

Thriving Private-Community Partnerships in Ecotourism: Perspectives from Fiji's Upper Navua Conservation Area

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Abstract : Ecotourism has proven itself to be a forerunner in the advancement of environmental conservation all the while supporting cultural tradition, uniqueness, and pride among indigenous communities. Successful private-community partnerships associated with ecotourism operations are vital to the overall prosperity of both the businesses and the local communities. Such accomplishments can be seen through numerous livelihood goals including income, food security, health, reduced vulnerability, governance, and empowerment. Private-community partnerships also support global initiatives such as the sustainable development goals and sustainable development frameworks including those proposed by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (WTO). Understanding such partnerships assists not only large organizations such as the WTO, but it also benefits smaller ecotourism operators and entrepreneurs who are trying to achieve their sustainable tourism development goals. This study examined the partnership between an ecotourism company (Rivers Fiji) and two rural villages located in Fiji's Upper Navua Conservation Area. Focus groups were conducted in each village. Observation journals were also used to record conversations outside of the focus groups. Data were thematically organized and analyzed to offer researcher interpretations and understandings. This research supported the notion that respectful and emboldening partnerships between communities and private enterprise are vital to the composition of successful ecotourism operations that support sustainable development protocol. Understanding these partnerships can assist in shaping future ecotourism development and re-molding existing businesses. This study has offered an example of a thriving partnership through community input and critical researcher analysis. Research has identified six contributing factors to successful ecotourism partnerships, and this study provides additional support to that framework.

Keywords : community partnerships, conservation areas, ecotourism, Fiji, sustainability

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