“Harnessing Ancestral Wisdom: Traditional Knowledge and Practices for Climate Resilience"

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Talofa Lava

It is an honour to stand before you today at the Pacific Ocean Pacific Climate Change Conference. I am particularly proud to speak on a subject that resonates deeply with our shared mission: "Harnessing Ancestral Wisdom: Traditional Knowledge and Practices for Climate Resilience." This topic strikes at the very heart of our commitment to address the urgent and complex challenges posed by climate change. We must draw upon the wisdom of our ancestors and the rich tapestry of traditional knowledge that has sustained our communities through the ages. By doing so, we can discover innovative and culturally appropriate solutions to the environmental crises we face.

In the Pacific Islands, our path forward does not lie in replacing our cherished cultures and traditions as we seek ways to adapt to climate change. Instead, we must turn to our own heritage, our systems, and our traditions, for it is through these means that we have thrived for centuries. For thousands of years, our communities have demonstrated remarkable resilience and ingenuity in the face of environmental changes. Too often, we portray ourselves as victims of climate change. But I ask you, why not see ourselves as saviours, showcasing the strength and resilience of our cultures and traditions? By weaving these time-tested practices into our official government policies, we can reinforce our unique identity and strength, and lead the way in climate resilience.

Today, I will delve into the critical role of traditional knowledge and practices in climate change adaptation and mitigation, with a particular focus on the Solomon Islands. Our islands have long been custodians of invaluable environmental wisdom, offering time-tested strategies for managing natural resources and adapting to environmental changes. This traditional knowledge is not just a testament to the ingenuity of our forebears; it is a vital resource for contemporary climate action. I am working to configure the Solomon Islands National University (SINU) to leverage this knowledge through the proposed development of living labs and the Center for Islands Futures. These initiatives exemplify how we can

integrate indigenous knowledge with modern scientific research to create resilient and sustainable communities.

Let us move forward with the wisdom of our ancestors guiding our steps, confident in the knowledge that our rich heritage can light the way to a sustainable future.

In line with the theme of this conference, "***Our Ocean, Our Home: Climate Resilience for a Blue Pacific***," I propose that this afternoon we focus our discussions on the sub-theme of "***Integrating Ancestral Wisdom and Modern Science for Climate Resilience***." This theme underscores the importance of a holistic approach to climate change, one that respects and incorporates the deep environmental insights of our indigenous communities while embracing the advancements of modern science. By adopting this integrative approach, we can develop comprehensive strategies that not only address the immediate impacts of climate change but also foster long-term resilience and sustainability for our Pacific Island nations.

As we confront the escalating crisis of climate change, we face numerous and complex challenges. Rising sea levels, increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, and shifts in ecosystems are just a few of the stark realities threatening our Pacific Island nations. These changes disrupt our livelihoods, food security, and cultural heritage, demanding urgent and effective responses. Despite significant advancements in scientific research and technology, there are inherent limits to what science alone can achieve. Scientific solutions often require substantial financial resources, sophisticated infrastructure, and lengthy implementation periods, which can be particularly challenging for resource-constrained regions like ours.

Moreover, conventional scientific approaches sometimes fail to fully account for the social, cultural, and ecological nuances of local environments. This is where the wisdom of our ancestors and the rich repository of indigenous knowledge and practices come into play. Scientists are increasingly turning to these time-tested strategies because they offer practical, low-cost, and culturally resonant solutions to climate impacts. Indigenous knowledge systems, developed over centuries of close interaction with nature, provide a holistic understanding of ecosystems and sustainable resource management.

By integrating traditional practices such as agroforestry, rotational farming, and community-based coastal management with contemporary scientific methods, we can enhance our adaptive capacity, mitigate climate impacts more effectively, and build resilient communities. This synergistic approach not only respects and preserves our cultural heritage but also enriches the global fight against climate change with diverse and innovative solutions.

The Role of Traditional Knowledge in Climate Adaptation and Mitigation

Traditional knowledge, often referred to as indigenous knowledge, encompasses a vast array of skills, practices, and innovations developed and refined by indigenous and local communities over centuries. This knowledge is not static; it is dynamic, continually evolving as communities interact with their environment. Deeply rooted in the cultural and ecological contexts of these communities, traditional knowledge provides a holistic approach to environmental management and sustainability. Unlike modern scientific approaches, which

can be fragmented and specialised, traditional knowledge systems are inherently integrative, addressing the interconnectedness of social, ecological, and economic systems.

In the context of climate adaptation and mitigation, traditional knowledge offers several invaluable contributions. For instance, many indigenous practices are designed to enhance the resilience of ecosystems to environmental changes. Agroforestry systems, which integrate trees with crops and livestock, are a prime example. These systems not only promote biodiversity but also improve soil fertility, conserve water, and provide multiple sources of income, thereby enhancing food security and economic stability. In regions like the Solomon Islands, where communities are highly dependent on natural resources, such practices are crucial for adapting to the impacts of climate change.

Moreover, traditional knowledge includes sophisticated methods of weather forecasting and environmental monitoring. Indigenous communities have developed keen observational skills and a deep understanding of local climate patterns, enabling them to predict weather events and seasonal changes with remarkable accuracy. This knowledge is particularly valuable in the face of climate variability and extreme weather events, providing early warning systems that can save lives and reduce damage. By incorporating these traditional forecasting methods with modern meteorological techniques, we can improve our capacity to anticipate and respond to climate-related risks.

Another significant aspect of traditional knowledge is its emphasis on sustainable resource management. Indigenous practices often involve rotational farming, controlled burning, and the establishment of taboo areas where hunting and fishing are restricted. These practices are designed to prevent overexploitation and ensure the long-term availability of resources. In the Solomon Islands, for example, traditional marine management practices, such as seasonal fishing closures and the use of sacred sites, have helped maintain healthy fish populations and marine biodiversity. These community-based approaches to resource management are essential for mitigating the impacts of climate change on local ecosystems and livelihoods.

Furthermore, traditional knowledge fosters social cohesion and collective action, which are critical for effective climate adaptation and mitigation. Indigenous practices are often embedded in cultural rituals and community governance systems, promoting a sense of responsibility and stewardship towards the environment. This collective approach contrasts with the often individualistic nature of modern scientific solutions and can significantly enhance community resilience. By engaging local communities in climate action and valuing their traditional knowledge, we can foster greater participation, ownership, and sustainability of adaptation and mitigation efforts.

Traditional knowledge offers a rich repository of sustainable practices and holistic approaches to climate adaptation and mitigation. It complements modern scientific knowledge, providing practical, culturally appropriate, and locally relevant solutions. As we face the growing challenges of climate change, it is imperative that we integrate traditional knowledge with contemporary science, leveraging the strengths of both to build resilient and sustainable communities. By doing so, we honour the wisdom of our ancestors and ensure a more equitable and effective response to the global climate crisis.

In the Solomon Islands, traditional practices such as agroforestry, rotational farming, and coastal management have long served as adaptive strategies to cope with environmental changes. These practices are not merely relics of the past but are dynamic and evolving systems that offer viable solutions to contemporary challenges posed by climate change. Agroforestry, for instance, involves the integration of trees and shrubs into agricultural landscapes. This method not only enhances biodiversity but also improves soil fertility, reduces erosion, and provides multiple sources of income for local communities. By creating a diverse and resilient agroecosystem, agroforestry helps buffer against the impacts of extreme weather events, such as droughts and floods, which are becoming more frequent and severe due to climate change.

Rotational farming, another traditional practice, involves the cyclical use of land for different crops and fallow periods to allow soil recovery. This method prevents soil degradation and maintains its fertility, ensuring sustainable agricultural productivity over the long term. In the Solomon Islands, rotational farming is often practiced in combination with agroforestry, creating a robust system that maximizes the use of available resources while minimizing environmental impact. By alternating crops and allowing periods of rest for the land, farmers can reduce the risk of pest infestations and diseases, which are exacerbated by changing climate conditions. This practice also promotes biodiversity and enhances the resilience of agricultural systems to climate variability.

Coastal management practices in the Solomon Islands are equally significant in the context of climate adaptation. Traditional methods, such as constructing seawalls from locally sourced materials, have been used for generations to protect coastal communities from erosion and storm surges. Mangrove reforestation is another vital practice, as mangroves act as natural barriers against rising sea levels and extreme weather events. They also provide critical habitats for marine life, support fisheries, and enhance coastal resilience. Integrating these traditional coastal management techniques with modern scientific approaches can offer comprehensive solutions to the challenges posed by climate change, ensuring the protection and sustainability of coastal ecosystems and communities.

The dynamic nature of these traditional practices is evident in their continuous evolution and adaptation to new environmental and social contexts. Communities in the Solomon Islands have a deep understanding of their local ecosystems and are adept at modifying their practices to suit changing conditions. This flexibility is crucial for responding to the unpredictable impacts of climate change. For example, as sea levels rise, communities are adjusting their coastal management strategies, incorporating both traditional knowledge and modern engineering techniques to enhance their resilience. Similarly, changes in precipitation patterns are prompting modifications in agricultural practices, with farmers experimenting with different crop varieties and planting schedules to optimize productivity under new climatic conditions.

These traditional practices, rooted in a profound understanding of the natural world, illustrate the invaluable role of indigenous knowledge in building resilience and sustainability. By combining these age-old methods with contemporary scientific approaches, we can develop

robust, adaptive strategies to address the pressing challenges of climate change in the Solomon Islands and beyond.

Moreover, the revival and adaptation of traditional practices are being supported by various initiatives and collaborations. Academic institutions, such as SINU, the University of the South Pacific (USP), and the National University of Samoa (NUS), are playing a pivotal role in documenting, researching, and promoting these practices. Through initiatives like living labs and the Centre for Islands Futures, SINU will facilitate the integration of traditional knowledge with contemporary scientific research, fostering innovation and resilience. These efforts will not only empower local communities but also contribute to the broader global discourse on sustainable development and climate resilience.

By recognizing and valuing the wisdom of traditional practices, we can develop more effective and culturally appropriate strategies to address the complex challenges of climate change. This integration will ensure that our responses are not only scientifically sound but also resonate deeply with the cultural and ecological realities of the communities they aim to serve. Through such comprehensive and inclusive approaches, we can forge a path towards a sustainable and resilient future, honouring the legacy of our ancestors while embracing the advancements of modern science.

SINU's Living Labs and the Institute for Islands Futures

At SINU, we recognise the immense value of traditional knowledge and are dedicated to integrating it with contemporary scientific research. One of our key initiatives is the establishment of living labs in various communities across the Solomon Islands where the living labs will serve as real-world environments where students, researchers, and community members collaborate to test and implement sustainable practices. These living labs will focus on place-based learning, where participants engage directly with their environment to understand and address local challenges. By integrating indigenous knowledge with modern science, we aim to develop innovative solutions that are culturally appropriate and environmentally sustainable.

These living labs will not only be educational hubs, they will also be centers for community engagement. They will be places where local wisdom is valued, and new ideas will be tested in real-world settings. Through these collaborative efforts, we aim to empower communities, foster resilience, and promote sustainable development across the Solomon Islands.

To further our mission, SINU has partnered with the Indigenous Knowledge Institute (IKI) to establish the Centre for Islands Futures. This collaboration exemplifies our commitment to blending traditional knowledge with contemporary scientific approaches. Our partnership is further strengthened by collaborations with Nia Tero and Arizona State University, which bring a wealth of expertise and resources to support our initiatives.

The scope of our agreement with IKI encompasses a wide range of projects, programs, and initiatives that align with the educational and national development goals of both SINU and IKI. Key elements of this collaboration include:

a. Developing Joint Research Grant Proposals: By fostering innovation and shared knowledge, we aim to secure funding for cutting-edge research that addresses critical environmental and societal issues. These joint proposals will leverage the combined strengths of SINU and IKI, enhancing our capacity to undertake significant research projects.

b. Organising Annual Master Classes: These master classes in Islands Knowledge and Islands Futures will attract global fee-paying students, showcasing SINU's name under license. This initiative not only promotes our unique educational offerings but also generates revenue to support our operations and further our academic goals.

c. Creating Advanced Content: By developing and delivering advanced educational content jointly with IKI, we can offer high-quality, commercially viable courses. Profits from these courses will be shared, providing SINU with additional financial resources while leveraging our combined expertise for educational excellence.

d. Identifying Commercial Opportunities: To support SINU's sustainable operations, we will explore and develop commercial opportunities. This strategic approach marks a significant step towards achieving our mutual goal of academic and operational sustainability, ensuring that our initiatives are both impactful and financially viable.

e. Establishment of the Centre for Islands Futures: This centre will serve as a hub for research, education, and community engagement focused on sustainable development and climate resilience. It will be a focal point for our efforts to integrate traditional knowledge with modern science, fostering innovation and resilience in the Pacific Islands.

f. Development of Postgraduate Programs: We will create a Postgraduate Diploma and Masters programs that incorporate in-situ learning and "living lab" community hubs as integral sites of learning and instruction. These programs will provide students with hands-on experience and a deep understanding of the practical applications of their studies, preparing them to address real-world challenges effectively.

Through these initiatives, SINU and IKI will pioneer a new approach to education and sustainability, one that honours our cultural heritage while embracing the possibilities of modern science. Together, we will build a resilient future for the Solomon Islands and the broader Pacific region, demonstrating that traditional knowledge and innovative thinking can work hand-in-hand to address the pressing challenges of our time.

The Centre for Islands Futures at SINU will play a pivotal role in our mission to integrate traditional knowledge with contemporary scientific approaches. Serving as a hub for interdisciplinary research and education, it will foster a systems approach to learning that transcends traditional academic silos. By bringing together diverse fields of study, the Centre will encourage holistic thinking and collaborative problem-solving. This approach is essential in addressing the multifaceted challenges of climate change, which require insights from multiple disciplines.

One of the Centre's core missions is to emphasise the integration of indigenous knowledge and wisdom into the curriculum. This integration ensures that the next generation of leaders

is well-equipped to navigate the complexities of climate change and other environmental issues. By valuing and incorporating traditional ecological knowledge, the Centre not only preserves cultural heritage but also enriches the educational experience. Students gain a deeper understanding of sustainable practices that have been honed over centuries, which are crucial for developing effective and culturally appropriate solutions.

The Centre's role extends beyond academia; it will act as a catalyst for community engagement and empowerment. By working closely with local communities, the Centre will facilitate the exchange of knowledge and the co-creation of solutions. This collaborative model ensures that research and educational initiatives are grounded in the real-world experiences and needs of the communities they aim to serve. Thus, the Centre for Islands Futures will become a vital bridge between traditional practices and modern science, fostering innovation and resilience in the face of climate change.

Proposed PGDip Outline

To further our educational goals, we will develop a Postgraduate Diploma (PGDip) program comprising four courses over one year, totalling 120 credits, with two courses per semester. This program is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Solomon Islands' cultural and environmental heritage, alongside advanced skills in indigenous methodologies and applied education.

1. Solomon Islands Foundations: This course lays the groundwork for understanding the rich cultural and historical context of the Solomon Islands. It covers:

- Epistemological Diversity: Exploring the diverse ways of knowing, contrasting epistemological versus geophysical perspectives, and recognizing knowledge as a defining criterion.

- First Nations of Solomon Islands: Delving into the long history of the Solomon Islands and the process of epistemic decolonisation.

- Indigenous Epistemology: Investigating how knowledge is created and shared within indigenous communities.

- Indigenous View of the Solomon Islands and Independence: Deconstructing the concept of independence from an indigenous perspective.

- Domains and Sources of Power: Analysing traditional power structures and their influence on contemporary governance.

2. Islands Guardianship: This course focuses on the sustainable management of natural resources and the role of indigenous practices in environmental stewardship. Units include:

- People and Place: Examining the dynamic equilibrium of human-environment interactions before external contact.

- Customary Land and Political Economy: Understanding the role of customary land tenure in the Solomon Islands' political and economic systems.

- Conservation Practices: Studying traditional conservation methods such as Tolo (protection of sacred sites) and Asi (resource management).

- Dynamic Environment: Exploring the creation of biodiversity through both anthropogenic and natural processes.

- Climate Change Concepts and Drivers: Providing a foundational understanding of the fundamental concepts and drivers of climate change.

The first two courses, "Solomon Islands Foundations" and "Islands Guardianship," are set to be developed in Semester 1 of 2024 and delivered in Semester 2 of 2024. This timeline ensures that the program is rigorously planned and implemented, allowing us to incorporate the latest research and insights from both indigenous and scientific perspectives.

The Centre for Islands Futures stands as a beacon of interdisciplinary research and education, championing the integration of traditional knowledge into modern academic frameworks. Through our innovative Postgraduate Diploma (PGDip) program and community-focused initiatives, we are committed to fostering a resilient and sustainable future for the Solomon Islands and the broader Pacific region. By valuing and leveraging our cultural heritage, we can lead the way in climate resilience and sustainable development.

In July 2023, we had the distinct honour of hosting Laurene Powell Jobs, the widow of Steve Jobs, founder of Apple Inc. and the visionary behind the iPhone. Her visit highlighted the rich cultural and environmental heritage of the Solomon Islands and underscored the importance of preserving traditional knowledge. During her visit, she explored the Baru Conservation Area in the mountains of East Kwaio, where the people continue to wear traditional garments known as "kabilato." She also swam in the pristine waters of Waihau river, located within the Waihau Conservation Area in West Are Are, Malaita. Furthermore, she visited the Kolobangara Biodiversity Area in the Western Solomons and Tetepare, the largest uninhabited island in the Pacific.

These visits are integral to our vision of the Living Labs initiative, which aims to take education beyond the conventional classroom setting in Honiara. Instead, learning occurs in the natural and cultural landscapes of Guadalcanal, Malaita, and other regions. In these environments, the lecturers are the local people and communities who possess and actively use traditional knowledge to sustain their livelihoods. This approach not only enriches the educational experience but also ensures that indigenous knowledge is passed down to future generations. Through the Living Labs, we can nurture a deeper understanding and appreciation of sustainable living practices, thereby empowering our communities and safeguarding our cultural heritage for years to come.

The Living Labs will serve as dynamic incubators for place-based learning, where students and researchers engage directly with their environment and the custodians of traditional wisdom. By immersing themselves in the daily lives and practices of these communities, participants gain a profound understanding of sustainable living and environmental stewardship. This hands-on experience is invaluable in fostering a deep respect for traditional practices and the resilience they offer in the face of modern challenges.

In Wahau, Malaita Province, we aim to explore Indigenous guardianship. In Takataka, the focus will be on cultural preservation, while Ferafolia will delve into the new economy. In Gounafiu and Busurata, the emphasis will be on Indigenous agriculture. Malango, Paraniju, and Soli will concentrate on returning to place, and Olotsara, Komarindi, and Nini will examine Indigenous tourism. Tetepare and Rendova will highlight conservation seascapes and the story of the Ngali nut. Kulu and Rannoga will emphasize Indigenous languages, while Imbu Rano, Kolo, and Poitete will focus on the forest and life. Taumako and Heheilavoi will celebrate oceanic voyaging, Lau, Asi, and NiuLeni will explore island engineering, Ontong Java and Pelau will address atoll futures, and Makira and Banana Island will showcase Indigenous food.

Each of these locations will offer unique insights and learning opportunities, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the diverse ways in which traditional knowledge and practices can inform and enhance modern approaches to sustainability and resilience. Through these Living Labs, we can foster a greater appreciation for the rich cultural heritage of the Solomon Islands and its invaluable contributions to global knowledge.

This initiative aligns with our broader educational goals at SINU, where we strive to integrate indigenous knowledge with contemporary scientific research. By bridging these two worlds, we aim to develop innovative and culturally appropriate solutions to the pressing issues posed by climate change. The collaboration between local communities and academic institutions creates a unique learning ecosystem that is both locally relevant and globally significant.

Laurene Powell Jobs' visit not only celebrated the cultural richness of the Solomon Islands but also reinforced the importance of preserving and leveraging traditional knowledge as a key component of sustainable development. Her engagement with the Living Labs initiative exemplifies the potential for cross-cultural and interdisciplinary collaboration in addressing the complex challenges of our time.

The concept of the Center for Islands Futures and the Living Labs aligns with the strategic thinking encapsulated in our draft Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Pacific Climate Change Center, hosted by SPREP. This collaboration underscores our commitment to integrating traditional knowledge and practices into our educational frameworks, particularly in the context of climate change adaptation and mitigation. Under the MoU, the project titled "Living Labs: Integrating Traditional Knowledge in Graduate Programmes for Climate Resilience" is planned. This initiative aims to blend traditional wisdom with academic research to tackle climate change, establishing SINU as a leader in interdisciplinary research and graduate education. The collaboration focuses on developing graduate programmes that incorporate traditional knowledge and are based in rural communities, transforming these communities into immersive "Living Labs" for education and research.

Key objectives include fostering academic inquiry rooted in traditional knowledge, developing new graduate courses, engaging rural communities as educational partners, and ensuring these courses meet accreditation standards from SITESA, Australia, and the UK. The methodology will employ multi-modal research, incorporating ethnographic studies and fieldwork within these Living Labs. Research domains will encompass traditional agricultural

systems, coastal ecosystem management, and sustainable fisheries. The collaborative framework will emphasize academic partnerships, community engagement, policy advocacy, and securing funding to support these initiatives. We are already progressing and eagerly anticipate working with the Pacific Climate Change Center (SPREP) to implement the Living Labs concept.

Harnessing Nature for Climate Resilience

In our pursuit of sustainable and resilient futures, it is essential to recognise the profound role that nature plays in addressing the multifaceted challenges of climate change. Nature-based solutions (NBS) have emerged as a powerful framework for mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change, while simultaneously promoting biodiversity and supporting community livelihoods. Grounded in the understanding that healthy ecosystems are the foundation of human well-being, NBS offer a holistic approach that integrates environmental stewardship with socio-economic development. As we navigate the complexities of climate resilience, it is imperative to leverage the wisdom of our ancestors and the rich natural heritage of the Solomon Islands. By doing so, we can develop innovative, culturally appropriate strategies that not only protect our environment but also enhance the quality of life for our communities.

Nature-based solutions (NBS) are actions that work with and enhance nature to help address societal challenges, including climate change. These solutions emphasize the protection, restoration, and sustainable management of ecosystems to provide a wide range of benefits, such as climate regulation, water purification, and disaster risk reduction. Healthy ecosystems are crucial for human well-being and resilience, making NBS an integral component of sustainable development.

In the context of the Solomon Islands, NBS include the restoration of mangroves, coral reefs, and forests. Mangroves, for instance, act as natural barriers against storm surges and coastal erosion while providing critical habitats for marine life. These coastal forests also sequester significant amounts of carbon, helping to mitigate the effects of climate change. Coral reefs protect shorelines from wave action and support fisheries, which are vital for local food security and livelihoods. Forests play a crucial role in maintaining watershed health, preventing soil erosion, and preserving biodiversity.

SINU is actively involved in promoting and implementing NBS through our research and community engagement programmes. By restoring and conserving natural ecosystems, we not only mitigate the impacts of climate change but also enhance biodiversity and support sustainable development. Our initiatives aim to integrate traditional ecological knowledge with modern scientific approaches, fostering community-led conservation efforts that are both effective and culturally relevant. Through these efforts, we are paving the way for a resilient and sustainable future, rooted in the rich natural heritage of the Solomon Islands.

One of our key proposals that we recognise is the ***Indigenous Territorial Climate Adaptation (ITICA)*** initiative, which recognises the fundamental strength and advantages of indigenous peoples remaining in their territories. ITICA emphasizes that responding to climate change

within self-conceptualised territories is the most effective option. This approach leverages the deep connection indigenous communities have with their land, enabling them to manage natural resources sustainably and resiliently.

Furthermore, the ***Focusing on the Intactness Between People and Their Land (FATEI)*** highlights the importance of maintaining the relationship between communities and their environments. When people retain their presence and active stewardship over their land, they are better positioned to manage and adapt to environmental changes. These programmes underscore the vital role of indigenous knowledge and practices in achieving long-term climate resilience and environmental sustainability.

Through these initiatives, SINU aims to create a model of integrated and holistic climate action that can be replicated across the Pacific region and beyond. By combining traditional knowledge with scientific research and community engagement, we are paving the way for a sustainable and resilient future for the Solomon Islands and its people.

Framing knowledge systems within their particular epistemologies is a useful approach that helps avoid the perception of traditional knowledge as merely anecdotal or inferior to systematic scientific knowledge. Many items we refer to as indigenous or customary knowledge are the products of intense and repeated empirical observation, often involving controls and comparisons. This rigorous process, akin to scientific methodologies, underscores the validity and reliability of these knowledge systems, even though it is important to note that validity is not solely determined by such processes.

Furthermore, it is crucial to engage with the different ontological foundations of our knowledge systems—the fundamental ways in which we exist and perceive our reality. For many in the audience, the instrumental and pragmatic advantages of relying on local knowledge over Western or Eastern paradigms are already familiar. This perspective, often termed the "local turn," emphasizes that local communities possess a deep, intrinsic understanding of their environment because of their long-term presence and interaction with it. However, stopping at this point risks undervaluing the true difference we bring.

What we offer goes beyond practical advantages; it encompasses a unique way of being and understanding the world. Our civilizations maintain and reinforce diversity as a core value, reflected in our conceptions of space and territory that extend beyond the conventional demarcations of land and water. In our worldview, land claims include reefs, ocean floors, and even specific spots in the ocean, challenging the imposed limitations of larger societies. Additionally, our multilocal, multilingual societies have persisted and thrived as distinct polities, showcasing an alternative model of what it means to be human.

The true excitement lies in acknowledging and embracing these ontological differences. Our way of being exemplifies a harmonious coexistence with nature and a holistic approach to environmental stewardship. This perspective not only challenges the dominant narratives but also offers valuable insights into sustainable living and resilience. By recognizing and integrating these diverse epistemologies and ontologies, we can enrich the global discourse on knowledge, sustainability, and what it means to be human in a changing world.

Conclusion

In conclusion, traditional knowledge and practices are invaluable assets in our collective response to climate change. They offer time-tested strategies deeply embedded in the cultural and environmental contexts of our communities. At SINU, we are committed to harnessing this knowledge through our living labs and the Institute for Islands Futures, integrating it with contemporary scientific research to develop innovative and sustainable solutions.

As we move forward, it is crucial that we continue to recognise and respect the contributions of indigenous and local communities. By embracing a holistic approach that combines traditional knowledge with modern science, we can build resilient and sustainable futures for the Solomon Islands and the broader Pacific region. As the renowned environmentalist Aldo Leopold once said, "Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land." This harmony is precisely what we strive to achieve through our efforts.

Let us work together to ensure that the wisdom of our ancestors guides us in our efforts to adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change. In doing so, we honour their legacy and pave the way for a more resilient and sustainable future for all. We invite you to join us on this journey, collaborating to create innovative and culturally appropriate solutions that will benefit our communities and the world at large.

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