



# Creating a Conservation Corridor: Fiji

Ecosystem services play a crucial role in the sustainable development of Fiji's economy and ensure the well-being of its people.

## Viti Levu

CI has worked in Fiji for over ten years and focused our efforts on the country's largest island, Viti Levu, home to 70 percent of Fiji's population - over 590,000 people. The forests of Viti Levu are under pressure from logging and conversion to agriculture, threatening the economy, people's livelihoods, and local identity.

CI is working to conserve the island's watersheds by supporting the creation and management of interlinked terrestrial and marine protected areas. Together with our partners, we have conducted ecological and socio-economic research to improve priority-setting and inform conservation management and policy decisions. This research established Fiji's Key Biodiversity Areas, three of which are our focal project areas - the Sovi Basin, Nakauvadra Range and Nakorotubu Range.

## Sovi Basin

The Sovi Basin protected area is central to CI's work in Fiji. The Sovi Basin is Fiji's largest remaining undisturbed lowland forest. It provides essential ecosystem services to surrounding communities and downstream provides freshwater to 70,000 people in the capital city of Suva.

The Sovi Basin is recognized as one of the highest priority areas for conservation in the Polynesia-Micronesia area because of high levels of diversity, endemism and globally threatened species, such as the Fiji long legged warbler, the pink bill parrot finch, and red throated lorikeet.

A total of 87 percent of the land in Fiji is communally owned by indigenous land owners. Therefore, conservation and development initiatives are generally subject to the consent of indigenous resource owners.

In the past ten years, together with our partners, CI have carried out biological research, built capacity and support among communities and helped to establish the 16,340 hectare Sovi Basin Protected Area through a 99-year lease with iTaukei Lands Trust Board and Sovi Basin landowners. This is the largest contiguous lease ever granted in Fiji and represents an important step towards developing an innovative tool that conserves habitat while providing economic and social benefits for amplification in Fiji.

This innovative conservation model was developed in full consultation with the various stakeholders. Economic incentives motivate and enable indigenous landowners to protect land in conservation areas, while legal rights ensure that they may still use protected areas for traditional food gathering and fishing purposes.

The Sovi Basin Trust Fund is a sustainable financing mechanism that will meet all obligations and activities under the lease, such as ensuring land rents, compensating for foregone timber royalties, providing community development opportunities, and implementing a co-management plan for the protected area.

## Development goals

We aim to establish community based projects which provide local communities with jobs, income and sustainable livelihoods, while advocating for the conservation of Fiji's critically endangered terrestrial and marine biological diversity through sustainable financing mechanisms.

## Policy

Through various local, regional, and global partnerships, CI amplifies its impact by engaging markets, influencing policy, and building capacity. CI's work has contributed to the establishment of national policy and legal frameworks. We are committed to support the implementation of the 2007 National Forest Policy as well as assist in the development of institutional frameworks for the establishment and management of protected areas. CI will continue work to strengthen Fiji's locally managed marine area network to supplement its strong terrestrial experience through ridge to reef planning; focusing on ecosystem based management that supports national development objectives.

### OUR VISION

We imagine a healthy, prosperous world in which societies are forever committed to caring for and valuing nature, our global biodiversity, for the long-term benefit of people and all life on Earth.

### OUR MISSION

Building upon a strong foundation of science, partnership and field demonstration, CI empowers societies to responsibly and sustainably care for nature, our global biodiversity, for the well-being of humanity.

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**CONSERVATION  
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## Creating a conservation corridor

Conservation corridors are strategically located regions, including protected areas, that link key habitats for plants and animals. Encompassing a range of land uses, including agriculture, human settlements, and economic activities, conservation corridors connect fragmented habitats to sustain natural processes, conserve species and encourage collaborative land-use planning.

Our work in the Sovi Basin, Yaqara Valley, Nakauvadra and Nakorotubu Range represent the initial steps towards the establishment of the **Viti Levu Conservation Corridor**—a network of linked terrestrial protected areas and locally managed marine areas, from ridge to reef, that will help secure both conservation and human well-being in Fiji for future generations.

## Amplification: Yaqara Valley

CI's work in the Sovi Basin has been well recognized for its innovation and effectiveness. CI has started replicating this model in the Yaqara Valley, to link the existing protected area from the Greater Tomaniivi/Wabu Nature Reserve to Nakauvadra and Nakorotubu Range, creating a large ridge to reef conservation corridor.

CI aims to reforest over 1,135 hectares of degraded grasslands and sequester 280,000 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> through these plantations over a period of 30 years. This will provide habitat for endemic and threatened tree species, such as the near threatened *Fagraea gracilipes* and the endemic *Podocarpus affinis*, while supporting green development in Fiji and sustainable livelihood opportunities for local communities. CI has constructed sixteen model farms to demonstrate correct smallholder farming techniques with various crops, such as ginger, cassava, sweet potato and yams. The model farms are designed to provide capacity building and technical training which is later shared and communicated to other communities.



PHOTO: Native sweet potato varieties planted at Vaidoko village model farm. © CI/Peg Arrington

## Improving marine managed areas

Fiji was selected as a focus area for marine projects because of its rich diversity of marine species, strong cultural and economic ties to the ocean, and unique traditions of managing ocean resources at village level.

We have implemented field demonstration projects in locally marine managed (LMMA) sites for the past six years to help communities better understand the effectiveness of current management plans. By sharing the results of these demonstrations with multiple stakeholders, CI has improved management plans, extended existing 'taboo' boundaries, shifted temporary closures to permanent closures, improved species conservation and habitat protection, and established new community-level 'taboo sites'. We currently have a Memorandum of Agreement with the Fiji Locally Marine Managed Area (FLMMA) network to provide research and technical support to local communities. Through this partnership, CI is helping to design a FLMMA Trust Fund to serve as a long-term sustainable financing mechanism.

The FLMMA network is comprised of members representing numerous villages throughout Fiji, government agencies, research institutes and international not-for-profit organization. They come together to share information and ideas about conserving ocean life and engaging local people in decisions about resource management. CI joined this network in 2006, and continues to contribute research expertise, technical support, and training.



PHOTO: A day's catch at Dakuibeqa, Beqa Island, Fiji. © CI/ Loraini Sivo