Practitioner Note – Community priorities for the future of tourism in the Mamanuca Islands

Reflections on major tourism perspectives in the Mamanuca Islands

June 2023

Context

This practitioner note presents results of the first stage of the ARC-Linkage project 'Developing a transformative tourism model for the South Pacific', focused on identifying long-term tourism goals of stakeholders. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted many shortcomings and vulnerabilities of the pre-COVID-19 tourism system, including its single-minded focus on serving the visitor and determining success in narrow economic terms. As part of the recovery and rethinking the tourism system, the call for tourism to deliver outcomes for host-communities has gained renewed traction, and together with it, the recognition that success should be defined more holistically.

The Mamanuca Islands are located to the northwest of Fiji's main island Viti Levu. In 2019, 11% of Fiji's visitor days were spent in the Mamanucas[1], and tourism was responsible for approximately 13 percent of the local population in the Mamanucas and adjoining coastal areas[2]. Even after the impacts of COVID-19, it remains one of the major tourism regions outside the main island. Despite its attractiveness boosting a pristine marine and terrestrial environment, the islands are facing freshwater supply issues, threats from overdevelopment and climate change. The Mamanuca Environment Society (MES) works with tourism businesses, local communities, NGOs, government and non-governmental organisations to protect the islands' natural resources and enhance communities' livelihoods.

Approach

This Practitioner Note was informed by a study applying Q methodology. This methodology is applied to help gain a deeper understanding of how people think about complex issues. Q methodology groups people with similar views to identify dominant discourses (common views or perspectives of how people talk or think about a particular issue, in this case tourism). In the Mamanucas, 43 representatives from tourism, related sectors and the community on Malolo Island participated in the study and expressed their priorities for the future of tourism. They did this by sorting 34 statements describing outcomes that tourism may or should deliver in order of importance. As indicated by Figure 1, the two statements considered most important were placed by respondents on the far right (+4) of the mat, the two statements considered the least important were placed on the far left (-4) of the mat. All other statements were placed somewhere in between depending on their relative importance.

Statements shown to participants were developed based on the South Pacific Sustainable Tourism Policy Framework[3], amongst others. They can be grouped into the following:

Economic
- **Economic & livelihoods:** Tourism delivering economic and livelihood outcomes.
- **Infrastructure:** Tourism providing infrastructure outcomes.

Community
- **Community:** Tourism contributing to community outcomes.
- **Health & Safety:** Tourism strengthening health and safety aspects.
- **Social:** Tourism enhancing social outcomes.

Culture
- **Culture:** Tourism supporting cultural outcomes.

Environment
- **Environment:** Tourism contributing to improving environmental outcomes.
- **Climate Change:** Tourism contributing to addressing climate change risk.

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[1] Government of Fiji, Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Tourism (2020). Fiji International Visitor Survey, 2019 Report for January – December 2019. Suva.

[2] World Bank Group (2021). Banking on Protected Areas. Washington.

[3] SPTO (2021). Pacific 2030. Sustainable Tourism Policy Framework. Accessible https://southpacificislands.travel/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Pacific-Sustainable-Tourism-Policy-Framework.pdf

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-4	-3	-2	-1	+/-	+1	+2	+3	+4

Figure 1. Mat and scale for statement ranking.

Results identified three distinct discourses or perspectives of tourism we call 'perspectives' from here on, that reflect what individuals in the Mamanucas would like out of tourism in the future. These perspectives are introduced in more detail below (see also Table 1 in the Appendix), are:

1. **Economic and financial outcomes**
2. **Environmental protection and community respect**
3. **Livelihood, skills and cultural industries**

The qualitative observations are based on the observations of the Research Associate and open-ended responses provided by participants. The Qualitative explanations are based on the open-ended responses provided by participants.

Qualitative observation
Tourism in the Mamanuca Islands is well developed, and local people are in their second generation of resort employees. This brought with it a change in lifestyle and how people live in villages, somewhat resembling the lifestyle of urban settlements (e.g., working on Sundays, being focused on immediate family, being well connected physically and via internet). While people have sufficient experience with tourism and many are well aware of negative environmental or social impacts, not all prioritise these, perhaps because they did not believe that much can change based on their current experience, or because other outcomes were more important.

PERSPECTIVE 1: ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL OUTCOMES

Participants represented by Perspective 1 prioritised economic and financial outcomes, including:
- financial benefits for individuals (+4),
- secure and decent employment (+4),
- contribution to the Fijian economy (+3), and
- to financially support their extended family (+3).

In addition, outcomes promoting recovery and access were more important to this group then others:
- supporting communities to recover from economic and environmental shocks (+2)
- improved transport infrastructure (air, roads, wharves, and jetties) and access to communities (+2)

None of the community outcomes was very important to this group, and the only social outcomes that was very important was empowering marginalised people (+3).

Tourism delivering environmental outcomes were less important to this group than to others, including:
- supporting the community to adapt to climate change (e.g., tree planting, coastal protection, coral restoration, education) (-2),
- conserving and enhancing local environments/ecosystems (-3)
- not contributing to climate change (-3),
- not stealing natural resources from future generations (-4), and
- protecting community access and use of local resource (e.g., potable water, beach access) (-4).

People associated with Perspective 1 were:
- More likely to be male.
- From both Solevu and Yaro villages.
- A mix of age groups, but out of all younger people (18 – 29 years), most held this view.

PERSPECTIVE 2: ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND COMMUNITY RESPECT

Participants associated with Perspective 2 prioritised tourism outcomes that protect the environment and address climate change. The following outcomes were more important to this group then others:

- supporting the community to adapt to climate change (+4),
- helping fund environmental conservation and protection (+3),
- conserving and enhancing local environments/ecosystems (+3),
- minimising energy use, water uses, waste generation and pollution (+2).

Also more important to this group were economic and social outcome that address linked community and environmental issues. These are:
- using local goods and services, e.g., locally grown fruit and vegetables and minimises imports (+4),
- protecting community access and use of local resource (e.g., potable water, beach access) (+2), and
- not stealing natural resources from future generations.

In addition, community outcomes were also significantly more important, such as:
- Being respectful of local decision-making (+3), and
- involving local communities in the planning, development and management (+2), and
- not increasing the cost of living (+2).

Economic outcomes such as financial benefits, decent employment and tourism's contribution to a growing national economy were neither important nor unimportant, but less important to this group than others.

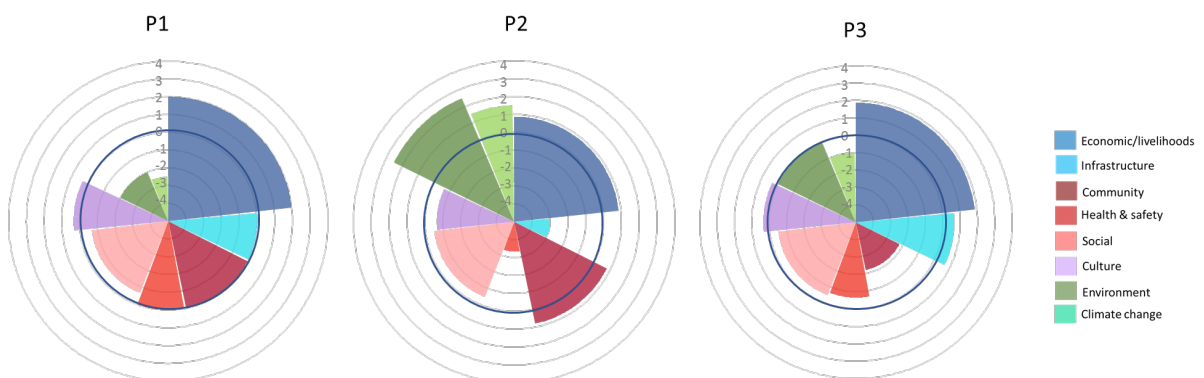Least important to this group were infrastructure and health and safety outcomes, including:

Figure 2. Importance of statement categories for each perspective, whereby the width of each piece reflects the number of statements in each category, and the outward length the relative importance of statements within each category.

- Improving transport infrastructure (air, roads, wharves and jetties) and access to communities (-2),
- supporting the provision of community utilities (water, waste, energy) (-3),
- improving sanitation and hygiene (-3),
- enhancing digital infrastructure for local peoples (e.g., mobile network coverage, internet speed) (-4), and
- improving the physical health of local people (-4).

> **Context:**
> Mololo island locals, in particular members of Solevu Village, have experienced the negative consequences of illegal tourism development at Wacia and Qalilwa, causing environmental damage, which in turn affects marine resources such as fish and crabs the local community relies on.
>
> **Qualitative explanations:**
> Participants representing Perspective 2 acknowledged the environmental and coastal challenges tourism and the communities are facing in the Mamanucas and believe addressing these to be a priority. They acknowledged the important environmental clean-ups and ecosystem restoration (reforesting, coral planting) resorts and visitors conduct. Health (physical and mental health) were seen as individual responsibility and not that of tourism. Infrastructure such as roads were regarded as less relevant and thus less important, and those that are important (internet), were found to be great already.

People associated with Perspective 2 were:
- More likely to be males.
- More likely to be from Solevu village.

PERSPECTIVE 3: LIVELIHOODS, SKILLS AND CULTURAL INDUSTRIES

Participants associated with this perspective again prioritised economic outcomes, including:
- contributing to a growing national economy (+4),
- enabling people to financially support their extended family (+4).

- building peoples' career, skills, and education (+3), and
- promoting the value of cultural and creative industries (+2).

Also more important to this group than others were infrastructure outcomes:
- Tourism supports the provision of community utilities (water, waste, energy) (+2), and
- Tourism enhances digital infrastructure for local peoples (e.g., mobile network coverage, internet speed) (0).

Less important to this group than to other groups were:
- using local goods and services, e.g., locally grown fruit and vegetables and minimises imports (-2), and
- protecting, promoting, and reviving local culture and heritage (e.g., arts, language, custom, architecture) (-3).

Less important to this group were community outcomes, including:
- Using local goods and services, e.g., locally grown fruit and vegetables and minimises imports (-2),
- Involving local communities in the planning, development and management (-2),
- Respecting local decision-making (-3)
- not increasing the cost of living (-4), and
- does not steal natural resources from future generations (-4).

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People associated with Perspective 3 were:
- More females.
- More likely to be from Yaro village and people residing elsewhere.
- More likely to be over 30 years of age.

Consensus and disagreement

There was agreement on subsistence livelihoods, entrepreneurship and building people's career, skills and education being important. There was also agreement between groups on social outcomes being less important, including allowing people to attend important family obligations and supporting traditional roles of men and women. (Table 1). There was strong disagreement between groups on the importance of environmental and climate change outcomes. There was also strong disagreement on the importance of using local goods and services and supporting the provision of community utilities.

Implications

Livelihood and economic outcomes were somewhat to very important to all groups and cannot be overlooked. Local people value tourism for the ability to generate a cash income, even for those with lover levels of education. Benefiting financially from tourism has not only improved people's quality of lives, it enables them to send their kids to school and universities. However, economic outcomes were also not the only outcomes local people would like tourism to deliver in the future.

Climate change and environmental outcomes were particularly important to one group. This group was more strongly represented by members of Solevu village, which may be explained by the fact that villagers are already observing environmental degradation, partly due to a failed resort development, as well as reported experience with climate change impacts such as inundation. The importance of environmental assets for tourism and the communities, and opportunities to localise supply chains and further economic opportunities for villagers if environmental resources are protected, were also mentioned.

Others regarded environmental outcomes as less important because they believed environmental protection was already a priority for communities, resorts and visitors. Others saw tourism having an impact and understood tourism's contribution to climate change, but didn't see anything changing in the future.

Because there were no outcomes that were least important to all groups, holistic planning to ensure certain outcomes are not achieved at the cost of others and understanding and managing trade-offs will be critical.

Next steps

We acknowledge the importance the people in the Mamanucas place on economic, livelihoods and environmental outcomes. Results of this study will be compared to Q studies in several other case study destinations, to identify whether the degree of tourism development has an impact on people's priorities (as they seem to be influenced by their experience with tourism). In addition, we are looking forward to working with Mamanuca Environment Society to identify how multiple benefits can achieved through tourism.

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Appendix

Table 1. Significant statements of each of the discourses on what outcomes local people perceive as important/less important (the numbers ranging from +4 to -4 represent the scale presented in Figure 1).

TYPE of Perspective	Important outcomes	Neither important nor unimportant	Least important outcomes	Agreement	Disagreement
P1 - Economic and financial outcomes	- Financial benefits to local people (+4) - Secure and decent employment (+4) - Growing national economy (+3) - Empowers marginalised people (+3) - Supports communities to recover from economic and environmental shocks (+2)	Supports the provision of community utilities (0) Involves local communities in the planning, development and management (0)	- Protects community access and use of local resource (-4) - Does not steal natural resources from future generations (-4) - Conserves and enhances local environments/ecosystems (-3) - Tourism does not contribute to climate change (-3)	- Supports traditional roles of men and women (-1, -2,-1) - Allows people to attend to important family obligations (-3,-1,-2) - Regenerates subsistence livelihoods (+1,+1,0) - Enhances community solidarity and stability (0, -1,-1)	- Protects community access and use of local resource (-4,+2,-1) - Supports the provision of community utilities (0,-3,+2) - Tourism uses local goods and services (+1,+4,-2) - Conserves and enhances local environments/ecosystems (-3,+3,+1) - Supports the community to adapt to climate change (-2,+4,0)
P2 - Environmental protection and community respect	- Use of local goods and services (+4) - Supports the community to adapt to climate change (+4) - Funds environmental conservation and protection (+3) - Is respectful of local decision-making (+3) - Conserves and enhances local environments/ecosystems (+3)	- Does not steal natural resources from future generations (0) - Secure and decent employment (0) - Growing national economy (0)	- Improves physical health of local people (-4) - Enhances digital infrastructure for local peoples (-4) - Improves sanitation and hygiene (-3) - Supports the provision of community utilities (-3)		
P3 - Livelihood, skills and cultural industries	- Growing national economy (+4) - Enables people to financially support their extended family (+4) - Financial benefits to local people (+3) - Builds peoples' career, skills, and education (+3)	Enhances digital infrastructure for local peoples (0) Supports the community to adapt to climate change (0) Enhances digital infrastructure for local peoples (0)	- Does not steal natural resources from future generations (-4) - Does not increase the cost of living (-4) - Protects, promotes, and revives local culture and heritage (-3) Is respectful of local decision-making (-3)		