

TOPIC: PROTOCOL-: ~~XXXX~~ VILLAGE MEETING

Investigator: Leata

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LAUTOKA. M 52yrs

Vitogo, LAUTOKA. February 1984

VILLAGE MEETING

Since I am the head of the committee here in this village, there are times when we hold meetings, and we call this a village meeting. This village is meeting is different from the meeting in which all the people subjected to this particular village meet. This meeting involving this village is known as BOSE VAKORO, as for the one which involves the whole community living around the area, this is known as BOSE NI VANUA.

In the bose vakoro, here they discuss, come up with a final affirmative decision and also pass motions and those other deals which the people wish to make for the village. In this meeting, they discuss about the running of the village and the work which revolves around this village is dealt with.

In the bose ni vanua, only the chiefs of the villages and the area meet and discuss. They discuss as to how they should run the whole place, including all the villages, and also what improvements they need to do for the areas.

Here in Vitogo, the village meeting, is held every Tuesday afternoon. And this is done every week. As for the Tui Vitogo today, he needs to be present in all these meetings, he should attend and be with the people during the meeting. As for this person whom they have installed to hold the position of Tui Vitogo, he remain there at his

home and then these people in the community, we have a committee running the whole show, it is their duty to take the message up to the chief saying that a village meeting is scheduled for tomorrow or for what they day they have arranged. Also for the chief, he is informed of what should be dealt with at the meaning and also he gives the final word whether it should be raised or dropped. A lot of those chiefs who were here in our village, I can remember it clearly that a lot of them used to be in this village meeting. They do all the right things at the right time so that there is no question of being out of place and also of being not prepared. Today, when they open this village meeting in the afternoon, the matanivanua of the Tui Vitogo goes to accompany the chief or the Tui Vitogo to the meeting house. They then arrive at this house where the village meeting is usually held.

Sitting there, the people make a yaqona ceremony which they call the I WARAKI(yaqona for their waiting for their chief). This yaqona is used or said to be the yaqona in which they wait for the arrival of the chief. The yaqona is presented, and then someone speaks of the yaqona since it is for the chief. The chief takes the first cup and so the matanivanua drink second to his chief, after that they all clap their hands to show that this is the end of the ceremony for the ceremony of i waraki held for the chief's arrival.

After this, then another yaqona is prepared, and this is known as yaqona NI DOLAVI NI BOSE, to declare the meeting open. The yaqona is mixed, then someone speaks to comment on the yaqona for the opening of the meeting, again the chief drinks, the matanivanua drinks second to it, then the chief or the Tui Vitogo open the meeting with a speech.

In this speech, he thanked all the people for their presence, and also for those two ceremonies done. One thing I wish to tell you, in this village meeting, we have both men and women, young men and young women or youths of both sexes.

After the chief speaks, then his speech is commented on. Then the meeting is open after that commenting on the chief's speech. Many times in the past, when the meeting is open and get started, the matanivanua informs the people of what they can talk about in this meeting. Today, the way of running the meeting now is similar to how business man deals with their clients and also with their other partnership, now they have a person who is the chairman. He is the main person who leads the meeting, or this village meeting. He is the one who declares the discussion opened and also he informs the people of some ideas and motions for the running of the village. The chairman shows all those things or plans which he wish to be discussed in this meeting, then the discussion part is now opened.

Now, it is open to anyone who might wish to speak to speak up while the rest of the people hears him out. This is a very important meeting too, this meeting decide on how the village should function and also some important approach they can make to makes things better than they are. They discuss how they can protect the village and also how should they keep their village clean and not polluted with anything, and all those other functions which they hold in a village, the freedom is given to the villagers to make suggestions on any one of these topics and also to voice their opinions if such motions are raised as to what should be done. This is how meetings or village meetings are held today.

But in the olden times, when they have a village meeting, the people

who turn up in this meeting, they do not utter a word when they enter until they leave the house again. Only those people who are known to be the village speakers are the ones who talk and make all the announcement for them. They speak to these people telling them what things they should do, as for the people, they have to keep very quiet and they don't have any say as to what should be done. For these speakers, all those things which they order the people to do, it is obeyed and observed. Today, the freedom is given to the villagers to decide as to what should be the best thing to do to solve this particular situation, also to show the others what they have in mind, it helps a lot when they share their opinions of some of the things they discussed. All speak at the meeting and finally they come up with an agreement on something.

They make a show of hands on things which they agree on and things they disagree on. All these things which they discuss in the meeting is written down in a log, they take these minutes of the meeting.

Now, there are a lot of committees running, we have one for the health department, and also some for the running of the district school. They have different committees which runs different sectors in this area. A committee for the church, a committee for the fishing group in this village, many new committees stands up or being founded today. Other committees are for youths, farming, christian fellowship, and also for women.

When they hold this village meeting, this is where all these sub-committees, which makes up the whole village turn in with their improvements on something they have done and also voice some of their motions and opinions on some things which they can do. Also for them

they wish to confirm something with all the people in the village, that they are going to lay their plan and set it to work, also if this is accepted by the people in the village. Then they might revealed the purpose of their ~~main~~ project. Also for each committee they bring up some of the things which they have discussed in their own private meetings. Let's take for an example, this committee which is for the health. They come to our village meeting to show us of what they have been doing, also those things which they wrote down as what is not right here in the village, all about the health and cleanliness here in the village. They both touched the area there in the kitchen, bathroom and toilet, sleeping houses, and all the other things which needs to be clean because we live in them and we use them everyday. They look into the water system whether this is a good one or they need another one. This is the time when they announce their report and also the whole village is listening now to what they say about their village. After they have done with their report and if they wish to have a fund raising so that they can raise some money for their organisation, this is the time and the place where the announcement is made. Also this is the place where the final answer is given to them, whether they should hold it or not.

The same thing goes for the church committee and how they run the affairs of the church. The church committee make the announcement that these people are not up to date with their payments for the church and all others. Also the final decision is given here whether they should hold charity funds and all that. They plan and lay down the right one after a few minutes of discussing and arguing over the issue.

They do not want something to clash when the people return to carry out what they have discussed in the meeting. Maybe they wish to do some fund raising and the other committees are also thinking of the same thing, in this village meeting, they discussed everything so that it works out well, there is no clash in these things which they are doing. The same report is done by the youth committee, and the christian fellowship committee. Also for farming this is the place and the time when they make the announcement of what the men and young men should be planting there in their farm and also of how many crops they should have grown by now from the time they started. Also they announce the names of those people who did not complete the assignment they were told to do. They do not inflict any punishment but they show this so that the rest of the people who do not belong to this committee knows what is going on. Another thing too, by making all these reporting work, the people know what the other person is doing for his or her village. The women's committee also have a time when they speak. Also for this topics and reporting, the freedom is given to the people to make a comment or an announcement if they do not agree with something which the people reporting says. But this method which the people are using now, this is a totally new and different method of a village meeting to be held. As for me, the things which I have seen and those things which has been done, there are a lot of things which they lay out as what they should do, the people of Vitogo cannot do all these, they give up when they come to the third part of it or the fourth part, they say that this is too much, but what can be done?. It does not matter if the people are not going to

do the work, but still they turn up for the meeting, this is something good about the people. Also for each committee they do not clash with the other side of what things they do, because all these things have been laid down clearly from the start. They have been given the freedom to talk and say anything which they think is not right, if they know that this work or this problem should be solved this way, then that is how they take care of it. "or a village meeting, this is a very important meeting for a place or for a village. This same meeting, is the meeting in which they lay out the plans and also arrange or programme the things which they wish to run here in this village for the next two or three months ahead. The chief is there and also the other important men of the yavusa and mataqali, they know how their people work so it is important they also present themselves when it is time for the meeting. In this same meeting, we are able to know about those things which is not clean at all about the village, those new behaviour which offend the people. Also there might be some problems related to the young people's behaviour, this is where such things are dealt with. If some people in this village have something to do with the police department, maybe they have some faults with them, in this meeting such things are discussed. A lot of times we speak to those young men working in the towns and city areas, they are the ones who bring trouble into this village. This is taken up to the village meeting, and if the old people and the chiefs of our place thinks something should be done to stop these, then they can be punished so that they do not do this again. But being a member of this village meeting, I have seen that not severe punishment are given to them if they are punished.

Only they are spoken to and grow~~ed~~ at, to stop this nonsense since this is their village and they should learn to behave properly when in the village, also to make sure they don't do the same mistake another time. They listen to what advice themature people give, an as a result, some of them do change. They are told not to do something which is unrespectful, very lowly, which can really destroy and bring down the name of a particular village, esepcially their own village Vitogo.

All other things which deals with the preserving of our behaviour and our customs, like riding bicycles around the village green or in the village, wearing hats in the village, wrapping a towel or a cloth around their neck, also for women they should not wear their sulu from their breastboan down, women wearing shirts in the village, these are some of the behaviour which is seen being done here in the village and needs to be straightened out. These things are discussed in the village meeting and also if they think they can solve it in some ways, suggestions and opinios helps in here.

I've already told you that this is a very important meeting, a meeting which should be kept to the good standard of all meetings, helped and also supported by the people of this village, but most important is that they should try and do what they think is right which is announced in this meeting. If they meet, discuss but do not do what they have been told and adviced to do, then nothing works. This village, Vitogo, the running of the village depend on this village meeting which they hold every ~~Tuesday~~ afternoon. After they have worked out all these things, some problems are dealt with, like building a new house, asking of the people in this village if they can give their support.~~x~~

All these are discussed in this village meeting. Also there are days when the people will have to bring their knives and there is a cutting grass going on there on this day, they need to keep their village clean also. On Tuesday, this is the day when they all come out from their homes and clean the village, any surrounding which they know needs a bit of cleaning is cleaned on this day. On ~~the~~ afternoon or the night of this day, then they have the village meeting.

After the meeting, then the Tui Vitogo speaks again to close all the discussion, suggestions and opinions raised on this night. At his speech, he asks the people in this village to hold hands together in their trying to solve all these problems which they have in front of them. Also before the meeting ends, there is a yaqona ceremony ~~one~~ which closes the meeting, it is done for the chief invited to attend the meeting, or someone whom they went to ask to be present here at the meeting. They ask him to return home now with the presentation of this yaqona ceremony, then someone kneels forward to accept the yaqona on behalf of the Tui Vitogo, and now the people are free to talk about anything else because the chief or the Tui Vitogo has declared the meeting closed. This is the pattern and the manner in which our village meeting is held and dealt with here in Vitogo today.

Many meetings passed, we also have our minister of the church who speaks about his section here in the village. In our village meetings, church dealings are also included and discussed. And this is the time when they begin opening this meeting with a prayer. After they have ended the meeting the traditional way, they also close it with a prayer.

This is happening now when we have all our meetings. This is all about the meeting which we hold there in the village.

- This person whom they make the ceremony of i waraki when he arrives is the person who decide when should the meeting starts and also when should it ends or.....

As for this meeting which they wish to hold on every Tuesday, all the people knows that on this day after they clean the village during daylight, in the afternoon or at night, then they meet. If they wish to cancel the meeting for another day and all that, this is going to be the turaga ni koro's duty, he is the one who informs the people that the meeting which should be held on Tuesday is cancelled. As for the turaga ni koro he is the person who listens to the chief all the time whether they should hold the meeting or not. This is then announced to let the people know what is going to happen. As I've said, this is something which they hold every Tuesday nights and afternoons.

From Tui Vitogo to the turaganikoro, if the meeting is to be canceled, then the turaga ni koro should inform the people of what the Tui Vitogo has decided. Today, the message of anything is from Tui Vitogo to the turaga ni koro. As for the turaga ni koro today he also belongs to our i tokatoka and he is one of the matanivanua. He is the head of this i tokatoka, this turaga ni koro of this village. And we could say that it is very easy for the message to be delivered to the people, and it does not need to go to another person who could be the matanivanua as the customs goes, since this person who is the turaga ni koro is a matanivanua himself. So the sending of the message is short and very quick also. From the Tui

Vitogo to the matanivanua who is the turaga ni koro and right on to the people in this village.

- When they hold their meeting in the olden times, can you tell me as to where do they hold their meetings. Do they erect a temporary shelter where the meeting is held or they have it out there in the village green.....

For all the meetings which they hold in the past, they all meet there in this large house at Sukanacagi. Today, we have another house where we could say is out meeting house and also a hall. We use our village hall for village meetings and other functions held in this village.

- One of the things which I often hear is known as VAKATADUMATA and they say that this is related to a village meeting to be held, can you tell me something about this word vakatadumata.....

It might have a different meaning to other people like to us this is similar to the i waraki or the yaqona ceremony they hold for the chief or this person who comes to open the meeting.

- This yaqona which they use for all these ceremonies, these are the yaqona which they have already cleaned and pounded before they use it or some are still with the roots and freshly pulled from the plantation. ....

The yaqona is the one which they have dried and pounded. They do not use any yaqona which is still with the leaves and roots. Also now is presented dry but all are mixed into the yaqona drink before it is presented. The only thing left is some people are new or strangers, and they wish to attend this village meeting, then they have to present their yaqona for their i sevusevu. But for the yaqona which they use for this village meeting, it is all mixed first before

it is presented to those people who should get it.

Also for this yaqona which we use during these meeting, we have divided up the days between all the yavusa in this community. For one meeting, this yavusa takes the turn to supply us with the yaqona for all the ceremonies, and also for the drinking that goes on during the meeting. Say the yavusa of Vanuakula might have the turn this week, and next meeting, we have the yavusa, Tunuloa to supply the yaqona for the meeting. And then it goes round and round until all theyavusa have their turn to supply the yaqona for the meeting. And sometimes the Tui Vitogo himself says, my turn now to supply the yaqona for the meeting, then we rest and he gets them for us. This is the new pattern used now, but a lot of times the Tui Vitogo says that he is the one who is going to supply the yaqona for the meeting. So we decided to do something about it so we took turns to buy the yaqona for the meeting, one thing too, those people who are the head of the committee, they don't arrange all these things before the meeting is held. Also there is no money given in these meets, so they can use it up for ~~buy~~ buying the yaqona for the meeting.

- When the people attend the ~~xxxx~~ meeting, can you explain their sitting arrangements, where do the men sit and where do the women sit, do they sit all together or there is a special side for the women and a special side for the men.....

Here in Vitogo, we have the Tui Vitogo right there in the front part of the room further up, like this is where the head of the table lies, and the turaga of all yavusa, Tunuloa, sits on one side, and so the others sits on the other side.

And the rest of the people sit on this side and the others on the

side, these are the men who takes care of the yaqona ceremony and also they take around the cup of yaqona for everyone sitting there when the yaqona ceremony is going on. The women then sits behind the men and they all sit with the young men and women who also attend the meeting. But now, they have group themselves, we have one side where all the women, mature women sits and one side where all the young women sits. They do not sit all mixed up, like old and young together. The same thing for the boys too.

- Can you tell me where the MASI NI VANUA sits.....

These people who are called the MASI NI VANUA, these are the people who are the turaga ni mataqali, heads of all mataqali, heads of the yavusa, i tokatoka, here in this village. They have their own duty and position here in this village, but just to be added on top of all that, like he is the head of the warriors, this is one reason why they are called the masi ni vanua. We can simply say they are heads of a group or club. They know their duty and this is what they do when the time comes to do these things.

- Can you tell me something about the clothes which the men and women both young and old are going to wear to this village meeting.....

For all these village meetings, which we are holding this days, no more do we allow men young or old to turn up in trousers where they hold the meeting. They should wear a sulu and a clean shirt. For the women they should wear a dress and a long sulu. A lot of times young girls turn up in skirts, but this should not happen, they should all wear the clothes they have been told to wear to this village meeting.

It is respectful and right that they turn up at the village meeting with the right clothes on and all that.

They should all wear long sulu to cover themselves up.

- What can we ~~xxx~~ say about the women.....

Since now that it is afternoon and getting into the night, they should wear a long dress and a sulu also, all should have their hair nicely combed.

- When is the best meeting time for the people in this village.....

The best time to hold such meetings, is in the afternoons, they find that people turn up in full force to the meeting. This is after the children at home have eaten and getting ready to sleep. This is the time when the fathers have returned from the farm, and also women return from fishing. It has been practised and they are used to it now, they like to have their meeting in the afternoon so they make it their business to come right at this time when they usually hold it. If they wish to hold a meeting during the day, this does not work at all, because a lot of people are away during the day so it is no use holding the meeting then.

- How is the meeting declared opened?

The opening of the meeting, today this is opened with a prayer from the minister of the church. After that, then the Tui Vitogo is to deliver a speech to declare it open now. He gives the permission to the people to talk and discuss now. First in this opening speech they thank the people for the good work they are doing and also if those who know they are not been working hard, ~~and xxx~~ then they are encouraged to do more work. The people of each sub-committees are thanked for their good work and also of the good effort they have done in trying to maintain a stable environment and peaceful community.

They are also told of it's bad part if they do not do what they have been told to do. They want all the people to support each other in their trying to do all these things to make the village come alive.

- During this meeting, is there any food that you prepare for the meeting or.....

For all village meetings, since they hold it every week, they do not need to cook any food for the people who attend the meeting. The only thing which ~~is~~ prepared for the meeting is the yaqona.

The yavusa who knows that this is their turn to supply the grog, it is their duty to see they have the yaqona ready on the day the meeting is held. They pound it ready and also they serve it there before the chief and all the people. This yavusa, also see that they open the doors and the windows before the rest of the people arrive, they prepare the ash-trays and all that, the bowl in which the yaqona is to be mixed, and the spreading of the mats on which the people will sit. Everything they need to prepare is what these people in the meeting are going to use, they drink the yaqona and sit there on the mats which they have prepared.

The Tui Vitogo opens the meeting, now he gives it or ~~hands~~ hands it over to the chairman. Then from then the chairman takes over and leads the discussion and the talking of the meeting now. This meeting which they hold now, this is not similar to the meeting which they hold before. In the olden days, when they hold such meetings, the speakers or the people talking gives the orders, the people in the meeting remain very quiet and they don't say a word at all during the meeting, all they need to do is to obey what the speakers say, and they go out to carry out what they have been instructed to do.

FOR any village meeting which they have in the olden days, the people have no say in what is taking place here in the village, those who are the clan of speakers are the people who are going to decide and do all the things for the people, it does not matter if this person whom they talk to is innocent or not, they only say what they think should be ~~sada~~. They tell the people of what should be done and not to be done.

- When the meeting is about to finish, how ~~q~~ do they end this meeting?  
As I've said the committees in this meeting say or report what they have been doing. After they have reported what they wish to report then they are asked again if anyone wish to add anything else. Then the Tui Vitogo is asked to end this meeting, or to close the meeting with a speech, the Tui Vitogo again address the people. After his speech, a comment on his speech done by someone, then comes the ceremony of the finishing of the meeting, a prayer follows this, and this is the end of the meeting.
- Who comments on the speech of the chief?  
The ~~ma~~ matanivanua does this.
- When the Tui Vitogo first comes in to the meeting house, are the people of Vitogo going to say their word of greeting done for the chief which they refer to as the TAMA?  
We no longer do the tama ~~ix~~ in this village and today. The idea which they take now, the people are already inside the house, but if they come in and the Tui Vitogo is already inside, then should the tama be done, but this is the opposite.
- In some meetings when they are ready to end the meeting, they say these two numbers VAKAVITU and answered with VAKAWALU. What can you say about these numbers and their link with the village meeting?

These are the two words used for commenting on the chief's speech. It is a very old customs and practise, as for all the things which they say now after saying these two numbers are the words to back and support the whole things discussed in the meeting. Also words of encouragement for the people who attended the meeting. It is like to make the plans and the arrangements all work out when the time comes to tackle all of them. There is a true meaning of the use of these two numbers. But the main aim of their using such words is to make it like a spell or magic so that what they have discussed comes true. As for the people hearing this ending speech, they know now that there is a very important thing to be done, they should take these words, accept it in the chiefly way, shoulder all responsibilities for their chief's ~~ska~~ sake, and also the women are included in all these. So they are to work so everything comes out true. This person who comments on the chief's speech, says VAKAVITU, the villagers says, VAKAWALU after him. Then this person commenting goes on to say what he wish to say of the chief's speech.

- In the olden days, they do not have all these committees, which we have today, how ~~q~~ do they hold their meetings in the olden time? I believe in the olden days, or in the past just a couple of years back, for each committee they run their own things and they don't show such things to other people, they do their own work, as for the other committees, they also do their own things. For each section or for each particular kind of work in this village, the owners or the committees and it's members are the ones who makes sure that everything is being attended to. After the meet, discuss and they hve something to say ~~q~~ this is then taken up to the chief or the Tui Vitogo.

The chief of the village is informed of what this particular committee wish to hold or plan to do. Ten years back a new rule was introduced by the Fijian Affairs for the people in the village, and they were told that it would be better if they have their sub-committees who can run what ever field of work there in the village. This is to make things easy for all the people, and also they can spend their own time thinking things out and doing their work which is going to help the village very much. Also in this village meeting, they know of what the people want and also of what they don't want, but this is how things done today, as for those in the past, they have to listen to only one person or these people, who does all the talking. As for the leadership which the people get, it is all from the chiefs and from these people, who are known as the 'speakers.' A lot of times today there is a lot of opposition from people, then their problems are not being solved, because there is a lot of disagreement going on between some people, it can be between one mataqali and the other mataqali. So the solution to particular troubles is not being solved at all, and there can be some unpleasantness for these people. All problems which people have, they bring it to this meeting, where they discuss it and then they see if they can solve all these. The chiefs listen to the problems of his people and if he thinks that he can do something about it, he offers his help if not then he asks for the support of his people to help this person or these groups of people.

- All the things which they have discussed in this meeting, the people have been told of the best things to do, and they also see that this is carried out, if not, they the things are left not done, but who else is going to do all these things for them? The people should

work themselves, then everything is going to work out well, if not, then nothing can happen. Also for some of the things which the chief might be thinking he can also tell his people. As for the matanivanua he can do these talking for the people, as for the people, they should listen to whatever thing the chief says, if not, they can be punished for that.

- When it is time for them to do these things which they have planned to do, who are the people who comes out to do the work?

We have the people, and also we have our chiefs, but they can be there for supervision. For those meetings which they have in the olden times, these things which the chiefs says, they have to obey it since this is an order from the chief. Also they hold this meeting only when the chiefs wish to hold it, as for the chiefs, they can meet very often and they discuss all the things which they need to do. Also for this meeting which the chiefs meet in, the turaga ni mataqali comes in and join them also, they discuss of what is happening there in their own mataqali and if they need some assistance from the chiefs of what they wish to do. As for these people, they are the people who decide on all the things which they need to do. Whatever they have discussed in the meeting and know it should be done, they give this to the village people to do it for them.

After the meeting, they do the ceremony of i VAKATALE. This is done for the chief, and then the people themselves goes out after the chief leaves. But today, after they have done this ceremony, then they have a short prayer before they all dispersed out.

- When one of the people or one of those listening wish to make a suggestion or say something, is there a particular sign which they have to make so that the chief knows of the chariman knows that you wish to make a suggestion or say something?

If someone wish to make a suggestion, then he or she should clap their hands and then the chairman might ask her to stand up and say what she wish to say. But today, for anyone who wish to say a word, they need to stand up and say what he wants, if not, they can lift their hand and for the person conducting the meeting, he knows this person wants to say something.

But our real customs, when someone wish to make a suggestion or say something, they have to clap their hands in a respective manner, then the chief might ask them to say what they wish to say.

After this person makes her suggestion, then she needs to clap her hands again. This is the end of the suggestion shown by the clapping of the hands.

- Is there anything else you would like to say about this topic of a village meeting.....

For a village meeting, I could say that this is the life of the village. In a village meeting, here is where they discuss all the things which they can do for the life of this village, also for them to make things for the village and also it helps these people who need help. In a village, there are thousands of things which needs to be done and also for the people, they should do their part when the time comes. When they wish to make things move for the church, the government and the village itself, they need to hold hands together, be co-operative and things will be very good for them. If a village does not have anything like this, then it is not going to be a happy village or a good village to live in.

People can do whatever they feel like doing, if not, then what else can be done? But having meetings like this, this is the only way in which they can get the people's support, their suggestions

on the bes things to ~~do~~ ~~be~~ be done. Also for those people who are in trouble and needs help, this is the only place where they get support. So, I would say that in a village meeting, this is the only place and time when things can be straightened out and also encouragement can be given to those people who are in trouble and cannot find a way to solve it. So, it is really a very important meeting.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

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FINISHED.