Advancing Community through River Conservation

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Case Study - Rivers Fiji
UNITING CONSERVATION, COMMUNITIES, & SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL

Where extraordinary travel meets endless possibilities

“Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people.” (TIES, 1990)
...the local community needs to be empowered to decide on what forms of tourism facilities and wildlife conservation programs they want to be developed in their respective communities, and how the tourism costs and benefits are to be shared among different stakeholders...(Akama, 1996, p. 573)
Framework in determining impacts...

- Economic Empowerment
  - Brings economic gains
  - Shared between many households
  - Improved infrastructure...

- Psychological Empowerment
  - Self-esteem is enhanced
  - Education and training opportunities
  - Increased opportunities for marginalized groups (women, youth, etc.)
Framework in determining impacts...

- **Social Empowerment**
  - Maintains or enhances a communities equilibrium
  - Increased community cohesion
  - Funds are raised for community development projects

- **Political Empowerment**
  - Political structure provides a forum to raise questions, concerns on ecotourism venture
  - Agencies implementing seek input of community groups
  - Provide opportunities for decision-making
You can’t often see your destination on the first step of your journey...

“I’ll Fly Away” 12-19-94
First explored in 1993
Re-visit in 1995 & 1996
1997 FTIB approval to operate commercial river trips…
1998 – Started promoting & training guides (6 months)
2000 – Established the Upper Navua Conservation Area (UNCA)
2006 – Established as a RAMSAR Site
Rivers Fiji Goals

What are we trying to accomplish?

- Natural Resource Conservation
- Build Awareness & Education
- Rural Highlands Economic Development
  (Create Jobs, Diversify Opportunities)
- Diversify Tourism Products in Fiji
Rivers Fiji Mission...

To enhance visitor’s and indigenous peoples appreciation for the culture and environment by providing activities that promote conservation & preservation through socially responsible and environmentally sensitive interaction with people, landscapes and ecosystems which makes the Fijian Highlands so distinct and unique.
The Model...The Foundation.

- Rivers Fiji
- Logging Company
- Mataqali
- Tourists
- NLTB
- Ramsar Scientists
Objective...

- To develop a segment of the nature-based tourism market in Fiji that did not exist.
Expand the marketplace, especially with particular focus on the U.S. market utilizing the resources of the partner company O.A.R.S.

- O.A.R.S. works with a client list of over 100,000 of dedicated rafters and ecotourists
- Expertise established Eco Challenge event
Objective...

- To develop a nature-based tourism business that contributes to the preservation /conservation of Fiji’s natural resources upon which the business depends.
Objective...

- To develop an ecotourism business that brings opportunities and benefits to people whom otherwise would not benefit directly from the country’s tourism industry (i.e., tourism is being introduced in rural communities in the central provinces of Fiji for the first time)
Strategy...

Collaborate with mataqali, research with village partners

Use traditional structures...

- e.g. guides selected from local villages near the start of each river program and provide extensive training program to support their involvement.
Strategy...

• Create agreement with the local logging company and communities to conserve 200 meters on each side of the Upper Navua River Corridor.

• Environmental Education
  • Implement the ‘leave no trace’ concepts and practices on all programs;
  • Educate local guides, community, and guests on ‘leave no trace’ and river conservation practices;
  • Collaborate with Scientists; RAMSAR
Working with communities...
Local Participation

Information sharing - information is shared

Consultation - informed and consulted on key issues

Decision-making - design and implementation

Initiating action - public takes the initiative in terms of action
Techniques for Community Participation

- Focus Groups
- Group Discussion
- Public meetings
- Research teams
- Surveys
Objective

• To develop an ecotourism model which benefits and encourages others to establish similar activities founded on ecotourism principles from examples set in the development of this project.
Strategies...

- Join local groups on ecotourism and sustainable tourism (e.g., The Fiji Ecotourism Association);

- Share and collaborate knowledge of guide training, safety gear, and program development ideas with related and complimentary programs;

- Work within established international guidelines for ecotourism and sustainable tourism development;

- Expand slowly and in direct consultation with villages and relevant community member and landowners.
Objective...

- Sustain business operations, economic viability
Strategies...

- Conserve natural resources.
- Develop tourism products that highlight Fiji’s natural environment in a unique and interesting way...
- Expand slowly, and train and hire locally.
- Manufacture in Fiji—local goods
- Run / Operate transportation...
- Work with partners (Nature Fiji, RAMSAR, OARS...)
Objectives...

- To maintain excellent relationships with local communities and landowners.
Strategy...

- Manage and hire locally
- Closely monitor relationships with villages and landowners, the provincial offices, national and local government;
- Communicate regularly with regard to the each phase of project development;
- Conduct on-going research.
Rivers Fiji Today...

- **Environmental Conservation**
  - Upper Navua Conservation Area (UNCA)
  - Education and Research

- **Social Programs**
  - Addressing village needs
  - Guide Training Programs
  - Environmental Education
  - Healthcare-New Clinic
  - Volunteer Programs
Fiji’s first... RAMSAR

- Third largest amongst Fiji’s Freshwater Drainages
  - 75 meters deep, 25 kilometers long (615 Hectares)

- Supports species important for maintaining biological diversity of a particular region:
  - Migration of unique species of fish and crabs
  - High concentration of sago palms
  - New to science—a species of Gobie!
  - Parrots, iguanas...
UNCA Benefits

1. $Direct income from tourist dollars—realize direct benefits from conservation (2 villages, 9 Mataqali)

2. Lease for conservation = environmental protection, protects unique cultural sites

3. Initial efforts have led to international wetlands recognition, protects freshwater source; coral reefs

4. Increased awareness, which may lead to further protection through education and research of the gorge
Community Challenges

• Lack of healthcare
• Lack of clean water
• Lack of transportation
• Lack of trained professionals
• Hospital 60k+ away, Suva
The Upper Navua Community today...

- **Environmental Conservation**
  - Upper Navua Conservation Area (UNCA) Lease
  - Removed from Dam/Mine Consideration (for now)

- **Social Programs**
  - Guide Training Programs
  - Environmental Education
  - Healthcare/Clinics
  - Volunteer Groups
The Upper Navua Community today...

- Infrastructure support
  - Road and Trail Maintenance to River
  - Employment Guide and Support
    - Safety
    - Responsibility
    - Training
    - Communication

- Specialized Clinics
Future programs...

• Directed fund raisers for specific school projects
• Scholarships / educational support
• Seek further conservation area support...
  • Grants to support UNCA Ramsar Site
  • Partnerships for increased management
Direct benefits to local people, conservation, community health and well-being...

- Lease for conservation
- Ramsar Site
- Promotes conservation of natural and cultural heritage of local and Indigenous communities, using ecotourism as a tool to further the conservation mission.
River of Eden
In closing...

“If our planet is to be saved, this will be achieved not by ideologies or political programs, but by people, individuals, in business and elsewhere -- who make up their minds to love and work in greater harmony with the world in which we live.”

--Sir Laurens Van der Post
Vinaka vaka levu!
Thank you very much!