

	<p>PEBACC+ Pacific Ecosystem-based Adaptation to Climate Change Plus</p> 	<p>Project co-funded by</p> 
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Regional EbA Learning & Knowledge Exchange Field Visit Report

25 Feb & 1 Mar 2025
Rakiraki, Lautoka & Nadi, Fiji



Prepared by
PEBACC+ Project Management Unit

THIS INITIATIVE IS FUNDED BY:

				
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Introduction

As part of the Regional Ecosystem-based Adaptation (EbA) Learning and Knowledge Exchange, participants embarked on a field trip across key sites in Rakiraki, Lautoka, and Nadi, Fiji, on 25 February and 1 March 2025. The purpose of this field visit was to deepen understanding of practical, community-led restoration and conservation efforts in the face of climate change. The visits provided valuable insights into how nature-based solutions are implemented, refined, and scaled in local contexts, particularly in the wake of natural disasters like Tropical Cyclone Winston.

One of the primary sites visited was Barotu Village in the province of Ra, home to Conservation International's largest mangrove restoration project and one of five climate-resilient nurseries established in the area. Participants observed firsthand the community-driven processes of mangrove rehabilitation, the challenges encountered, and the strategies adapted to enhance ecological and social resilience. The field trip also included visits to Totoka Island Limited, Fiji Pine Limited Lololo Station, and Vee's Organic Farm – each offering unique examples of sustainable land management, entrepreneurship, and inclusive development.

These site visits not only showcased the outcomes of ongoing restoration work but also highlighted the role of innovation, traditional knowledge, and governance in building resilient ecosystems and livelihoods. The exchange allowed participants to draw inspiration and practical lessons that could be replicated or adapted in their communities.

Background of the sites visited

1. Barotu Village – Mangrove Restoration and Nursery Development

Barotu Village is a key site for Conservation International's mangrove restoration

efforts. Following the devastation caused by Tropical Cyclone Winston in 2016, the surrounding mangrove ecosystem was left severely damaged, impacting local fishing communities who rely on it for their livelihoods. No restoration work had been undertaken until 2019, when initial surveys and assessments identified Barotu as one of the most critically affected areas.



*Mangrove site in Barotu Village, Ra Province
(Photo: PEBACC+ © Kiwa Initiative – Feb. 2025)*



After extensive community consultations, a large-scale replanting initiative began. This effort led to the establishment of the Barotu Nursery, a key infrastructure investment that enabled the community to propagate mangrove seedlings locally. The process involved significant trial and error, including lessons learned about the survival rates of different mangrove species. For example, the *Bruguiera* species struggled in saltwater, prompting the creation of specialised on-

site nursery that allowed better conditions for its growth.

Today, the project is 90% community-managed, with men handling site clearance and women and youth overseeing the nursery and planting operations. This model integrates traditional knowledge and modern conservation practices, boosting both ecological and economic outcomes for the village.

2. Totoka Island Limited – Sustainable Forestry and Eco-Enterprise

Totoka Island Limited, located in Nadi, is a privately owned forest park that also operates in mineral water bottling. Founded by Mr. Toralf Dittmann, a German software engineer turned entrepreneur, the site exemplifies the integration of sustainable land management with commercial enterprise. Under the guidance of the Department of Forestry, the owner has transformed the landscape within six years, successfully cultivating tree species and rehabilitating forested land.

Participants were offered insights into the challenges and innovations involved in this transformation, ranging from soil restoration to business development, making Totoka Island a model of how private initiatives can contribute to national reforestation and sustainable economic development.



3. Fiji Pine Limited – Lololo Station

Fiji Pine Limited's Lololo Station serves a hub for research, development, and commercial cultivation of pine species in Fiji. During the visit, participants were able to observe the life cycle of pine trees and explore the different species cultivated in the region. This site highlights how commercialisation within the forestry sector can support national goals in timber quality enhancement and species diversification, while remaining adaptive to tropical conditions.

By focusing on both economic output and environmental management, Fiji Pine provides a valuable example of how public-private collaboration can support sustainable forestry practices and innovation in resource use.

4. Vee's Organic Farm – Inclusive and Resilient Farming

Nestled below the Sabeto mountain range, Vee's Organic Farm is community-driven, disability-inclusive initiative run by Ms. Vitila Vuniwaqa. Despite living with a disability, Vee has created a thriving organic farm with support from the Ministry of Forestry. Her farm includes fruit tree cultivation, the manufacture of organic hair and skin products, forest walking trails, and an upcoming zip line venture.



Participants with Totoka Island Founder and Director, Mr. Toralf Dittmann.
(Photo: PEBAACC+ © Kiwa Initiative – Feb. 2025)

This site represents resilience, empowerment, and the potential of agroforestry as a tool for inclusive economic development. Vee's story inspired participants with determination, ingenuity, and ability to turn vision into reality through hard work and strategic partnerships.



Participants at Fiji Pine Limited and Vee's Organic Farm. (Photo: PEBACC+ © Kiwa Initiative – Feb. 2025)



Community Engagement

A central theme across all sites visited was the key role of community engagement in the success and sustainability of restoration and conservation efforts. From the outset, the mangrove restoration project in Barotu Village exemplified how involving local stakeholders in decision-making and implementation builds ownership and long-term commitment. The initiative was shaped through in-depth consultations with the community, particularly those whose livelihoods depended on mangrove ecosystems, such as fishermen, ensuring

that the restoration efforts responded directly to local needs and aspirations.

As the project evolved, the Barotu community became the driving force behind its success. Men took the lead in site clearing and physical restoration, while women and youth managed nursery operations and planting. This inclusive approach not only empowered different groups within the community but also ensured the transmission of traditional ecological knowledge, which proved critical in improving seedling survival rates and adapting techniques to local conditions.

The governance structure established where the chiefs of the four villages serve as board members of the nursery company strengthened community oversight and



Participants at the Barotu Village Nursery (Photo: PEBACC+ © Kiwa Initiative – Feb. 2025)





Boat trip to project site & community engagement (Photo: PEBACC+ © Kiwa Initiative – Feb. 2025)

accountability. The creation of a Deed of Trust further reinforced transparency and ethical management of funds and resources, ensuring equitable distribution and community benefit.

The field visits to Totoka Island Limited, Fiji Pine Limited, and Vee’s Organic Farm also underscored the importance of engaging communities and individuals in land restoration and sustainable enterprise. At

Totoka, collaboration with government departments enabled the sharing of technical expertise and aligned private initiatives with national forestry goals. At Vee’s Organic Farm, participants witnessed the powerful impact of personal determination supported by community and government networks—showing how inclusive engagement can empower individuals to overcome barriers and lead successful, environmentally sustainable businesses.



(Above) Mineral Bottled Water and afforested areas at Totoka Island. (Below) Fiji Pine Limited. (Photo: PEBACC+ © Kiwa Initiative – Mar. 2025)



Across all sites, the field visit fostered knowledge exchange between communities and participants, allowing for the sharing of experiences, challenges, and innovations. This participatory learning environment reinforced the value of community-led models, highlighted diverse pathways to resilience, and inspired participants to explore similar initiatives in their home regions.

Key Takeaways and Learnings for the participants across the sites visited

1. Community-Led Restoration drives Long-Term Impact

- Engaging the local community in conservation efforts leads to long-term sustainability.
- Traditional knowledge played a crucial role in improving mangrove seedling survival rates.

2. Traditional Knowledge Enhances Ecological Outcomes

- Incorporating indigenous practices in nurturing and planting significantly improved mangrove seedling survival rates.

3. Adaptability in Conservation Efforts

- Trial and error were necessary in establishing nurseries and identifying suitable mangrove species.
- Learning from past failures (e.g., *Bruguiera* species not surviving in saltwater) helped refine strategies.

4. Economic and Social Benefits of Conservation

- Mangrove restoration helped revive biodiversity, benefiting local fisheries.
- Community-managed nurseries provided livelihood opportunities, empowering men, women, and youth.

5. Strong Governance and Transparency Ensure Success

- Establishing a Deed of Trust prevented corruption and ensured fair fund distribution.

- Chiefs serving as board members strengthened accountability and project management.

6. Gender and Youth Inclusion Empowers Communities

- Men, women, and youth all played distinct, essential roles ranging from site preparation to nursery care, demonstrating inclusive community participation.

7. Cross-Sector Collaboration Enhances Impact

- Partnerships with government agencies and experts helped in resource provision and technical guidance.
- Visits to other forestry and conservation projects provided knowledge-sharing opportunities.

8. Resilience and Sustainability are Crucial

- There is a need for post-disaster rehabilitation guidelines for mangrove restoration in Fiji.
- Sustainable livelihood projects linked to conservation can enhance community resilience.

9. Inspiration from Diverse Success Stories

- Learning from businesses and individuals (e.g., Totoka Island Limited, Fiji Pine, and Vee's Organic Farm) showcased different models of sustainable land use and entrepreneurship.
- Vee's Organic Farm highlighted that disabilities do not limit success, emphasizing determination and support systems.

10. Continuous Restoration and Expansion is Needed

- Identifying additional mangrove restoration sites will further strengthen climate resilience.
- National baseline mapping and benefit-sharing mechanisms can improve future projects.



Participants at Vee's Organic Farm (Photo: PEBAACC+ © Kiwa Initiative – Mar. 2025)

These lessons underscore the importance of community engagement, adaptability, governance, and knowledge-sharing in successful environmental restoration projects.

Acknowledgement

We would like to acknowledge and mention a special thank you to Conservation International team in Ra, the chief of Barotu village and its community for their warm welcome and for sharing their success with the participants. The warm hospitality and

the opportunity to walk through the restoration sites and the learnings exchanged in the mangrove plains. Also, to the Ministry of Forestry Fiji Western Division for their support in the workshop and to the owners of the other sites; Totoka Islands & Aquoram Insula, Fiji Pine Limited Lololo Station and Vitila Vuniwaqa of Vee's Organic Farm for allowing the project and participants to visit their sites despite the weather and their busy schedules. Our participants enjoyed it and talked about it for days after and hope to take back the ideas shared in their homelands.