Fijians for Fijian Forests ? linking livelihoods and landscapes

Title Mount Nabukelevu is one of two Important Bird Areas (IBAs) on the Fijian island of Kadavu, and its montane forest is of critical importance for five Globally Threatened bird species. However, unsustainable practices are causing degradation of agricultural areas, leading to further pressure to clear more forest. In response, BirdLife have been working with the local communities to develop solutions and build local skills. This has led to the establishment of a Site Support Group, comprising representatives of land-owning *mataqalis* (family units), who want to manage their forest resources sustainably. Following support from CEPF, Conservation International Pacific, the GEF Small Grant Programme (GEF SGP) implemented by UNDP, Keidanren Nature Conservation Fund, Pacific Development Conservation Trust and UK Darwin Initiative, the Site Support Group is now involved in a number of activities which improve livelihoods and landscapes. Activities include establishing new sustainable agricultural practices - such managing a model farm, tree nursery and apiary - and involving school children in their conservation efforts. Local kids now have a pocket guide and comic strip describing Kadavu's unique birds, and have been involved in a series of eco-camps complete with games, bird identification training, quizzes and nature walks. "Working with communities, in some of the world?s biologically most important places, the BirdLife Partnership are demonstrating that it is possible to bring about the changes required for living sustainably on our planet Earth,? said Dr Marco Lambertini, BirdLife International?s CEO.

Karen Azeez from The World Bank?s Sustainable Development team recently met the Site Support Group in the village of Lomati, and tells us a personal tale of what she discovered? *I recently found myself dancing with the elders of Lomati, a small village on a remote island in Fiji, drinking kava and wondering: How on earth could this be work for a World Bank conservation project? I was visiting Fiji as part of a team to supervise progress on the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, a multi-donor initiative for investment in biodiversity conservation.*
Until that moment, I had been under the impression that conservation was something purely scientific, and that my travel companions would be inanimate plants or animals. I also thought that working with the World Bank meant that I would surely be interacting with government officials on mega-projects. It turns out that I was wrong. The CEPF is in fact funded in part by the World Bank, along with the Global Environment Facility and other partners, and doesn?t focus on work with governments at all. It helps local communities and civil society organizations conserve important natural resources that bring economic and social benefits to the poor. ?These are the kinds of win-win solutions that justify moving conservation away from a solely philanthropic focus by showcasing proof of the financial self-interest of protecting biodiversity and natural capital,? said Dr Valerie Hickey, a World Bank biodiversity specialist. For the Bank, this is the direction that conservation is headed.
In Lomati, we met with BirdLife International to see their CEPF-funded ?Fijians for Fijian Forests? project which has helped almost 200 villagers learn to manage tree nurseries, plant pineapples and maintain beehives whilst also working with the community to conserve their precious forest habitat. Not only did villagers gain job skills and generate new income, they helped save five endemic bird species under threat in the area. The idea turned out to be a good one, and it?s now being replicated in other villages across Fiji. Through initiatives like these, the CEPF fills a niche in the conservation sector by piloting innovative projects, giving organizations leverage to scale-up successful ideas. ?If the CEPF didn?t exist, a lot of these projects would never have materialized,? said Jack Tordoff - CEPF Grant Director. ?There simply aren?t many other sources of funding for work at this level.? By contributing to the CEPF, the [World] Bank has encouraged ground-breaking work in biodiversity and contributed to conservation worldwide. The strength of the CEPF lies in its ability to show the world why conservation matters, and teach us how to accomplish it in ways that help everyone. If you ask me, we should all start paying attention, because the projects of the CEPF are a glimpse into the future of sustainable development... **BirdLife?s projects at Mount Nabukelevu IBA have been kindly supported by CEPF, Keidanren Nature Conservation Fund, Pacific Development Conservation Trust, the GEF Small Grant Programme (GEF SGP) implemented by UNDP and UK Darwin Initiative. CEPF unites six global leaders who are committed to enabling nongovernmental and private sector organizations to help protect vital ecosystems: L?Agence Française de Développement; Conservation International; The Global Environmental Facility; The Government of Japan, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation; The World Bank.** **Click here to subscribe to The BirdLife Pacific Quarterly E-Newsletter.**