



The customary owner of Wabu Creek, Litiana, with her two sons and the tui (high chief) for the area.

long sustained period. For this reason nature tourism alone would not be able to match the landowner's expectations of immediate large cash returns from logging.

LITIANA'S STORY has a happy ending. During 1991 the Fiji Ministry of Forests found the finance necessary to compensate her and is currently in the process of formally protecting the Wabu Creek forest. Proposals to develop sensitive nature tourism in this area are now underway in what is to become the next phase in securing the long term protection of this magnificent forest.

Other nature tourism projects have been operating in Fiji over the last few years where forest conservation and community development has combined to provide Fiji with development alternatives for some of its remaining intact rainforests. The most notable example is the Bouma project on Taveuni Island. Here landowners have been selling a rainforest experience to tourists instead of cutting their forest down as a means of ongoing income. This project is a success partly due to assistance provided through New Zealand government aid.

MANY FIJIANS desperately want to be included in the development process where perceived improvements to their welfare can be made. Tribal owners of tropical forests in Fiji invariably see their forests as a foundation on which to build their economic future. Denying them this opportunity altogether could be perceived as sentencing them to socio-economic stagnation and confiscating their inheritance.

Development of one form or another is going to continue in the forest lands of Fiji, irrespective of the wishes of conservationists in New Zealand. Many of us have long forgotten that our lifestyle is riddled with the kind of gadgetry that the average Pacific Island villager could never hope to have. What are regarded as basic essentials to many of us lie in the dreams of many Fijians. And it is these "basic essentials" that we take for granted – fridges, ovens, electricity and hot water – which stimulate the desires of people in places like Fiji who may look to their forests as a means to these ends.

Conservation efforts in Fiji, and in many other countries (including New Zealand) must address the fundamental social and economic issues that drive the development process which is so often



▲ Nature tourism has yet to become a major component of the tourism industry in Fiji although the potential for developing the wilderness experience is enormous. Fiji is endowed with perhaps the most tourist-friendly tropical rainforests in the world, having no malaria, leeches or dangerous animals, together with a pleasant climate and easy access. Places like Wabu Creek would provide an ideal location for activities such as nature walks and guided tours.

responsible for environmental degradation. It is not the business of outsiders to question the legitimate aspirations of indigenous peoples to a higher standard of living with improved health care and educational opportunities. If they wish to translate their natural resources into a livelihood it may be more appropriate for conservationists to help them achieve this in ways that do not destroy the conservation values of their resources. Nature tourism as an alternative to logging is only one option and is only appropriate in certain parts of Fiji. Some areas are unlikely to be as logistically attractive for tourism development as Wabu Creek, and different mechanisms will be needed to protect them.

In any case, the pathway to indigenous forest conservation in Fiji is not going to be easy as the circumstances at Wabu testify. But hopefully the case of Litiana and Wabu Creek will demonstrate that conservation programmes in Fiji cannot ignore the process of economic development. They can redirect it but this will require more than merely an understanding of ecology. ♦

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