

Small Grants Programme

Community-based Conservation of Forest Biodiversity in Fiji

Project No: FJI/OP3/2/07/17
Grantee: Biausevu Tourism Committee
Location: Fiji
SGP Contribution: US\$18,500
Cash Co-Financing: US\$ 7,200
In-Kind Co-Financing: US\$6,500
Project Duration: Oct 2007 – Oct 2011
Focal area: Biodiversity

BACKGROUND

Biausevu, a small village located in the Korolevuwai district, houses approximately 200 hundred residents. Currently the village runs a 2km walking tour from the village to the Savanamateya Waterfall, along a bush track through the native forest. The biodiversity of the area has been under increasing threat due to the escalating number of visitors since the initiation of the Waterfall tours in the mid 1980s. The tour track is a worn path that crosses the creek 9 times. Up until recently, large animals such as horses and cows were also crossing the path and causing loss of vegetation and major erosion around the areas prone to flooding. The banks around the streams have also been degraded from overuse and are under threat of more

erosion due to the loss of tree species along the path. The area around the waterfall has increasingly become barren, worn and cleared of plants due to visitors trampling around the site. Moreover, land clearing for further ecotourism development has been an ongoing problematic, threatening the biodiversity of the area. Without proper environmental consultation the impacts of the touristic tour could cause irreparable damage to the biodiversity and forest areas lying inland from the coast.

Using an Integrated Management initiative these conservation issues could be addressed by engaging the Biausevu Tourism Committee (BTC) to upgrade the track and reception area, through the implementation of appropriate infrastructure and awareness raising on best environmental management practices.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND KEY OBJECTIVES

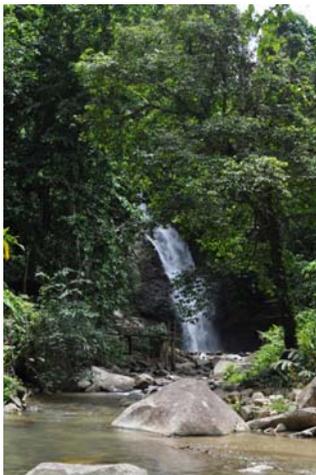


Forest area that was cleared for logging

Recognizing the immense threat to the area’s biodiversity, the Global Environmental Facility’s Small Grants Programme (GEF SGP), implemented by the United Nations Development programme (UNDP) supported a project on community-based conservation of forest biodiversity through ecotourism support in Biausevu.

The project’s primary purpose was to improve the environmental management of the Biausevu Waterfall Tour and develop more environmentally friendly and sustainable ecotourism activities. In particular, the project helped the community identify the effects of logging on waterfall and creek water quality, as well as raise their awareness on the different plant and tree species along the waterfall track and the vegetated area surrounding the village and consequently developing a strategy to manage and minimize future damage. Additionally, the project involved upgrading the quality standards and reception facilities of the tour to deliver a more professional tour, increasing tour sales and revenues, while ensuring the conservation of the biodiversity in the area.

IMPLEMENTATION



The implementation of the project included two main activities: training and awareness raising on forest biodiversity conservation and land degradation, as well as track rehabilitation.

To raise awareness amongst members of the Biausevu village about the damaging effects of poorly managed tourism to the vegetation and eco systems along the waterfall track, several initiatives were undertaken:

- Hosting regular environment awareness training workshops with the University of the South Pacific (USP) staff and the Department of Forestry on good environmental management techniques and forest rehabilitation;
- Developing an Environment Management Plan to ensure these practices are implemented on an ongoing basis to minimize the tourism industry's adverse impacts on the environment and help plan for sustainable future development;

• Conducting workshops and focus groups for members of the community to learn about the importance of protecting forest ecosystems and native trees and plant species.

To manage the problem of erosion, the project started the construction of a more sophisticated drainage system, guided by the Department of Forestry, to divert water away from the track and back into the stream. It also planted native tree and plant species along the creek and pathway edges and around the base of the waterfall; and used large flat boulders as 'stepping stones' to cross the creek so visitors do not have to step into the water. This will minimize pollution and disturbances to the creek, which is the main water source for the village.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT



The project had a significant environmental impact in reducing the pressure of the biodiversity in the area, which was achieved through awareness campaigns and the installation of the appropriate infrastructure. Since a main component of the project was raising awareness about the community's biodiversity issues and the methods for environmental conservation, which embodied a strong flow of knowledge transfer that will ensure project sustainability.

In terms of raising awareness, the project targeted multiple stakeholders; local residents of Biausevu, members of the Biausevu Tourism Committee (BTC), local authorities, and tourists. The project raised awareness about the short and long term effects of logging on the local environment and its impact on the future of the Waterfall Tour. To ensure proper project implementation and sustainability the BTC members were trained by the university on sustainable environmental management practices and participated in knowledge exchanges on sustainable forestry, forest-based ecotourism, and best practice on governance for resource owners. Visitors now learn about the importance of the wildlife and vegetation of the area, and the vital role it plays in the Fijian culture.

The project successfully reduced the amount of erosion along the track and, by formalizing the creek's entry points; it reduced erosion along the creek embankment. The project also entailed improving the drainage system along the swampy portions of the walk, as well as planting native trees and plant species along the track and around the base of the waterfall. A total of 500 native trees were planted in the forest, and 200 planted along the track itself. Tree planting is now a feature of the forest walk.

To better inform the community about the biodiversity of the area they live within, the USP Herbarium department conducted a review of the site and provided a comprehensive report documenting which plants are present along the track.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT

The project contributed to generate more sustainable livelihoods and allowed the community to take ownership of the project which increased the community's ability to manage the ecotourism activities. In the past only village chiefs were involved with managing the ecotourism activities, thus leading to numerous conflicts. To help solve this issue, the BTW adopted a strategic plan to manage conflicts on financial management and community ownership by openly communicating the projects initiatives and goals relating to good forest management, and sustainable practices. In addition, since the forest tour and walk involves the engagement of several landowning clans, there is a set of guidelines, part of the strategic plan, that have helped to minimize conflicts and lead to better governance and quality of life.



Other socio-economic impacts include providing alternative economic opportunities, employment opportunities, facilitating positive interaction between visitors and villages, and increasing interpretation skills. The Forest Walk is generating income from tourists who pay an entrance fee and providing opportunities for women in the community that are now able to sell their local handicrafts and cook meals for a small fee.

The project has generated over 100 jobs including forest tour guides, waterfall attendants, nursery attendants, story-tellers, meals coordinators, tour coordinators and handicraft sellers.

POLICY IMPACT

The project resulted in influencing local authorities to impose a capacity limit to the number of people accessing the track per week, thereby mitigating adverse environmental impact caused by excessive trampling in overcrowded tours.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Good governance is critical to enhance sustainable forestry management
- Financial literacy and sound financial management skills are also a cornerstone to success of community-based ecotourism projects
- Engaging youth in decision making and management activities is also critical in ensuring the sustainability of the project
- Women participation in planning and implementation of income-generating activities enhances overall success of such projects