalagi, so I got on stage. The experiment itself was designed to be fun, but at the time I didn't understand what I was being asked to do and ultimately was left confused by it and slightly embarrassed by this confusion. It was not until Joe and I spoke about this over a year later that he realised that I had put myself in that position because of his authority and an imbalance of power in the relationship.

We laugh about it now and have had time to build trust and better understand each other, but this initial poor power dynamic could have very easily led to me choosing to sit out any future activities.

### ***2.3 Erame on trust***

When I first worked with Joe and the other researchers, I did not expect to stay connected with them. I was participating in their program because my lecturer had asked me to – I expected to watch and listen for a few hours and then go back to class. At the end of the day, they asked if I would come back tomorrow. I was happy to continue participating with them for a few days as their work was more interesting than the classes I was supposed to attend, even so I did not anticipate any continued relationship. At the end of a week of activities together I would say that we had developed rapport but not necessarily trust.

It was not until the second visit from Joe and the team that we began to develop mutual respect. The fact that we stayed in contact in between visits certainly helped but also the fact that the Kaivalagi did not separate themselves from us in the day to day activities. On one particular day we trekked to a remote village, it took three hours each way. I expected the Kaivalagi to want to ride horses – when they chose to walk with us I felt we could begin to see each other as equals.

### **2.4 Joe on mapping out goals**

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I am reminded of a recent period of working with a colleague in Samoa, seeking to establish a science centre in Apia. Our relationship had been built up over 18 months with many digital meetings, emails and multiple in-person visits as we explored how we may work together to increase local capacity in STEM education. We adopted business management techniques and created a theory of change for the next 12 months of collaboration. Thanks to a shared understanding of our own positionality and strong levels of mutual trust, we were able to use the theory of change documentation to articulate our goals and ensure we had a shared vision. This process developed organically and was facilitated in person over three separate sessions spread over a three-week period. We were not following a strict protocol as some researchers have done in the past (Archibald et al. 2016). We were simply mapping out a pathway from inputs and resources through to aspirational goals. Myself and another researcher sat down with our Pacific colleague with a wall covered in butcher's paper and with a handful of colourful markers. We asked questions about what they wanted to achieve in STEM education and why, writing these things down for all of us to see. From there we identified which aspects of these broad goals were achievable through our collaboration and created a pathway to achieving them with clear milestones. The act of mapping this out together created a space for discussion. Conducting the process over a long period provided time for consideration and reflection from all participants. Leaving the final product on the wall held all of us accountable to meeting these goals.

### **2.5 Erame on being a boundary spanner**

I have acted as a boundary spanner for Joe and his team on multiple occasions – I have helped them cross language barriers, acting as an interpreter when we needed to interact with stakeholders that had limited English. I have shared with them insights into cultural practices and ensured they understood how to be respectful in settings that were new and novel for them. I have also provided connections to new stakeholders and partners that has led to bigger and more meaningful relationships between the Kaivalagi and the Fijians.

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Reflecting on this, we did not label my role, nor did we explicitly outline expectations for what this role involved, but it is clear that it was crucial in allowing our team to have a positive impact throughout our capacity building activities.

### **2.6 Joeon maintaining contact**

I have been building relationships with key stakeholders from a community in remote Australia for some time. The project officially ended earlier this year and my role changed with an end of funding to the area. Because of the personal value I placed in the relationship I made the conscious decision to maintain contact with my colleagues within the community and made sure I shared the final information and reports with them prior to submission for their input and perspective. Not only did this provide key partners with the opportunity to have the final say on the content of our outputs, but it was also an opportunity to showcase and celebrate the fruits of our labour – I would posit that this would also have resulted in an increase in dispositional trust between this community and any outsiders they may wish to work with in the future.

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