

# The Practice and Challenges of Community-based Ecotourism in Fijian Villages

Misato Takeda

Key Words: Fijian village, eco-tourism, local resources, development assistance

## 1. Research background and objectives

Regarding the efforts for sustainable development, among which there are various discussions about eco-tourism, for example, effects on environmental conservation and local economy, and disregard for local people's lives, the government of the Republic of Fiji plays a central role to change the conventional resorts for tourists to eco-tourism. Fiji eco-tourism includes activities to enjoy a rich nature and to experience the traditional culture. The influence of modernization caused economical hardships in rural areas. Thanks to the support from international institutions, eco-tourism projects are being implemented as an economical solution. However harmful effects from this development appeared: the traditional culture has been ignored and technical and financial support from overseas did not reach the small businesses. In this paper, the objective is to clarify the current situation and its related challenges in Fijian villages which promote eco-tourism not based on development project by outside organizations.

## 2. Research methods

Research methods include a literature review about the settings on the evaluation axis of eco-tourism and a field survey composed of interviews in the rural communities. The literature review is composed of international common knowledge of ecotourism, and local initiative and relationship with outside organizations; first local people take advantage of the local resources sustainably, second local people use voluntarism to work freely for the benefit of village lives, and thirdly local people cooperate with external stakeholders and obtain necessary and sufficient support from them. The field survey held at Nataleira village, Korova community and Navala village was a bunch of interviews with the villagers regarding eco-tourism. The main questions of the interviews were about the content of eco-tourism, the situation of the current relation between villagers and external organizations, and the recent changes. The result was considered by evaluation axis, and the challenges in the three villages were emerged.

## 3. Research Findings and Conclusion

The common challenges of eco-tourism in the three villages were in sustainability, local initiative, and support from outside organizations.

(1)Sustainability: It appeared that expanding the scale in Nataleira village, problems about succession of the techniques and procurement of the materials in Korova community, and unrecognition of tourism resources in Navala village. The causes of them are the policy of ecotourism does not refer to sustainability, and local people lack the knowledge because of insufficient communication with outside organizations

(2)Local initiative: It appeared that the difference between the business plan and villagers' will and existence of a person in disadvantageous position in Nataleira village, lack of initiative in Korova community, and unequal distribution of the profit in Navala village. The causes of them are the position of the villages is unequal to outside organizations, and local empowerment is not enough.

(3)Support from outside organizations: It appeared that no consideration for a weak person in Nataleira village, no support for industrialization in Korova community, and no support for succession of local resources in Navala village. The causes of them are the cooperation between the outside organizations beyond the field is weak, and local people lack communication with outside organizations. Moreover, from the point of difference between Nataleira village and other two villages, it appeared that local people can use local resources in various ways with support from many fields while the expansion of the scale is concerned, so it is necessary to increase awareness that eco-tourism should be promoted on a small scale.

Given these challenges, it would be suggested that local people and outside organizations communicate mutually in an equal position, and utilize local resources variously based on tradition on a small scale under local empowerment for their initiative and the cooperation between outside organizations in multiple fields.