

Fijian local conservation group receives global award

A local group working to conserve the Natewa Tunuloa Important Bird Area in Fiji has won the prestigious Equator Prize for 2012. "The Sisi Initiative stood out among more than 800 entries as a remarkable demonstration of local development solutions for people, nature, and resilient communities", said Eileen de Ravin, manager of the Equator Initiative. The Equator Prize shines a spotlight on outstanding local and indigenous groups from across the world working towards sustainable development. The winners were announced at a special UNDP ceremony in New York last Friday, and representatives of winning communities will receive their prize - of between \$US 5,000 and \$US 20,000 - at an award ceremony at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), which will be held in Brazil in June 2012. Establishment of the community-based Sisi Initiative was supported by the BirdLife Fiji Programme in 2006 in response to illegal logging, forest fires, overgrazing, agricultural encroachment and invasive alien species around the Natewa Tunuloa Important Bird Area. Important Bird Areas are sites that are of critical importance for the survival of wild birds and nature in Fiji and around the globe. Natewa Tunuloa covers large tracts of old-growth rainforest which support globally threatened birds such as Shy Ground-dove and Silktail. In a short space of time the Sisi Initiative have made a big difference. "The establishment of over 6,000 hectares of community protected forest has been one of the greatest highlights of BirdLife's work with local communities in Fiji", said Don Stewart, BirdLife International's Director for the Pacific. The voluntary group has also worked to develop income-generating activities that are compatible with nature conservation. A model farm and a tree nursery have reduced the pressure on forest clearance. Furthermore, through projects such as handicraft and jewellery making communities have learnt to use raw materials from the environment to create products which generate income. This has added to the value of natural resources, and reinforced people's motivation to conserve it for future generations. "Fiji's Sisi Initiative has ensured that communities around Natewa Tunuloa understand the link between traditional livelihoods and the environment, making them more resilient and capable of withstanding changes to their lifestyle, environment and climate", added Mr Stewart. Site Support Groups like the Sisi Initiative are central to BirdLife's work and one of the most practical ways of supporting local communities to conserve the places where they live. They demonstrate a new approach to the management of natural resources which couple biodiversity conservation and sustainable livelihoods in partnership with local people. Their work is now being used as a model for other community based projects by BirdLife in Fiji, and their approach is being shared with local stakeholder groups at over 2,000 sites worldwide through BirdLife's Local Empowerment Programme. "The Sisi Initiative are providing a brighter future for themselves whilst providing a shining example for others to learn from and follow around the globe", said Mr Stewart. The work of the Sisi Initiative has been kindly supported by the GEF Small Grants Programme (GEF SGP - implemented by UNDP), CEPF, UK Darwin Initiative and Australian Government Regional Natural Heritage Programme. CEPF unites six global leaders who are committed to enabling nongovernmental and private sector organizations to help protect vital

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