

# Language, Culture and the Internet In the Cook Islands

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# Overview

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- Initiatives
  - Te Maeva Nui
  - Maori Bible Digitisation Project
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  - **Cook Islands Maori Database**
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# About Us

- Small country (12,000 pop)
- Spread over a large geographic distance (2 Million Sq. Km)
- Isolated, connected by Geo Stationary Satellite
  - slow and expensive (O3B could change this), luxury
- Free Association with NZ
- Economic Model: MiRAB + SITE
  - Large amount of Cook Islanders living overseas, est. 90% of Population
  - Population Growth Rate -3.3%
- 74% of the Population live on Rarotonga
- Official Languages: English and Maori
  - 98% of Population speak English



# Challenges

- Decline in language use,
  - Media and the Internet dominated by English
  - Decline in use by youth on Rarotonga and overseas population
- UNESCO's endangered languages list
  - **Rarotongan**
  - **Manihiki**
  - **Pukapukan**
  - **Penrhyn**
- Not helped by a declining population in the outer islands
- Government has limited funds for supporting culture and traditional knowledge



- ♀ vulnerable
- ♀ definitely endangered
- ♀ severely endangered
- ♀ critically endangered
- ♀ extinct

# Opportunities

- Anecdotal evidence to suggest most are keen relearn the language and culture
- The internet has created a host of new opportunities and possibilities
- But the question is...
- How do we leverage the internet to help preserve our culture?
- Despite the significant challenges (cost, capacity, capital), we are slowly beginning to find solutions
- Below are some of the Innovative Initiatives to cultural preservation using the internet

# Te Maeva Nui – Cultural Festival

- Annual Performing Arts Competition (Also teaches traditional instruments and costume making)
  - Groups from Districts and Islands
  - Prize Money
- Funded and Backed by Government. Run by Ministry of Cultural Development
- Almost all Young people consider it “Cool” to join a group to represent either their island or district
  - Main driver is the fierce competition amongst teams + pride in representation
- Measure of Success – Amount of Illegal uploads of performances YouTube
  - Generates a buzz
- Cook Islanders Overseas are starting to create

# Maori Bible Digitisation Project

- Digitising the Cook Islands Maori Bible
- Backed by the Cook Islands Christian Church (CICC)
  - Following in the foot steps of Samoan, Tongan and NZ Maori Bibles have been digitised
- Running for 2 year project, aims to finish by October
- Data Entry done by volunteers drawn from the congregation
- Plans for Android Application to be developed for it

# Bio Diversity Database

- Online Plant and Species Database Bio Database  
<http://cookislands.bishopmuseum.org/>
- Database of Natural Heritage terms (4000) with English translations
  - Mostly traditional and scientific names of various plants and species that are native to the Cook Islands.
  - Also developed Cook Islands Maori Keyboard for inclusion of Hamsha and Macron
- Mainly been driven by Gerald McCormack
- Backed by Natural Heritage Trust and the National Environment Service
  - Funded in the past by NZAID, SDC, Bishop Museum, PBIN, GEF, and UNDP



Cook Islands Biodiversity  
& Natural Heritage

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## Welcome to the Cook Islands Biodiversity Website

### Resources



[Biodiversity Database](#)



[Natural Heritage Articles](#)



[Maori Dictionaries](#)



[Bibliographic Database](#)



[Useful Links](#)

This website has been developing since 2003. The Cook Islands Natural Heritage Trust gratefully acknowledges those who have supported the website possible, and gives a special *ma'ata* to the [Bishop Museum](#) for hosting this website.

## [Dengue and Mosquito Control on Rarotonga](#)

By Gerald McCormack (posted 6/11/2007)

A PDF article. Part ONE "The disease and the mosquitoes" provides information on the illness, the viruses, the mosquitoes, the epidemics on Rarotonga to October 2007, and how epidemics start and finish. Part TWO "Managing dengue-spreading mosquitoes" provides information on controlling larvae and adults. The use of Reslin, a pyrethroid insecticide, is much debated. Information is provided on pyrethroid toxicity and control before the health and environment threats of using Reslin as a ULV spray are evaluated.

[Read Full Article](#) | [View All Articles](#)





# Cook Islands Maori Database Project

- 6000+ database of Cook Islands Maori words with English translations and example useages
- Local developers
  - Developed our own search engine based off of Jaro-Winkler Algo, MySQL function
  - Leverage open source software (LAMP Stack + Joomla CMS)
- Sources Buse Rarotongan Dictionary (1995), Savage Rarotongan Dictionary (1962), Public Contributions
- Recently praised as having best search engine and user friendliness
  - Social Linguistics Cook Islands Report by School of Oriental and Africa Studies, University of London
- Facebook Page and Early Android/iPhone Prototype
- Self Funded, Seeking funding from ISIF Asia to expand development

# What I've Learnt

From the perspective of Small Island Developing States while developing the Cook Islands Maori Database

# Lessons: Challenges & Solutions

- Copyright - Ask for Forgiveness instead of Permission
- Capital/Money – There is none
  - So Beg, Borrow and Steal
  - Aid/Donors – Bureaucracy wall -> Foreign consultants/companies
- Capacity/People - Developer talent hard to find or doesn't exist (most leave)
  - Prioritise/Focus on what's important
- ...affects technology choice. Critical Factors:
  - maximize productivity,
  - reduce complexity (Built our own RAD Tool)
- Time
  - High cost of living, I work 2 jobs to pay bills.

# Closing Remarks

- Do What Works?
- Fail often, do it quickly/cheaply, learn and then move on
- Resources are limited, So...
  - Prioritise what's really important
  - Don't reinvent the wheel
  - Don't be afraid to beg, borrow & steal what you need
- Ask for Forgiveness rather than for Permission

<http://www.maori.org.ck>

**THE END**

# Plans

- Short Term Goals
  - **Get Funding** (Crowd Funding, Applying Directly to Donors)
  - Upgrade the site
  - **Build Mobile App**
  - **Develop teaching resources** to integrate project into schools
  - Promote Project
  - Recruit moderators and sort out submission process
  - **Spell Checker**
- Long Term Goals
  - Create an addictive mobile game/app based on the project i.e. DuLingo
  - Add Multimedia Support: Voice Recordings, Images, Video etc...
  - Create/Find a sustainable Model
  - Clean data and add punctuation (Hamsa and Macron)