

Can Ecotourism be a Potential Development Tool to Improve Local
Livelihoods of Indigenous Communities in Solomon Islands?

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ABSTRACT

Developing tourism provides opportunities for indigenous people to utilise their natural resources, but various challenges can hinder tourism development. This study seeks to discover whether ecotourism can be a tourism tool to improve the livelihoods of indigenous communities in the Solomon Islands.

An analysis of three ecotourism case studies aligned to different ecotourism categories of the Solomon Islands was undertaken, based on their proximity to marine resources and eco-friendly accommodation: the model of a cultural village with sustainable cultural practices, a nature park located inland and promoting conservation of the forest, flora and fauna and an ecolodge accommodation with dolphin attraction.

The objective of this study was to identify the ecotourism benefits, barriers, and challenges faced by indigenous people utilising their natural resources in tourism businesses, and whether these improved their livelihoods. There is potential for indigenous participation in ecotourism, but there are many challenges, and a need to improve, upgrade their products and national strategies to respond to these, otherwise these ecotourism businesses will not succeed.

Literature and data collected for this study were mainly from secondary sources; data were largely obtained from the literature and web scans.

Future and more substantial research is needed targeting the key and critical issues faced by indigenous people. Including a wider assessment of other provinces, remote islands and businesses will provide a better in-depth understanding of challenges faced by indigenous people and an understanding of ecotourism products available that can be utilised in the Solomon Islands.

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ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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GOD BLESS

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Toku henua, toku moana, kau ma'ungi kina ka he'e haisongo'
(*My land and my ocean for survival should not be destroyed*)

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the research and provides a background to the Solomon Islands in respect to the Solomon Islands culture, economy and environment. Particular emphasis is given to potential ecotourism products and the benefits of ecotourism in the Solomon Islands, as well as the barriers to ecotourism development.

1.2 Potential ecotourism development for indigenous Solomon Islanders

The objective of this research was to determine the potential of ecotourism development to sustain and improve the livelihoods of indigenous people and families in the Solomon Islands. According to Weaver (2008), Melanesian countries in the Pacific are regarded as the potential ecotourism leaders of the future for the region – a region that includes the Solomon Islands. This is an opportunity for local Melanesian countries to utilise their natural resources to develop tourism and generate revenue for their families. The research question is: “can ecotourism be a potential development tool to improve local livelihoods of indigenous communities in Solomon Islands?”. Consequently, focus is on how indigenous Solomon Islanders develop their natural resources and turn their properties into ecotourism attractions and businesses. To do this, the research was guided by three questions:

1. What are potential ecotourism products in the Solomon Islands?
2. What are the benefits of ecotourism?
3. Why is ecotourism important to the Solomon Islands?

The research used a case study analysis to answer the guiding questions and address the main research objective. These case studies were: Dolphin View Beach, Barana Nature Park, and Sikaiana Cultural village. The research findings provide an understanding of ecotourism in the Solomon Islands and whether it can be a development tool for improving the livelihoods of the indigenous people there.

There are six chapters to this dissertation. Chapter 2 is the literature review, which critically assesses the development of ecotourism in comparison to general tourism. Chapter 2 particularly highlights ecotourism in the South Pacific region, specifically focusing on the Solomon Islands. Chapter 3 explains and justifies the methodology used in the research. A qualitative approach and inductive analysis were used; data collection was through internet and literature scan. The six steps of thematic analysis are discussed to highlight the concept of categorising the relevant data into significant topics relating to the research question (see Braun and Clarke, 2006). Chapter 4 critically assesses the three case studies. Findings were based on the literature review and the three ecotourism case studies on the island province of Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands. Chapter 5 addresses the critical issues for Solomon Islands ecotourism development based on the results of the case studies and discusses the progress indigenous Solomon islanders have achieved in terms of ecotourism and hospitality operations. The discussion also highlights ecotourism potential and its importance to the Solomon Islands communities. Chapter 6 concludes and summarises the research and provides novel approaches to the pursuit of Solomon Islands ecotourism. This leads to answering to the research question, whether ecotourism can be a tool for tourism development for indigenous Solomon islanders.

1.3 Overview of the Solomon Islands

The Solomon Islands are an archipelago which comprises of 992 islands, with only 147 islands inhabited. Solomon Islands are predominantly Melanesians, with a small group of Polynesians from the islands of Rennell and Bellona, Tikopia, Anuta, Sikaiana and Lord Howe (Ontong Java) atolls. The Solomon Islands lie northeast of Australia and it gained independence from Great Britain on 7th July 1978. Alvaro de Mendana, a Spanish explorer was the first European to discover these islands and named them, “Isles of Solomon”. This was after he found alluvial gold on the island of Guadalcanal and thinking that this must be where King Solomon in the Bible story got his gold and wealth, so named the islands, “Isles of Solomon.” Most of the islands in the Solomon Islands retained their original names through Mendana’s influence (Solomon Islands Government, 2018).

Figure 1

Map of the Solomon Islands



From Solomon Islands Government. <https://solomons.gov.sb/about-solomon-islands/>. 2020 Solomon Islands Government Portal.

Image 1



From *Solomon Islands*. <https://www.visitsolomons.com.sb/solomon-islands-the-hidden-gem-of-the-south-pacific-ocean/>. 2018 Welcome to Tourism Solomons.

The tourism industry in the Solomon Islands is still emerging. However, for growth to expand to an economically desirable level, the constraints to tourism development need to be addressed. Recognised constraints include the limited domestic air services, weak marketing activities, inadequate tourism skills and training of the local population, and limited capacity to deliver required training to meet the needs and desires of tourists (Ministry of Development, 2016). However, there has been some growth of the Solomon Islands tourism product. This is evident from the range of tourism activities available, such as dive tourism, adventure-related tourism, nature tourism, home stay tourism and heritage tourism as there are a lot of World War II relics in the Solomon Islands. Although recent buildings of accommodation facilities illustrate the expansion of the tourism and hospitality sector, there is untapped potential for ecotourism, which is a sustainable development option yet to be widely recognised.

According to Stronza (2009) claims that many conservationists promote ecotourism as an idea to protect natural resources and also meet human needs. Furthermore, her observation shows that because ecotourism is strongly connected to capital markets, this can be an incentive to change household economies that can lead to job opportunities, it

can become new ways of earning an income, and also adds new knowledge on information technology for many indigenous communities especially in the tropical developing countries.

Solomon Islands is an emerging destination that can meet the needs of valiant travellers around the world, who look for destinations undiscovered by tourists. The Solomon Islands are only three hours' travel by air from Australia and is largely untouched by commercialisation. The landscapes are huge, ranging from natural beautiful beaches, mighty volcanoes, rainforests and jungles, to waterfalls. Their attractions also include the remnants of World War II relics, which is an interesting piece of history for the Solomons, during World War II, when local coast watchers helped stop the Japanese invasion of the Pacific. This historical connection makes the Solomon Islands so special; they have a fascinating history (Solomon Airlines, 2020).

The Solomon Islands Government recognised tourism as a leading growth sector to offset the decline of logging (Roughan & Wara, 2010). The literature confirms that logging contributed much to Solomon Islands' economy for several decades, but also reports that logging activities are extremely and have high negative effects to the forest environment of the Solomon Islands (Katovai et al., 2015). Logging and mining issues have been a barrier and hinderance to development in the Solomon Islands. One reason for the struggle of indigenous ecotourism operators, is that the services of the country are affected by corruption; the Government focuses more on the logging and mining sector than on tourism. In recent reports on mining and logging in Solomon Islands, logging and mining lease processes on the island of Rennell, a World Heritage site, were revealed to have corrupt processes in relation to the involvement of senior officials in the Government's ministry. A chief from Rennell Island, Allen Taupongi, explained:

It seems that the Government has indeed forgotten us. What will be left for us once mining operations leave our shores? (Piringi, 2020, p.3)

One former Prime Minister of Solomon Islands, defending his government's decision to grant the mining lease to the Asia Pacific Investment Development (APID) in 2014 to mine bauxite on Rennell Island and claimed that he did the right thing;

As the caretaker government at that time, the granting of the mining lease was done by the Minister and the Director of Mines and were acting in accordance to the Mining and Mineral Act powers that were vested on them to grant the mining

lease. The approved export duty tariff was 20% but then the next government that took over reduced the duty tariff to “zero” percent. (Piringi, 2020)

A new Director of the Ministry Mines, told the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC) News that the process of land acquisition and the eventual granting of the mining lease to Asia Pacific Investment Development Ltd (APID), was undertaken in haste:

The handling and process of granting the mining lease to APID did not follow the Mining Regulations and the process was messed right from the start. (Piringi, 2020)

The advice from a magistrate working in Honiara pointed out clearly, that corruption was not only spreading fast in Solomon Islands but it was also wearing down the very essence of respected societal values. He mentioned this after sentencing a government officer for fraud:

Corruption destroys the very structure of government principles and the rule of law, and once it is started, it is hard to stop (Radio New Zealand [RNZ], 2017)

The magistrate also advised that politicians, public officials and those holding offices have a duty to care and should lead by example.

A major contributor to Solomon Islands' economy is logging, but it has destructive effects on the environment and indigenous landowners receive only a small return from it. According to Katovai et al. (2015), there is extensive corruption in the logging industry in different parts of society, which resulted in excess logging in the country. He claimed that reports uncovered logging companies have been involving in fraudulent conduct and practices, such as tax evasion. He further claimed that there is poor monitoring of logging process in the country and resource owners may be working alongside loggers and supporting them in their operations.

Tourism may provide an alternative development pathway and contributions to national accounts to reduce reliance on logging, and consequently, on environmental degradation. Research in this particular area is important as information about this, is needed for sustainable development in the Solomon Islands, but there is little information available about tourism products in the Solomon Islands, which has an impact on decisions by travellers wishing to visit the Islands.

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the global position of tourism and investigates tourism and ecotourism at a regional level in the South Pacific. It also justifies the use of ecotourism development in the Solomon Islands by highlighting how ecotourism can benefit the Solomon Islands.

2.2 What is tourism?

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), (2010) defined *tourism* as activities that involve people who travel and stay in places outside of their normal environments for the purpose of leisure, or business for no more than a year.

2.3 What is ecotourism?

The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) defines ecotourism as cited by Bricker, (2017) as “travelling responsibly to natural areas that conserves the environment and improve the wellbeing of local communities, their activities should not leave negative impact on the environment” (Bricker, 2017 p.1).

The six principles according to The International Ecotourism Society, (TIES) and cited by Bricker (2017) are;

“i) it is minimising impact, ii) it is to build environmental and cultural awareness and respect, iii) it provides positive experiences for both visitors and hosts, iv) it is to provide direct financial benefits for conservation, v) it is to provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people, and vi) it raises sensitivity to host countries’ political, environmental and social climate” (Bricker, 2017, p.1).

Ecotourism as an economic development tool, reduces the need for exploitative industries such as logging and mining (Ell, 2003), but this requires careful planning which should involve all stakeholders.

2.4 Economic impacts of tourism

According to Fletcher et, a. (2018), tourism provides important economic potential for destinations in terms of employment, currency exchange, imports and taxes. However, as Stainton (2020) explained, while tourism has positive economic benefits, it also has negative impacts. One economic negative impact of tourism is leakages, this involves foreign tourist companies operating at a destination and profits generated by the companies is transferred out of the country, not retaining it to help contribute to the economy of the country (Nelson, 2013).

2.5 South Pacific SIDS (Small Island Developing States) tourism

Small tropical islands of the Pacific and other small islands in the world are experiencing an increasing impact of ecological and social changes in their livelihoods, as a result of economic development, (e.g. tourism, natural resource exploitation, industrial development), climate-related processes and population growth. This is affecting the survival of their coastal communities and affecting local livelihoods (Diedrich & Aswani, 2016).

In the South Pacific, many SIDS rely on foreign aid, agriculture, fishing, and logging, but Pacific Islands face the challenge of how to develop tourism and manage it in a sustainable way that can be a source of livelihoods for future generation, and will not degrade the quality of life, natural and cultural resources.

Pacific Islands SIDS do not have the population and/or natural resource base to support anything other than small-scale tourism industries (Milne et al., 2013). This makes the development of ecotourism rather than mass tourism, important to the sustainable economic development of Pacific SIDS.

According to Zeppel (2006) affirms Pacific islands' indigenous ecotourism depends on donor assistance and support from conservation and non-government organisations (NGOs) to address the impediments and limitations in their ecotourism businesses. Many village ecotourism ventures in the Pacific have failed due to these limitations, which may be due to the nature of ecotourism development in the Pacific.

The development of ecotourism to a point where it can attract high spending tourists requires certain standards to be met. At the time of writing, many indigenous ecotourism businesses in operation in the Pacific were planned and designed for travellers with a low budget and these ecotourism businesses were normally operated by families or the community, and were very simple, with limited modern facilities such as flush toilets and hot water. Furthermore, the main reason why ecotourism in these developing countries were unsuccessful is due to the fact that there was ineffective and insufficient marketing to attract tourists to come to these destinations. In areas frequented by low-budget travellers, many rural communities have had success opening their houses for “family homestays,” which can be a viable source of income for families without the financial capital to build larger tourism establishments. This type of tourism requires some marketing skills and ability, or middlemen, because many rural areas are isolated, and away from the principal tourism paths. Therefore, they need strategies and human capital to attract tourists to these destinations.

2.6 Ecological impacts of tourism

Tourism can have damaging effects on the environment, but the quality of the environment is important to the success of tourism activities (Barkauskiene & Snieska, 2013). Ecotourism has positive economic benefits and some negative environmental consequences associated with mass tourism (Stem et al., 2003). The condition of the environment is particularly important to ecotourism, because the relationship between tourism and the environment involves many activities that can be harmful to the environment. Many of these impacts are associated with the construction and development of roads, airports, other tourism businesses like hotels, shops, restaurants, and marinas. These tourism developments have negative impacts that can gradually destroy the environment these businesses depend on (Fakhrana & Ridho, 2020). However, there is potential benefits for tourism as it can raise awareness and also contribute to environmental conservation and protection, and also encourage environmental values, that can be used as a tool to help in protecting natural areas and increase their economic importance (Sunlu, 2003). Alternatively, due to the necessity of nature to ecotourism, this form of tourism pursuit can provide the impetus for environmental preservation by the local population.

2.7 Benefits of ecotourism

Fennell (2002) outlined three benefits of ecotourism: psychological benefits, educational benefits, and ecological benefits. Psychological benefits focus on wellbeing and personal fitness, and educational benefits are accrued from educating people about preserving nature. This is an educational process for locals, as it is ethically and morally right that people are stewards of their natural environment and have the responsibility to look after and take care of their environment. Ecotourism therefore serves as means to conserve the environment. Ecological benefits are accrued when people enjoy nature, as this supports both the human and animal kingdoms.

Ecotourism can be a revenue generating industry that offers a viable alternative to destructive industries especially logging. However, there is still excessive logging practices in many parts of the tropical Asia-Pacific even though there is legislation to curtail such excessive and heavy logging practices (Katovai et al. 2015). He cites, Solomon Islands as an ideal case for exploring this kind of destructive practices, and this is because there is no proper monitoring and recording system on logging activities and its ecological impacts in the country. However, the Solomon Islands are not alone in their challenge of finding ways to develop ecotourism. Many countries face difficulty trying to keep a balance between maintaining and protecting their areas and making a profit from their available resources (Ell, 2003).

An aim of ecotourism is that it respects local culture and encourages cultural preservation, which is enhanced through indigenous participation in ecotourism business operations. According to Honey (2008), ecotourism can educate visitors and respect the local culture, and if there is no clear explanations and clear ground rules made with host communities, the danger remains that ecotourism may destroy the cultures and lifestyles it aims at protecting. According to Ell (2003), the potential of cultural commodification, which adds a dimension of inauthenticity, can have long term impacts on a culture.

2.8 Ecotourism in the Solomon Islands and its characteristics

For ecotourism to be successful in the Solomon Islands, they need to differentiate themselves from other South Pacific islands. This could be achieved by establishing national standards and criteria for eco-labelling and certification, such as has been done in Vanuatu (Vanuatu Department of Tourism, 2018). This has the potential to safeguard

the environment in connection with tourism development. Although the Solomon Islands has a code of practice for the tourism sector, and minimum standards and classifications for tourism accommodation that ecotourism operators can use as guide in their ecotourism ecolodges (Solomon Islands Tourism Quality Standard Program, 2018), this is not a robust system.

Ecotourism in the Solomon Islands is still an emerging industry (Ell, 2003). Ecotourism facilities were established in some parts of the Solomon Islands prior to 2000, with support from aid donor organisations. Some ecolodges in the Western Province and Rennell and Bellona Province, were initiated as ecotourism ventures. Unfortunately, due to the political unrest and other related problems at the time in the Solomon Islands, donor funding and support ceased (Ell, 2003). Ecolodge operators have since opened ecolodge accommodations however, and some indigenous ecotourism operators have received funds from the Government to initiate ecotourism projects. Forbes Magazine (2015) featured the tourism minister of the Solomon Islands, the Honourable Mr Bartholomew Parapolo, describing the Solomon Islands as a diverse destination with varied cultures, and as a unique, unspoilt natural environment with unique flora and fauna. The Government has encouraged indigenous people to participate in and explore the potential of ecotourism development in the Solomon Islands.

Ecotourism is encouraged more than is logging, because of the destructive impacts of logging on the environment. Katovai et al., (2015) claims the focus on the economic contribution of logging and mining is constraining the Solomon Islands' focus on ecotourism development. However, according to Zepple (2006), there has been small - scale ecotourism projects with donor assistance, such as ecolodges, village guest houses, tours, rainforest and walking trails in the Solomon Islands. These projects are an emerging transformation of the national focus on logging and mining, to preserve the environment for the economic contribution of ecotourism.

2.9 Progressing ecotourism in the Solomon Islands

According to Haider (2017), the Solomon Islands are an example of a Small Island developing country that has the potential for ecotourism. With the massive destruction to Solomon Islands' natural environment by external logging and mining companies, the Government has since prioritised tourism with its National Tourism Strategy. This

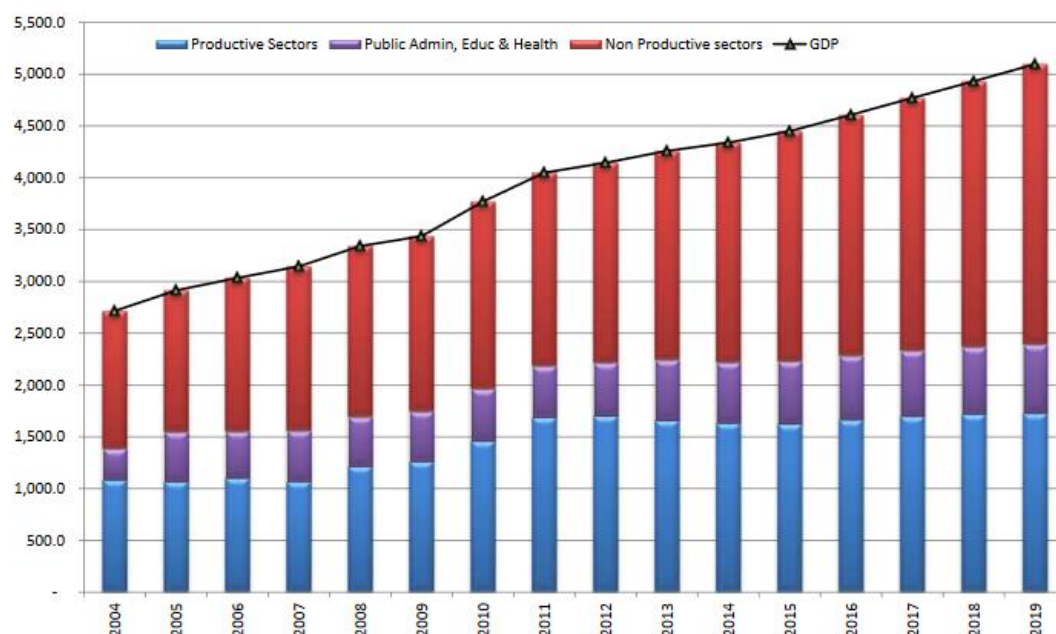
provides the opportunity for locals to engage in ecotourism activities sustainably and utilise their natural resources to generate income for their families (Solomon Islands Government, 2018). Logging and mining activities have long been a threat to the Solomon Islands environment. There is environmental damage experienced by indigenous people of the Solomon Islands, this is seen in the case on Rennell island, in which a cargo ship loading bauxite ran aground and spilled more than a hundred tonnes of heavy fuel oil into the ocean. An Australian senior research fellow said the environment is the indigenous peoples' security and safety net, keeping the environment intact is a form of security for local people when they face economic challenges (Radio New Zealand [RNZ], 2019).

There is corruption associated with mining and logging in the Solomon Island, this is seen in the process of granting mining leases to overseas companies (Katovai et al., 2015). This is supported in a news article on the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation, (SIBC) by the Director of the Ministry of Mines, Mr. Nicholas Biliki, who revealed that the process of granting mining leases were messed up by some of the highest mining officials (Piringi, 2020). This is just an example of foreign mining and logging activities in the Solomons.

Solomon Islands' tourism sector has an important role in the country's economy and it is becoming one of the drivers of economic development, it continues to provide foreign exchange and contributes to direct, indirect and induced employment to locals (Solomon Islands Government, 2018) (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

State of the Solomon Islands Economy and Investment Climate



From *Tourism Solomons*. <https://www.visitsolomons.com.sb/about-the-solomon/national-tourism-forum/>. 2018 Welcome to Tourism Solomons.

In its 2017 annual report to the National Tourism Forum in Honiara, the Central Bank of Solomon Island's (CBSI) international financial manager, Mr Michael Kikiolo, revealed that tourism earnings could double if the tourism sector set a target of 50,000 visitors by 2017. The CBSI encourages Solomon Islands to invest in non-logging activities in order to support the economy (Tourism Solomons, 2017). From the writer's personal experience, it is evident that the Solomon Islands can help the tourism sector achieve its aims and goals to attract tourists to the Solomon Islands by 2027 if the tourism stakeholders work together. The Solomon Islands will be hosting a regional event in 2023, (the Pacific Games to be held in Honiara). This is an event that Tourism Solomons can embark on, in marketing the Solomon Islands sports and tourism event as a destination in their marketing strategies.

Tourism Solomons (2018a), in its efforts to market Solomon Islands and its uniqueness as a tourism destination internationally, has identified some reasons why Solomon Islands should be visited. Solomon Island has fine world-class diving which gives scuba fans a chance to enjoy the pristine marine life and coral gardens, and have the chance to explore World War II relics at Iron Bottom Sound in Honiara, where the fiercest and bloodiest

battle of the World War II was fought; hence war relics are still visible and well preserved (Tourism Solomons, 2018a). There are other aquatic options which include kayaking and rafting down rivers of Guadalcanal. Rennell Island which is a World Heritage site is just a one-hour flight from Honiara the capital of the Solomon Islands. There are also options as land-based activities which includes bush walks, visiting traditional villages and watching the variety of local performance of Solomon Islanders (Forbes, 2015). Moreover, the Solomon Islands have multifaceted and numerous cultures. It is a country in the South Pacific that has the three main races of Polynesians, Micronesians and Melanesians live and share their cultures and custom together. The country is predominantly of Melanesians. The natural attractions there include the submarine volcano on Kavachi in Marovo lagoon, Western Province. This is an active marine volcano that boils out of the sea water. The beauty of the islands is appealing, as there are many natural attractions in the Solomon Islands.

The Solomon Islands is a destination for adventure who do not seek convenience, but rather, look for destinations that offer a simple life and limited technology. However, it is also important that to be able to attract more tourists to the islands, the comforts of tourists must be considered (Ell, 2003).

2.10 Barriers to ecotourism development

Corruption is seen as a major obstacle to sustainable development and an issue of public discontent for Solomon Islands. The Transparency Solomon Islands (TSI) recently carried out a survey which shows a high percentage of respondents in their survey showing a high percent of corruption related services which is over and beyond what is legally required, this corruption is impacting development in the Solomon Islands (RNZ, 2013).

Infrastructure is a barrier to ecotourism in the Solomon Islands. According to Zeppel (2006) the establishment of Komarindi Ecotours in the Solomon Islands with an aim to offer half day and one day village and rainforest trekking tours on Guadalcanal began but didn't last long, Komarindi Ecotours faced numerous problems; one of which was infighting between tribal groups but other problems highly which contributed to the failed project was, Komarindi Ecotours was not able to secure cruise ships visits to the site as there was less marketing of their product and it affected their business. It also badly

needed proper and good site infrastructure. The poor infrastructure, the infighting between tribal groups and not enough marketing for this business were the issues that affected this ecotourism project therefore it stopped.

While marketing is a problem for Solomon Islands ecotourism business, it will be even worse with the proposed suspension on facebook recently announced by the Solomon Islands Cabinet, will only affect marketing and advertisement for ecotourism businesses in the Solomon Islands (RNZ, 2020). The opposition Minister of Parliament (MP) and foreign relations committee chairman, Honourable Mr Peter Kenilorea Junior, expressed that as a democratic country, he is very concern to hear this proposed suspension on Facebook for Solomon Islands (The Guardian, 2020). Critics have attributed this move to China's influence in the Solomon Islands after the Government revoked its recognition of Taiwan as an independent nation and established diplomatic relations with Beijing (Kekea, 2020). The proposed ban of social medial network sites such as Facebook in the Solomon Islands will have negative consequences on small ecotourism business operations.

CHAPTER 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the methodological approach and methods used in this research. The purpose of this research was to determine if ecotourism can be a potential development tool to improve livelihoods of indigenous communities in the Solomon Islands. A qualitative research approach was adopted drawing from a review of relevant literature and a thematic analysis of three case studies. Critical issues and further research priorities are also presented.

3.2 Qualitative method

A qualitative methodological approach was used in this research to identify the potential of ecotourism products in the Solomon Islands. Qualitative research is expressed in words rather than in the numbers used in quantitative research. Streefkerk (2020) asserted that a qualitative approach is used in the endeavour to understand concepts, thoughts, and experience. It is an approach that enables a researcher to combine insights on topics that are not well understood. This methodology was selected because it was a means to gather relevant information about ecotourism in the Solomon Islands to answer the research question about existing ecotourism destinations and their respective operations.

Qualitative methodologies are characterised by understanding aspects of social life and offer the ability to adopt methods for critical reflexivity in the process of generating meanings from words rather than from numbers. McCusker and Gunaydin (2015) presented four key methods of qualitative data collection: 1) interviews, 2) focus groups, 3) ethnography, and 4) literature reviews. As this study was conducted outside the Solomon Islands, due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, a literature review was a key method adopted for this research. The qualitative approach was well suited to this research because it fits with an indigenous worldview, in interpreting and understanding the thoughts and concepts drawn from case studies. As a Solomon Islander, I was able to provide a critical reflexive account based on my own indigenous knowledge and thus am positioned as an insider in this research. Quantitative methods, as proposed by Streefkerk (2020), were not appropriate for this study, mainly because three case studies would not provide a large body of numerical data but rather, were best analysed to draw meaning and highlight issues facing tourism development for the tribal peoples of the region.

Inductive analysis was used to analyse information collected from the literature scan, and thematic analysis was applied to the case studies.

3.3 Data collection and analysis

Data collection for this study was from July to August 2020; most of the data were obtained through literature and web scan. The data were obtained from government reports, Solomon Islands accommodations websites, Tourism Solomons media, print and social media from the Solomon Islands, the Solomon Islands International Visitors Survey, 2019, and a literature review. The literature reviewed was related to ecotourism development and analysed to determine its benefits for the indigenous people of the Solomon Islands and development potential.

3.4 Thematic analysis

The data collected in the web scan and literature review were analysed using a thematic analysis method. A thematic analysis allows data to be categorised into themes and organised to find commonalities and differences in the literature collected (Lin, 2019). According to Braun and Clarke (2013) data collected for research provides a focus on the topic of interest. Through a literature review and thematic analysis, the researcher was able to gain a deeper understanding of ecotourism and how this could contribute to the Solomon Islands' ecotourism development. Braun and Clark (2006) presented a six step process for thematic analysis as follows.

1. Familiarisation with the data
2. Generating coding categories
3. Generating themes
4. Reviewing the themes
5. Defining and naming the themes
6. Locating the examples

The first step in this process involved re-reading the academic literature and relevant reports. This generated distinct categories that addressed critical issues facing Solomon Island ecotourism development.

Inductive analysis was used to analyse the information. This was through critical reflection to find issues that frequently appeared in the literature review – these were then

applied to the findings in the case studies. Topics frequently mentioned in the literature were coded and grouped together. Key subtopics that emerged, included the benefits of ecotourism, opportunities for ecotourism development for indigenous peoples, indigenous participation and partnerships, sustainable tourism, barriers to tourism development, and impacts of ecotourism development particularly on small island nations. Grouping these topics from the literature made it easier to discuss and explain them when addressing the research question. These key topics provided the areas of research for the analysis of the case studies and allowed the researcher to define key issues and actual examples from existing ecotourism destinations in the Solomon Islands.

Table 1 outlines the literature sources of the key categories sourced and their classifications.

Table 1

Key Categories from the Literature

TOPIC	SOURCES	CATEGORIES (71)
Definition of ecotourism and tourism	Braun & Clarke (2006) Blamey (2001) Cheia (2013) Fennell (2002) Honey (2008) Mason (2014) McCusker & Gunaydin (2015) Streefkerk (2020) UNWTO (2010)	Provide definitions and similar expressions of ecotourism (9).
Ecotourism potential	Ell (2003) Haider (2017) Liu (2003) Weaver (2008) Wearing & Neil (2009)	Highlight the potential of ecotourism and how this potential can be and is used (5)
Benefits of tourism	Berkes (2019) Fakhrana & Ridho (2020) Zeppel (2006)	Highlight the benefits of tourism (3)
Economic activities	Tourism Solomon Islands (2017) Stainton (2020) Stem et al. (2003)	Highlight types of economic activities (3)
Indigenous participation	Barana Nature and Heritage Park pictures (2020) Barana Community Nature and Heritage Park, Solomon Islands (2019) Boshoff (2020) Dolphin view beach (TripAdvisor 2018)	Highlight indigenous people venturing into and participating in ecotourism, the Ecotourism potential

TOPIC	SOURCES	CATEGORIES (71)
	Dolphin Beach View Review (2019) Eco-Tourism Solomon Airlines (2020) Foale & Macintyre (2005) Forbes Solomon Islands Untold riches (2015) Island Sun Newspaper (2020) Kekea (2018) Milne & Li (2019) Minimum Standards and Classification for Tourism Accommodation (2019) Ministry of Development (2016) O’Barry (2020) Osifelo (2020) Pattison (2019) Roughan & Wara (2010) Roxborough (2016, 2020) SIVB (2014) Solomon Airlines Tourism websites (2020) Solomon Airlines Destination guide (2020) Solomon Islands Government (2018) Solomon Islands National Tourism Development Strategy 2015 – 2019 Plan (2018) Solomon Islands National Tourism Development Strategy 2015 – 2019 Plan (2018) Solomon Islands: “The hidden gem of the South Pacific Ocean” (2020) Solomon Islands Tourism Quality Standard Program, (2018) Strongim Bisnis (2019) Story of Kona Roha – Dolphin View beach Ecolodge (2020) Tourism Solomon Islands (2018) Vanuatu Department of Tourism (2018) Walenenea (2020)	and reasons local businesses are unsuccessful (31)
Impact of ecotourism	Diedrich & Aswani (2016) Evans (2019) Stronza (2007) Sunlu (2003)	Provide more data on the impacts of ecotourism, both negative and positive (4)
Awareness on ecotourism and tourism	Barkauskiene & Snieska (2013) Blangy & Mehta (2006) Cheers et al. (2018) Goodwin 2011 Urry & Larsen (2011) Ghera & Reddy (2007)	Provide awareness of ecotourism especially what ecotourism and tourism are, at

TOPIC	SOURCES	CATEGORIES (71)
		global, regional, and local levels (6)
Challenges	Bilua (2019) Hviding & Bayliss-Smith (2000) Kekea (2020) Katovai et al. (2015) Piringi (2020). RNZ (2013, 2017, 2020) Solomon Times news (2020) Solomon Islands Government National Waste Pollution Strategy, 2017 – 2026. (2017) SPREP (2019) The Guardian (2020)	Authors of these articles highlight the challenges of ecotourism; the reality of ecotourism in the south Pacific region and the Solomon Islands (10)

Further deliberation on these is provided in Chapter 5, where critical issues are discussed.

3.5 Case study approach

Case study approach was used in this research. Case study approach is similar to using questionnaires, that are normally used in tourism studies (Mason, 2014). In addition, case studies are used to gain more understanding of what is happening, and the circumstances and times, and attempt to find out why it is happening.

The case studies were selected using three key criteria that helped establish a representative selection of existing indigenous tourism destinations on the main island of Guadalcanal. The case studies featured indigenous Solomon Islanders from Guadalcanal island who utilised natural resources to showcase their indigenous culture, environmental protection, and ecolodge accommodation. The criteria for the case studies aligned to different ecotourism categories. They were:

1. Sikaiana Cultural village, a destination that is a model of sustainable cultural development;
2. Dolphin View Eco-lodge beach tours, based on the proximity to marine resources and eco-friendly accommodation practices; and
3. Barana Nature Park located inland and promoting conservation of the forest, flora and fauna.

The case studies were developed from web scans of the destinations, social media, government reports, observations from previous visits to the destinations, travellers' blogs, and public media sources such as broadcast media and newspapers.

3.6 Personal reflection

Personal reflexivity in research brings researchers into their research, making them visible as part of the research process. It may also involve acknowledging who they are as researchers and declaring the researcher's worldview and thus the critical reflections that influence the study itself (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

This study interested me because as an indigenous Solomon islander, I interact with nature and know how to survive on our lands and seas, which are fixed in the context of customary management systems; our survival is based on these natural resources that we own (Diedrich & Aswan, 2016). I strongly believe in preserving nature and coming from a province in the Solomon Islands that has experienced the destructive effects of logging and the mining operations, I am naturally troubled by the destruction. It seems little is done about stopping these mining and logging operations, which are having such a devastating impact on our islands' ecosystem. The province I come from, has mineral resources that are sought by mining companies, and now my indigenous people's livelihoods are being affected by these destructive activities (see Piringi, 2020).

A key priority for me is to advocate awareness of less destructive tourism development for indigenous peoples by presenting my research understandings in lectures at my university. It is important for indigenous Solomon Islanders to engage in ecotourism development, as the environment is what we survive on and provides opportunities for economic and social development. This clearly influences my perspective on this research topic.

This study was undertaken to provide a local voice from the worldview of an indigenous woman who was raised and lives in Honiara. There is a paucity of information from an indigenous perspective in this area and a real need for developing indigenous capacity for ecotourism development. The intent is that, through this study, I will have gained a more in-depth knowledge of ecotourism, to enable me to contribute to national tourism development and expand the resource content for my role as a lecturer in tourism and hospitality at the Solomon Islands National University. The establishment of the School

of Tourism and Hospitality in the Solomons was a catalyst for the Solomon Islands' economic future (eHotelier, 2020). Expanding my own knowledge so I could help educate aspiring indigenous tourism operators in the Solomon Islands was a key reason for undertaking this study. My role will play a major part in providing training at the university, to Solomon Islanders.

CHAPTER 4: Case Studies

This research used a case study approach. Mason (2014) explained that case studies are used to obtain understandings of what is happening in particular circumstances, the context and times, in the attempt to find out what and why the particular phenomena are occurring.

This chapter presents three case studies of ecotourism operators in Honiara on Guadalcanal. These three businesses were: Dolphin View Beach ecolodges, Barana Nature and Heritage Park, and Sikaiana Cultural Village. Ecotourism is relatively new in the Solomon Islands with 16 eco-lodges affiliated to the Tourism Solomon Islands agency (see Tourism Solomons, 2018b). There are other eco-tourism operators not identified as such by the national tourism agency which aligns to the definitions of ecotourism in the literature (e.g. Ell, 2003). However, for the purpose of this study, the three case studies were chosen based on the three different ecotourism products of land-based ecotourism, marine and coastal eco-tourism, and educational cultural-based ecotourism.

Information was obtained from government documents, academic literature, and various websites and social media reports such as on Facebook and in TripAdvisor reviews. The three selected ecotourism cases also had easy access for both domestic and international visitors to the destinations, as Honiara is the gateway for air and sea travellers to the Solomon Islands. The three case studies also enjoy high tourist visitations due to their locations. From the findings, it was evident that the focus for these ecotourism venues was the conservation of nature, cultural sustainability, and economic development, which are all fundamental components of the eco-tourist experience (Fennell, 2020).

Visitor reviews on social media sites highlighted these three concepts based on their experiences at the different locations:

At Dolphin View Beach, an Australian visitor commented on the “eco-place” nature of the destination, and on the staff.

Alistair and his family are very helpful, their meals are lovely, the rooms are clean. This venue is an eco-place, there is no electricity, but nobody needed it at a place like this. There is wonderful view from the room over the ocean. If you need to chill out this is the place. Take reef shoes if you want to swim as coral is sharp getting in. (Lee, Trip Advisor, July 2019)

At Barana Nature and Heritage Park, a review from a New Zealand visitor again referred to the expertise of the staff and wild life.

The incredible skill of the Rangers to spot birds and their patience to assist me to find them. Beautiful walk along the dirt road with fantastic view. (Karen, Facebook, February 2020)

At the Sikaiana cultural village, a travel blogger reported on the “wild adventures in the jungles of the Solomon Islands” and the natural landscape and referred to the hosts and sincerity of sharing the culture.

It's too easy to get blasé about visiting the places people live when we travel, but there was something very effecting about the sincerity of the Sikaiana welcome, just what our presence meant to them and how much it's up with their hopes for the future. I hope good days are ahead. (Roxborough, 2020)

A reason for choosing Guadalcanal province is that ecotourism activities on Guadalcanal show indigenous groups from other provinces of Solomon Islands living and participating in ecotourism activities in Honiara. Climate change has forced some island peoples to move to Guadalcanal and small communities from these islands are now creating ways to sustain their individual island cultures. As they showcase their own customs and cultures, they are also embracing the diverse cultural groups of Solomon Islands on Guadalcanal, and most importantly, they learn and engaged in utilising their resources in non-destructive activities. All three case studies are based on local indigenous peoples who operate these ecotourism businesses on the island of Guadalcanal.

4.1 Dolphin View Beach, (Kona-Roha) West Guadalcanal

Image 2

Dolphin View Beach, West Guadalcanal



From *TripAdvisor*. https://www.tripadvisor.co.nz/Hotel_Review-g1746837-d12378334-Reviews-Dolphin_View_Beach-Guadalcanal_Island.html. 2020 *TripAdvisor*.

Dolphin View Beach ecolodge is about 25 km west of Honiara, on Guadalcanal island and owned by an indigenous Solomon Island family, Alistair Pae, and his wife, Kuvien. This ecotourism business provided an example of an indigenous person utilising the resource of his home, which he developed into an ecotourism attraction. The main tourism product was an eco-homestay, comprising of three bungalows built from local and bush materials and powered by solar energy. The ecolodges could be booked by visitors wanting to spend time at the Dolphin View Beach. The owner of Dolphin View Beach, Alistair Pae also offered boutique tours, sharing his knowledge with guests, taking them on half day marine boat cruises to view the dolphins, and snorkel around the reefs and view of old World War II ship wreck nearby. Other activities included bush walks, visits to local villages, purchasing local fruits and vegetables from the community, and arranged visits to the neighbouring Savo volcanic island across the sea (Imperial Meet and Greet Services, 2020).

In addition to the eco-lodge, a key attraction of the business was watching dolphins swimming around the shallow water of the beach. This business met the concept of ecotourism defined by Fennell (2002), as multifaceted and include different types of

tourism activities like nature travel, camping, whale watching and bird watching, adventure travel and archaeological digging. In the case of Dolphin View Beach ecolodge, wildlife viewing, tours, and indigenous culture, the owner aligned his venture as an ecotourism product offering accommodation, nature tourism, and local knowledge. The owners of Dolphin View Beach, Alistair and Kuvien, started this small ecotourism with their own savings, and later received assistance from the Enhanced Integrated Funds (EIF) through the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in Honiara. The Dolphin View Beach ecolodge was a recipient of funding from the Solomon Islands Government in its support for indigenous ecotourism operators (Enhanced Integrated Framework, 2015).

Image 3

Bungalows at Dolphin View Beach, West Guadalcanal



From *TripAdvisor*.https://www.tripadvisor.co.nz/Hotel_Review-g1746837-d12378334-Reviews-Dolphin_View_Beach-Guadalcanal_Island.html. 2020 *TripAdvisor*.

Locals were sometimes engaged to help with the maintenance and clean-up of the beach. The owner paid them a small amount of money for their work. Local women also assisted in food preparation using local produce such as banana leaves to wrap yams, cassava, sweet potato (kumara), fish to bake using (motu), local hot stone oven. Fish and

vegetables were bought from locals and they were also hired as skippers to take visitors on boat trips sightseeing around the reefs (Imperial Meet and Greet, 2020). The activities at Dolphin view beach allowed the owner to support the local community.

While storytelling and the culture were part of the ecolodge experience and operations, the business had adapted to meet the market and expectations of non-local visitors. An example was in the change of the business name from the indigenous name of “Kona-roha” to “Dolphin View Beach.” The owner changed the name to “Dolphin View Beach Ecolodge” to highlight the natural phenomena of dolphins seen swimming and playing off the beach whenever the weather was fine. The owner also established the Dolphin View Beach business to protect the dolphins and keep them safe in their natural habitat, because some provinces of the Solomon Islands (especially Malaita Province), hunt dolphins for food and dolphin’s teeth for cultural decorations (O’Barry, 2020).

Image 4

Dolphins Swimming in the Reefs near Dolphin View Beach



From *Lonely Planet*. <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/solomon-islands/west-of-honiara/hotels/dolphin-view-beach/a/lod/f7cb0c33-f8cc-4428-a180-ae990981f05b/1332215>. 2020 Lonely Planet.

The indigenous name for Dolphin View Beach is “Kona-roha,” which means “eagle’s pond or stream.” Guadalcanal legend recounts the story of a blind woman who lived in

Kona-roha, who belonged to a “small line” of the family lineage of Guadalcanal. In Guadalcanal there are two family lineages, the small line and the big line. Other Solomon Islanders are not able to distinguish between these lineages, but the Guadalcanal people themselves know who belong to the small and big lineages. The small line sees the small eagle (*roha*) as their god. This blind woman belonged to the small line and regarded the eagle as her god. The blind woman would sit outside her hut and wish she could have water to prepare a certain fruit called *taumana* in the local Guadalcanal language. This fruit is prepared by washing it properly in water until the bitter taste of the fruit is gone. It is then prepared for special occasions and presented to the chiefs. This woman had many *taumana* trees, but she could not do anything with the fruit, as there was no water to wash and prepare them. The woman was sitting outside her hut one day and felt something crash down beside her. She reached out and touched a bird - it was a *roha*. At the same time, she heard running water and felt the water flowing, so it is believed that the *roha* helped her by creating the small stream, so she could prepare food. This is how the place became Kona-roha, and the small lineage people of Guadalcanal have always seen the place as sacred and special to their small lineage (Imperial Meet and Greet, 2020).

This story and name Kona-roha is significant to the social fabric of Guadalcanal and the knowledge in this story of the beach relates to indigenous environmental protection, community status, food preparation and knowledge, and the sacred obligations of the locals to the place.

Image 5

Kona-Roha Stream, Dolphin View Beach



From Imperial Meet and Greet Services, 2020, The story of Kona-Roha, [photograph]
<http://www.imperial-travel-service.com/>.

Since Dolphin View Beach ecolodge started, visitors have had easy access to the beach. Local buses provided service to the areas west of Honiara city, but the beach is not on a scheduled bus routes from the city. However, the owner of the Dolphin View Beach has a vehicle that collects guests from the airport, as the owner, Alistair, confirmed on Facebook.

We also organise and provide airport transfers or even transfer from Honiara to Dolphin View Beach and vice versa. (Dolphin View Beach, 2019)

4.1.1 Guided tour of Dolphin View Beach (3 hours - half day)

The guided tour commenced with a welcome and brief information by the owners, Alistair and Kuvien. The information related to the venue, product and services, and a brief history of how the business started. Then the tour started off by viewing the bungalows and ablution block. The bungalows were a one bedroom with twin beds, the other two bungalows were one bedroom with double beds. A standard minimum accommodation requirement for accommodation had to be met, so items like linens must be clean, and attentive customer services should be available. The Minimum Standards and Classification for Tourism Accommodation requires accommodation businesses to meet the standards in this Tourism Classification and guide for tourism ecolodges. (see Minimum Standards and Classification for Tourism Accommodation, 2018). There was

a need to furnish the rooms with amenities such as wardrobes and mirrors, as these were specified in the criteria for the Minimum Standards and Classification for Tourism Accommodation and applied to homestay accommodation.

Visitors were taken on boats by local skippers to see dolphins if they arrived late in the morning, because dolphins were not normally visible from the beach at this time of day and would swim out to the deep water. The normal time for dolphins to swim near the shore was around 6.00 am to 9.00 am during fine weather. Visitors were then taken back to the beach and those who wished to snorkel, or swim were given the opportunity to do so. Small canoes were provided for visitors who wanted to paddle around the shores and see more of the reefs and corals or just have fun. Visitors were treated to some local food and drinks by the owners before they bid farewell to them. This concluded the three-hour tour at Dolphin View Beach (Imperial Meet and Greet Services, 2020).

The tour provided an opportunity for visitors to mix with local people on the beach, see their local gardens, and see the areas where they discarded and buried their rubbish. Unfortunately, the communal rubbish pit was not very robust, and there was no proper managing of waste in place, so the owners had to bury and burn their own rubbish. This was an area of concern, because recycling, and proper management of waste was encouraged and required for ecotourism businesses (Minimum Standards and Classification for Tourism Accommodation, 2018).

4.2 Barana Nature and Heritage Park, east Honiara

Image 6

Barana Community Nature and Heritage Park Welcome Signage



From Imperial Meet and Greet Services, 2020, Barana Community Nature and Heritage Park Welcome Signage, [Image]. <https://www.facebook.com/Imperial.Meet.and.Greet/photos/a.194016921171438/790791988160592>.

The Barana Nature Park was part of a conservation project that used eco-system-based adaptation, preservation, and restoration of susceptible ecosystems as protecting roles to build social and economic resilience to climate change. These 5000 hectares of forest area up the Mataniko River in Honiara, is owned by the Barana community, which comprises of different tribes of Guadalcanal Island (Kekea, 2020). Traditional agriculture was the most common livelihood option for the community at Barana (Walenenea, 2020). However, the disposal of rubbish was also to dug out pits, which was not adequate for effective waste management. Empty bottles and cans were sold to private bottle shop and can owners for recycling, while the rest was dumped in pits, and buried.

Image 7

Barana Nature Park, Waterfall



From Imperial Meet and Greet Services, 2020, Barana Nature Park waterfall, [Image].
<https://www.facebook.com/Imperial.Meet.and.Greet/photos/pcb.790792331493891/790791718160619>.

The park was developed in 2017, as a partnership with the Guadalcanal province and the national government through the Ministry of Forests, Environment and Conservation. Barana was selected as a result of a comprehensive and participatory Ecosystem and Socio-economic Resilience Analysis and Mapping (ESRAM) study that was done for Honiara. The findings confirm that Barana Nature Park is the largest conservation in Honiara, and has a number of World War II relics, an important piece of history for Solomon Islands.

The key findings from that research, highlighted Barana Nature Park as the largest conservation site in Honiara on Guadalcanal, with a number of World War II relics which are an important part of the history and heritage of the Solomon Islands (SPREP, 2019).

Barana community was encouraged to participate generating revenue aspects for long term sustainability of the park and the livelihood of their community. The Barana community alongside the government agency, had included an environment and resilience centre as the focal point of supporting the development of the park. The centre is located at the entrance to the park.

The park was jointly funded by the Pacific Ecosystem based Adaptation to Climate Change Project (PEBBAC) with assistance from the South Pacific Regional Environmental Programme (SPREP). While the park was jointly funded by inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations, the Barana community and tribes of Guadalcanal island owned and operated the destination (SPREP, 2019).

As part of the park development, the Environment and Resilience Resource Centre was built for the community. This provided a space for cultural frameworks of knowledge to be incorporated into the decision making and tourism products offered. For example, the *tok stori* session (an indigenous tribal session of information sharing and collective decision making) this had an educational component to it, because it helped create awareness for the community to value good practices on the environment and the role in building community resilience (Pattison, 2019).

Barana Nature Park operators were proud of historical sites such as Hill 27, which was a US (United States of America) base during World War II. The Hill has a small museum with some old artefacts such as military dog tags that were found in Barana, and which belonged to soldiers who fought during the war. These have been preserved and attract visitors to visit the area. There is also the natural attraction of a waterfall and caves at Barana, which the community looks after. On a full day of sightseeing, visitors can purchase vegetables and fruits, and baked local food from the villagers; vegetables include egg plants, cabbages, cucumbers, and beans, and fruits are pawpaws, bananas, mangoes, and coconuts (Walelenea, 2020).

Image 8

Hill 27, Barana Nature Park



From Imperial Meet and Greet Services, 2020, Hill 27 Barana Nature Park, [Image].
<https://www.facebook.com/Imperial.Meet.and.Greet/photos/pcb.790792331493891/790792264827231>.

The park was managed by a park management committee comprising five tribes that owned the land in the hills directly above Honiara. The staff included Lynstone Buko, a park ranger, and 20 other rangers who were tour guides. Melinda Tombakelo Kii looked after the community nursery and was helping with replanting and reforestation. Birdwatching was also encouraged, and a weekend food market regularly attracted residents from the capital, helping the community generate income (Wasuka, 2020).

4.2.1 Ecotourism activities and local benefits on Barana

Barana Natural Park management's plan was to preserve nature and the environment, as explained by the park ranger, who ensured that villagers making gardens acted sustainably by not cutting down too many trees. Birdwatching was encouraged but unfortunately,

there was no mention of codes of conduct, an important part of managing and safeguarding the flora and fauna and minimising impacts by visitors to the park. Furthermore, the ecosystems were vulnerable because logging had been active in the areas around Barana Natural Park, so there was a ban on using secondary forests for logging (Wasuka, 2020). The community had a nursery and were helping with replanting and reforestation.

Ecotourism is defined by its nature-based focus, sustainability (local benefits and conservation), learning, as well as ethical imperatives. The development of the park contributed to improving the local peoples' livelihoods, giving them the opportunity to sell their products in the market house at the park to earn money. The improvement of the roads to Barana Nature Park had made travelling to and from Barana and Honiara easier, and the park had been a new learning experience for both the community members and visitors. The local community learnt about preservation of the environment, history, and cooperating in looking after their resources, and visitors experienced and valued the conservation programme and the natural landscape, enjoying the attractions of Barana Nature Park.

Indigenous community at Barana Nature Park, participated in integrating revenues for long term sustainability of the park and the livelihood of their community. This provided the indigenous people an opportunity to sell their local products (Walenenea, 2020).

The development of the park contributed to improving local livelihoods, and improvements to the roads to Barana Nature Park made travelling to and from Barana and Honiara easier. The women of Barana sold their products at the main markets near the border to Honiara city, but since the market at Barana Nature Park had opened, it had reduced costs such as those of hiring transport to take their products to sell at the main market in the city (Osifelo, 2020).

Image 9

Barana Nature Park Cave Entrance



From Imperial Meet and Greet Services, 2020, Barana Nature Park Caves, [Image].
<https://www.facebook.com/Imperial.Meet.and.Greet/photos/pcb.790792331493891/790792041493920>.

4.3 Sikaiana Cultural Village, east Honiara

Sikaiana Cultural Village is located east of Honiara at Red Beach, approximately 23 km from Honiara city. Sikaiana Cultural Village is home to the Sikaiana people who migrated from Sikaiana Island in Malaita Province and settled in Honiara. Part of the Sikaiana village is constructed and modelled to promote and preserve Sikaiana's culture and identity. Cultural preservation includes activities meant to protect cultural identity and awareness, cultural beliefs and cultural features from loss or disappearance (Gherna & Reddy, 2007). Culture provides people with a connection to certain social values, beliefs, religions or customs. Sikaiana (Stewart Island) is about 144 kilometre east of Malaita Province in the Solomons, and its people are Polynesians. Most migrated to Honiara and settled at Red Beach developing the property where they now live, to showcase their

culture and customs through singing, dancing, storytelling, arts and crafts, cultural performances, and traditional preparations of food and feasting. These atolls are experiencing sea level rise on the island because of climate change (Bilua, 2019).

The Sikaiana people established their village and built themselves houses of modern building materials and created a model of Sikaiana cultural village on the other side of the village. The cultural village includes two local dwelling houses called “*hale*,” one kitchen hut commonly called a “*tapahale*,” (small house), and a traditional house in the centre of the cultural village called “*hale aitu*” (house of spirits). There was also a nursery of coconut trees preserved for transplanting in the cultural village. The establishment of the village was a settlement for Sikaiana people and later, an extension of their model village was created. As this was a settlement village there was no funding nor assistance from the Government, but visits to Sikaiana Cultural village were sold as a unique tourism product by cruise ships. This was a support from the government through the Tourism Solomons where Sikaiana Cultural village was sold as a unique tourism product to cruise ships visiting Honiara, Solomon Islands.

Image 10

Small Children (Pikinini) Welcoming Guests by Standing on Coconut Stumps Near the Entrance to the Cultural Village



From Roxborough. <https://www.roxboroughreport.com/2020/08/in-search-of-giants-the-wild-jungles-of-the-solomon-islands.html>. 2016 The Roxborough Report.

Pikinini (children) stand on the stumps of coconut trees that marked the boundaries of the Cultural village. The children welcome guests at the entrance to the Sikaiana Cultural village.

Image 11

Local Vicar in traditional attire, and New Zealand Visitor



From Roxborough. <https://www.roxboroughreport.com/2020/08/in-search-of-giants-the-wild-jungles-of-the-solomon-islands.html>. 2016 The Roxborough Report.

One prominent and influential senior elder at the Sikaiana cultural village was its vicar, who is pictured in Image 11, dressed in local attire with New Zealand broadcaster and writer Tim Roxborough, in 2016. The hut in the background is made of woven and twined coconut leaves (*tapakau*) used for walling, and the materials used on the roof are *pola*. This is one of the models of a dwelling house (*hale*) in the cultural village. The dwelling houses are furnished with just a sleeping mat and pillow, and are not used, being for exhibition purposes only (Roxborough, 2016).

Image 12

Cultural Performance by Girls and Boys at Sikaiana Cultural village



From Roxborough. <https://www.roxboroughreport.com/2020/08/in-search-of-giants-the-wild-jungles-of-the-solomon-islands.html>. 2016 The Roxborough Report.

The performance in this photograph was normally for tourists who arrived from cruise ships, and other large groups of visitors. Their costumes are made of *tapa* and the leis on their necks are made of the bark of a tree.

4.3.1 Entry fee for the cultural village

The entry fees for the village are: \$100 to \$200 AUD for a day's programme.

The gate takings benefited Sikaiana Cultural village and community, who used them for educational purposes, helping and support for their young women and men to study tourism and hospitality at the Solomon Islands National University in Honiara.

4.3.2 Guided tour of Sikaiana Cultural Village (3 hours)

The guided tour started with a welcome by the entire community, with the children and women at the entrance. A brief introduction to the Sikaiana village was given, including information about their cultural model village. Briefing was made by tour guide, and

orientation was assisted with a map of their small community. Visitors were formally “welcomed” with a youth war dance before being taken to the traditional *hale aitu* (house of spirits). The *hale-aitu* was where most meetings took place, and also showcased displays of local products. This was also where women demonstrated mat and basket weaving, and the art of knitting loin cloths. A display of woven coconut leaves used for thatched roof huts was provided, and making ropes from coconut fibres from the husks, which were plaited and used as strings for tying logs and securing and building huts.

The group was then taken to the two residential huts, (*hale*), made from pandanus leaves, coconut leaves, and log posts. The next place visited was the local kitchen hut, where visitors were shown the different and various methods of local food preparation, such as the way food was roasted and baked over hot stones. Demonstrations of cassava, taro, and bananas cooked with coconut fresh cream using local herbs, leaves for wrapping food, and pudding preparations were also provided. The tour highlighted demonstrations and preparations of *kamaimai* (a toddy drink made from fermented coconut) and preparing coconut sweets by boiling pure and thick coconut oil and shredded coconut flesh until it hardened, then rolling it into small balls of coconut sweets.

The visitors were next taken to witness a demonstration of coconut tree climbing by youths using ropes secured and nestled around their legs before they climbed the trees to get the fruits. These were then thrown to the ground, avoiding break them open, which would lose their contents.

The last part of the tour was with lunch and snacks provided by the Sikaiana villagers, but the most enjoyable part was clearly the cultural performances from the women and men, young people, and children of Sikaiana village. Visitors were also selected and ushered in by the performers to join the dancing and finish off the fun. The singing, and the smiles and laughter create lasting memories of the Sikaiana village and its people.

A good-bye touch was provided, when the villagers accompanied the visitors to their buses, waving them goodbye and thanking them for visiting. The main experience was of the core and unique products of learning from the cultural village, and seeing the cultural *hale* (dwelling houses), the weaving demonstrated in the local *hale-aitu* (house of spirits), cooking and food preparations in the *hale-tapala* (kitchen huts), the preparation of the

toddy drinks from coconuts, preparing of coconut sweets, and most of all, enjoying the cultural dancing in the village.

4.4 Summary

The findings in these case studies showed each of them face the same challenges and barriers. These are in terms of infrastructure, marketing and promotion, and waste management issues. These businesses did not have electricity connections but used solar power. Marketing was a disadvantage for all of them, as they depended on the Government to advertise and promote their products, and the proposed ban on Facebook by the Solomon Islands Government would be a challenge for these businesses. Dolphin View Beach and Barana Nature Park both had Facebook pages and websites which they used to advertise and promote their products, while Sikaiana Cultural village did not have a Facebook page or website but depended entirely on Tourism Solomons to market its products and services. The proposed ban by the Government will greatly affect these small businesses in terms of promotion and marketing, and provision of other information about their products (Kekea, 2020).

CHAPTER 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction: Critical issues for Solomon Islands ecotourism development

This chapter discusses the key findings from the three ecotourism case studies in seeking an answer to the research question, can ecotourism be a potential development tool to improve local livelihoods of indigenous communities in Solomon Islands? The themes from the research findings are discussed to address the research question. The themes are: benefits of ecotourism, cultural sustainability, economic implications, conservation and protection of species, ecotourism natural attractions, barriers and challenges, and certification programmes for ecotourism in Solomon Islands.

5.2 Benefits of ecotourism to indigenous people

Fennell (2002) outlined three benefits of ecotourism which are: psychological, ecological, and educational. Similarly, Honey (2006) claims that if the three core tenants of ecotourism is done well, this can protect and improve the environment, respect local cultures and provide tangible benefits to host communities, and can be educational. This research aligned best to Honey's (2006) definition of *ecotourism* due to its focus on host communities and sustainable tourism development necessary for indigenous engagement in ecotourism. In addition, Ell (2003) included the economic benefits of ecotourism. Ecotourism in particular is considered by the Solomon Islands Government because it encourages economic, environmental, social, and cultural sustainability (Solomon Islands Government, 2018). The case studies considered in this research are examples of three ecotourism businesses owned and managed by indigenous people who utilised the country's natural resources to generate income for themselves, their families, and their communities.

Zeppel (2006) explained that transport is an impediment to Pacific Islands ecotourism development. This was reflected in the case studies as a barrier to development. However, infrastructure development that had taken place in and around the case study destinations was shown to be beneficial to the local communities, improving access, transportation, and importantly, engagement and interest in ecotourism development at a community level. The development of roads leading to these venues had made life for the indigenous people easier due to the improved access to transportation. Before the development of the ecotourism ventures and subsequent roading improvements, travelling in and around the

villages of Guadalcanal was challenging. Transportation and infrastructure issues are not just a local problem but are also barriers to tourism development in the wider region.

Conservation is an ecological and cultural practice where inter-generation knowledge is transferred. Berke (2019, p. 31) explained that

Traditional knowledge and resource management practices have the potential to contribute to the current understanding and use of a wide variety of ecosystems.

This concept was demonstrated at the Sikaiana Cultural village. Traditional practices of food sovereignty are promoted in this destination as a form of cultural sustainability for the people that had relocated as a result of climate change, as they experience sea level rise in their homes. Elders and skilled young men were teaching young girls and boys how to plant coconut trees, how to preserve coconuts for food, and young boys were taught coconut tree climbing, an important skill in the village. Looking after the beach front as an important conservation practice also involved replanting coconuts for food and protecting the environment from soil erosion.

5.3 Cultural sustainability and ecotourism

A principle of ecotourism is to “build environmental and cultural awareness and respect” (Bricker, 2017). Maintaining culture is consistent with this ecotourism principle, and evident in the case of the Sikaiana cultural village.

According to Honey (2008), ecotourism holds the promise of educating visitors and respecting local cultures. This is true, and was evident in these case studies, as their activities reflected the aim of presenting their culture to visitors and sharing it with their younger people.

Cultural preservation refers to events intended to protect awareness of culture, their cultural identity, beliefs and cultural features, from loss or disappearance (Gherna & Reddy, 2007). To the Sikaiana people, maintaining their culture was important, because they are a minority group in the predominantly Melanesian Solomon Islands. Furthermore, it was vital for them to create their own tribal spaces away from the island they had to leave due to the effects of climate change. These forced some island people to move to Guadalcanal, creating their own communities to maintain and sustain their

individual island cultures. Sikaiana cultural village is a re-creation of a cultural village of the Polynesians from Sikaiana Island in the Solomon Islands. The model village is an extension of their own residential village where they maintain the way of life, they left behind on Sikaiana island. Cultural sustainability is vital in creating their own tribal spaces away from islands they had to leave due to the effects of climate change.

The Dolphin View Beach reef tours include half day marine boat cruise to view the dolphins, and snorkel around the reefs and World War II shipwreck nearby. The history and indigenous story behind Dolphin View Beach ecolodge are an important story for the indigenous people of Guadalcanal. The story of Kona-roha and what it means is part of indigenous Guadalcanal legend and story of Dolphin View Beach. When people learn about Dolphin View Beach and what its indigenous name means, they acknowledge the story, and what it means to them, and this is told to young people of that community. The cultural sustainability for Dolphin View Beach was demonstrated in reviving and maintaining the local way indigenous people prepared local food in their hot stone ovens. Women in the village normally prepared local food in hot stone ovens at Dolphin View Beach for guests, as this type of food preparation can cater for large groups of guests. The Dolphin View Beach owners were able to maintain their cultural way of preparing food for guests.

The cultural sustainability for Barana Natural Park was in the preservation of natural attractions such as the waterfall and the caves. Much of the area of Barana was preserved, and as Honiara continues to expand inland, the preservation of the park has enabled the indigenous people of Barana to access much of their resources, so they can plant and make gardens for their survival in this area, as subsistence farmers. The stream, waterfall, and caves were maintained and preserved, and have stories attached to the local's cultural history, which has meaning to the Guadalcanal people. The replanting of trees at Barana was a way of reviving their traditional ways of planting and preserving plants that were used in their herbal medicines.

5.4 Economic implications

Since the establishment of these ventures, the revenue from their products and services has benefitted the communities and those involved. All three cases showed that their

businesses were improving the financial viability and livelihoods of the indigenous people.

The development of Barana Nature Park has enabled local families to sell their garden produce at their market established at the Park, generating income for the families. The entrance and gate fee paid by visitors to the park, was used to pay for the upkeep of the park and compensate the rangers for their services. The establishment of the park had improved the local livelihoods, as local people were able to save money previously spent on hiring transport to move their garden produce to the main markets in Honiara, whereas now they were able to sell this in the Barana market.

The inclusion of Sikaiana cultural village as a unique attraction in Honiara was sold as a package to cruise ships, which was a benefit to the local people. Sikaiana cultural village were also benefitting from the gate takings, and the proceedings of these, provided education opportunities for their young people to study at the national university in Honiara. The selling of local artefacts to tourists also benefitted the locals involved in the cultural village.

Dolphin View Beach has also benefitted from its services and products. The gate takings from this enabled the family to purchase linen and cutlery for their ecolodges, and the purchases of food crops and fish from locals benefitted the indigenous community at Dolphin View Beach. Furthermore, it provided employment for local people in the community, who helped to clean up the beachfront, or skippered boats that took tourists on marine boat cruises. Tourists went to the local village nearby to purchase fruit and local food, which also provided a means of income for the local people. The case studies showed that these ventures provided income for locals and the communities involved in the businesses.

5.5 Conservation of resources and protection of wildlife

The Solomon Islands Government encourages indigenous people to participate in and explore all the rich natural potential the Solomon Islands has to offer, so this can be used as a catalyst for tourism development. Forbes (2015) described the Solomon Islands as a diverse destination with varied cultures, a unique, unspoilt natural environment, and unique flora and fauna. This provides the Solomon Islands with a significant product for ecotourism development. Ecotourism can assist in preserving the natural product that the

Solomons has to offer as a form of economic development and alternative to destructive industries such as logging and mining (Katovai et al., 2015). All three case studies prioritised the environmental, cultural and social sustainability aspects of their businesses.

Dolphin View Beach ecolodge was established by the owners in a place where dolphins can be protected and allowed to swim freely in their natural habitat. Dolphin View Beach ecolodges were utilising the natural beauty of the beach and abundant wildlife. Moreover, by utilising local knowledge and engaging the community in business operations, this business focus was on long-term environmental protection.

Barana Nature Park was the only park in Honiara and had much to offer in terms of its natural attractions. Because of this business, the waterfall, the caves, and the vast rainforest were being preserved because of their appeal to visitors. Barana Nature Park management focused on environmental protection and provided an educational component for both tourists and the local tribal peoples. This combined social benefits in indigenous knowledge to protect wildlife and provide an avenue for indigenous participation in ecotourism activities. This greatly increased environmental awareness among the indigenous tribes of Barana.

Sikaiana Cultural Village's replanting of coconut trees was to protect the village from soil erosion, and also from the high tides and rough seas during natural disasters such as cyclones and tsunamis. The preservation of coconuts in the village was a means of food preservation for droughts and natural disasters as well. According to Diedrich & Aswan (2016) confirm small islands in the Pacific Islands, which include the Solomon Islands, are vulnerable to social and ecological stresses because of the poor adaptive qualities of their communities. Promoting and sustaining indigenous environmental knowledge is important to reduce the environmental stressors that the people of small islands are facing, such as the impacts of climate change.

5.6 Barriers and challenges

These case studies faced challenges while operating as ecotourism businesses. These challenges include infrastructure issues, corruption issues, lack of training for local operators, lack of marketing and management skills, waste management issues and the lack of proper rubbish disposal, and the absence of ecotourism eco-labels programmes.

The challenges experienced by these ventures hinder their progress of work and further hinders the development of other ecotourism businesses.

Ecotourism was promoted as an alternative to logging in the Solomon Islands, but needs good promotion and marketing for it to be financially viable – otherwise, it will fail (Hviding & Bayliss-Smith, 2000). An example of this was found in the Taha-Matangi Resthouse on Lake Tegano, Rennell Island, which is a world heritage site. Taha-Matangi was the first ecolodge accommodation on Rennell Island in the Solomon Islands, initiated with aid donor funding. However, due to poor management and limited marketing opportunities, the business failed and is no longer operating. This signifies the importance of marketing for ecotourism businesses.

Milne et al. (2013) observed that the islands of the South Pacific are challenged in how to develop and manage tourism that can become a sustainable source of livelihood for future generations, without destroying the value of life, and natural, cultural resources. This was a challenge faced by these three cases in their operations, a challenge for them to be sustainable in their businesses.

The Sikaiana Cultural Village depended on cruise boats that came to the Solomon Islands because their products were sold through promotions on cruise ships, by Tourism Solomons. The bulk of their guests were mostly tourists from cruise ships. Now, Sikaiana Cultural Village is challenged even more by travelling restrictions for the cruise industry because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This has severely affected the cruise industry, so the Sikaiana Cultural Village will struggle to stay viable, with fewer tourists visiting the Solomon Islands. The issue is the same for Dolphin View Beach and Barana Nature Park. These businesses can resort to promoting to the domestic market, but this is only a small group of visitors likely to visit these destinations.

Local ecotourism operators in the Solomon Islands struggle to manage their businesses, and without assistance from government or non-governmental organisations, their businesses may fail. Such failures are common in Melanesia, according to Foale and McIntyre (2005).

The establishment of Barana Nature Park was through the assistance received from the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) and Dolphin View Beach was started with the owner's funds and later received assistance from the Enhanced

Integrated Funds (EIF) facilitated by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in Honiara. Sikaiana Cultural village however, had no assistance to start the business. The major challenge now, is how these businesses will continue to sustain and keep their operations going, when there are no guests or visitors coming due to the COVID-19 travel restrictions.

Ineffective and insufficient marketing are the main reasons ecotourism businesses in developing countries could not attract visitors to their destinations (Honey, 2008). Another challenge faced by indigenous ecotourism operators is in a lack of marketing and promotions. These businesses depend on government assistance to market and promote their products internationally.

Barana Nature Park and Dolphin View Beach each had a webpage and Facebook site for marketing their products, but it is not known how many use their Facebook and websites or respond to them. Sikaiana Cultural Village depended entirely on the Government through Tourism Solomons for marketing, but there is not much information about any of these destinations. For tourists to be able to make informed decisions about visiting places, they need relevant information about the destination, as they will not visit a place, they know nothing about. The recent call by the Solomon Islands Government to suspend Facebook in the Solomon Islands will have a major impact on these small local businesses, as the suspension of Facebook will only complicate their marketing. As the ventures are remote and isolated from international ecotourism markets, a Facebook suspension will affect the businesses, the local communities, and their links to the outside world, as much of these are through social media, especially Facebook (Kekea, 2020).

Cheer et al. (2019) noted that small economic bases such as Pacific Islands countries, have to pursue additional tourism development despite the fundamental constraints that make them less competitive than southeast Asian destinations. The three cases in this study faced challenges and were constrained and are less competitive than are other destinations in southeast Asian destinations, because of their remoteness from international markets. In addition, their infrastructure was poor and needed improvement. All three cases faced the challenge of tourism development in terms of their infrastructure and were particularly challenged by being remote from international ecotourism markets.

Infrastructure is a barrier to ecotourism businesses in Honiara. Infrastructure is a list of important facilities and systems that support functions of businesses, including the services and facilities necessary for them to function. Barriers experienced by indigenous people were poor infrastructure and waste management problems. All three cases faced challenges in infrastructure.

Dolphin View Beach faced a challenge in terms of infrastructure, as there was no electricity from a local grid, no hot water, and no power-points in the venues and lodges, which were powered with solar energy. Dolphin View Beach had no main electricity but relied on solar power. A fuelled generator was available, but not used much because it consumed a lot of fuel, which is expensive. Both Barana Nature Park and Sikaiana Cultural Village were fully equipped with solar power, but no electricity from the main grid, so faced the same problems as did Dolphin View Beach ecolodges. These challenges could have an effect on tourists wanting to visit the Solomon Islands. The businesses were operating and in the vicinity of Honiara city and close to the city, so there should be improvements made to the infrastructure and services.

Another challenge faced by the three ecotourism businesses was the issue of waste management and rubbish disposal. There was no regular collection of rubbish or rubbish bins, nor segregation of green waste or compost from other rubbish, nor any collection of recyclable rubbish.

The three case studies were challenged as they struggled to meet the requirements of the Minimum Standards and Classification for tourism accommodation. There were areas that needed attention as it did not meet some criterias, especially the ecolodges and the disposing of their rubbish. These venues didn't have reception areas, but visitors congregated at some entrance and were met by the hosts. There were not enough power sockets in the strategic locations in the ecolodges. The Minimum Standard and Classification for tourism accommodation required accommodations to have a Reception area where services should be conducted. Disposing of their rubbish was a challenge, rubbish was not recycled but disposed either in the dug-out pits, rubbish was either buried or burnt. Rubbish should be disposed properly, the recyclable materials were not separated from rubbish and stored separately. Enforcing the codes of conduct practice was weak and a challenge faced by the ecotourism operators.

Corruption is an issue in the Solomon Islands that continues to hinder development, affecting infrastructure and other businesses, including tourism. The corruption will deter visitors from coming to the Islands. The public has been discontented and regarded corruption as a major obstacle to sustainable development in the islands. In a recent survey conducted by Transparency Solomon Islands in 2013, (United Nations Development Programme Pacific, 2020), illustrated there was high percent of corruption involving bribery, illegal process of permit, and other issues related to land registration.

These three case studies experienced similar challenges. An example of this was when the Government announced that funds will be available for indigenous business operators to assist with their businesses to help them cope with the economic effects of the COVID 19 pandemic, and local business operators were encouraged to apply for funding. Barana Nature park and Dolphin View Beach applied for funding but were not qualified, while Sikaiana Cultural Village did not apply. Recipients who were qualified and approved for funding kept waiting, as the list of approved businesses kept changing, and reported on social media and also on print media (RNZ Pacific news, 2020). This shows the corrupt dealing of high officials entrusted to facilitate and allocate these public funds to help indigenous businesses. Corruption needs to be dealt with, as it hinders the development of businesses in the Solomon Islands.

5.7 Certification, accreditation, eco-label programmes for Solomon Islands

A further concern was the lack of quality standards, as there was no ecotourism certification in the Solomon Islands. However, a code of practice for the tourism sector and a minimum standard and classification for tourism accommodation for ecotourism operators was provided to guide ecotourism businesses (Kekea, 2018).

The three cases studies showed that there was lack of environmental waste management, which was a concern in needed attention. This was a challenge for the ecotourism businesses, however, the launching of the Minimum Standards and Classification for Tourism Accommodation by the Solomon Islands Government in 2018 was an important step for the Solomon Islands tourism and hospitality sector. This provided a criterion and guide to adopt in order to provide international quality services in the Solomon Islands (Minimum Standards and Classification for Tourism Accommodation report, 2018).

Dolphin View Beach ecolodges, like other ecolodge businesses affiliated to Solomon Tourism, was reviewed by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism division staff to ensure it met the required criteria of ecolodge businesses. A major challenge for these businesses was the disposal of their rubbish, which was not eco-friendly.

Other environmental issues needed to be considered, and as these businesses grow, issues of human waste will become a concern. An example of this is in the Muri Lagoon in the Cook Islands, where the tourism sector failed to deal appropriately with waste. This is a concern and this issue need to be considered by Solomon Islands tourism sector in their strategic plan (Evans, 2019).

5.8 Summary

In conclusion, the findings showed that there is ecotourism potential and natural attractions in the Solomon Islands, but that these are still underutilised. Assistance from donors, non-governmental organisations and the Government was still needed for ecotourism businesses. Local ecotourism operators still faced challenges in terms of marketing and promoting their products and services internationally and locally. There were barriers to indigenous eco-tourism in the Solomon Islands, but the people were striving to utilise their natural resources and move away from destructive activities such as logging and mining. Cultural sustainability is part of ecotourism, and it is important for the Solomon Islands to maintain its diverse culture. There were no specific certification, accreditation, or eco-label programmes for the Solomon Islands.

Corruption continued to be an issue and a hindrance to ecotourism development in the Solomon Islands, and will discourage tourists from visiting the Islands.

The issue of waste management was a challenge that needed attention from the Government; in all three cases, the disposal of their rubbish was in pits where it was either burned or buried them. This is inadequate and did not meet ecotourism principles and criteria.

CHAPTER 6: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the conclusions to this study, which analysed academic literature to determine whether ecotourism has potential for development to improve and enhance indigenous people's livelihoods in the Solomon Islands communities. The focal points of the literature were indigenous ecotourism, benefits, ecotourism potentials, and barriers to ecotourism in the Solomon Islands. Three indigenous ecotourism case studies were explored to address the research question, "can ecotourism be a potential development tool to improve indigenous livelihoods and communities in Solomon Islands?"

6.2 Answering the research question

This study sought to determine whether ecotourism is a potential tourism development tool to improve the local livelihoods of indigenous communities in the Solomon Islands. The research investigated potential ecotourism products and services in the Solomon Islands to determine the benefits of ecotourism and why ecotourism is important for the Solomon Islands.

This research found psychological, ecological, educational and economic benefits of ecotourism, which were identified from the analysis of the three case studies of indigenous ecotourism communities. It was also found that ecotourism has various components, and these are aligned with cultural sustainability; due to locals' participation in ecotourism, conservation of the resources and protection of wildlife was achieved by utilising their natural resources in non-destructive activities, which produced benefits for the local people. The Solomon Islands Government encourages indigenous people to participate and explore the rich potential that the Solomon Islands can offer and use this as a catalyst for tourism development (Forbes Solomon Islands Untold riches, 2015); as the findings in this research reveal, that indigenous communities were participating, and utilising the natural resources they owned, for ecotourism activities. This is encouraging because the involvement and participation of indigenous communities in ecotourism businesses in utilising their natural resources this way, is contributing to tourism development in the Solomon Islands.

The psychological benefits of ecotourism to indigenous people were evident in their attachment to nature and their environment because they survive on these, and the natural environment had stories attached to it. The case studies showed that local people were turning their resources into ecotourism activities and at the same time preserving their environments, so they could enjoy the natural surroundings and reclaim the use of their resources from destructive logging activities. The natural environment and surroundings are psychologically enriching for both locals and visitors. This contributed to their psychological well-being, which also improves their quality of life.

Ecological benefits accrue to indigenous communities through ecotourism, because it helps protect natural habitats and pristine environments. As evident from the case studies, ecotourism activities allowed the indigenous communities to build on their resources and preserve the environment without harming it. Their protection of species and wildlife meant that local wildlife could thrive, and both locals and visitors could enjoy the untouched destinations.

This research also observed the educational benefits of ecotourism for indigenous communities. The communities learnt that with ecotourism, they are learning to be able to conserve and preserve their lands and can utilise them in non-destructive activities. The protection of wildlife educated locals and showed them that ecotourism activities can be tourism attractions but also to protect wildlife and sea animals as well. The indigenous knowledge of managing their resources has significant potential to contribute to existing knowledge and understandings, helping them utilise their different culture, the environment and resources. Communities learnt the importance of having adequate infrastructure for the operations of ecotourism businesses.

From an economic perspective, the findings showed that participation in ecotourism had economic benefits to local families, as the proceedings of their ecotourism businesses helped families generate an income to purchase items needed for their homes. The economic benefits may be small, but they were sustaining them in their efforts in the ecotourism businesses.

The findings also indicated that partnerships with government, aid donors and NGOs, enhanced indigenous participation in ecotourism businesses, and was a way of supporting indigenous communities' efforts and commitment. In its national tourism strategy plans

for 2015 to 2019, the Government revealed that tourism was its focus area, and an area where it can offer support to indigenous ecotourism businesses to develop tourism for the country.

Indigenous networks can be established with local people and landowners, chiefs, local farmers, and local fishermen, to support each other to utilise their resources to improve their livelihoods and communities. However, to lead productive livelihoods in their communities, the activities need to conform to the guiding principles of ecotourism practices. Their activities should be sustainable and not have negative impacts on their environment or community.

6.3 Barriers to ecotourism in the Solomon Islands

The findings of this research confirm that there is ecotourism potential in the Solomon Islands and indigenous communities can utilise and develop it. However, there are also barriers faced by indigenous communities, so the potential of ecotourism was not fully realised by either the Government or the local population.

The research found that the barriers were: poor infrastructure, dependency on government for national marketing, limited communications and internet capacity to access international markets, and marketing skills. These are key critical issues and barriers that hinder ecotourism developments, thus not enhancing ecotourism potential for indigenous communities, as the discussion shows.

1. *Infrastructure* is identified as a barrier to ecotourism and development, and limits tourism development in terms of transport to the destinations. Infrastructure improvements are national projects that need the attention. Local communities in and around the regions also benefit where roads are developed, encouraging local community engagement in the tourism industry.
2. Dependency on government for national marketing limits communication. For example, the ecotourism ventures in this study depended on the Government through Tourism Solomons, to promote and advertise their products abroad, but there was insufficient information available about these destinations. This hindered the ability of businesses to market themselves. Government could support ecotourism development by marketing the islands internationally. The inclusion of remote and other provinces in the Government's marketing strategies

by working with provincial tourism division, would develop and enhance this sector.

3. Internet capacity to access international markets was a significant barrier to development. The internet capacity was limited, minimising access to international markets. Internet services are expensive, so remote areas in the Solomon Islands cannot access internet services. Better internet capacity with Government support, would benefit whole communities in creating capacity, providing for the self-determination of tourism business marketing activities. This also provides better education for indigenous people. The proposed ban on Facebook by the Solomon Islands Government will affect promotions and advertising of tourism products. Marketing and promotion should be at both national and individual business levels.
4. In terms of education, indigenous communities need more awareness of ecotourism activities. The analysis of the three case studies showed that the Solomon Islands have ecotourism potential, but an awareness of this was not present; locals need to be aware of their ecotourism potential, and what they can do, and how they can exploit the potential. The tourism marketing agency of the Government, through its marketing strategies, could improve awareness to all - not just for Guadalcanal alone but for other provinces and other islands. Remote islands have natural resources that are unspoiled, so need to be aware of their potential for ecotourism.

This research provides information for indigenous communities and aims to contribute to knowledge about potential ecotourism products and the barriers to ecotourism development. It also emphasises the importance of support from the Government to the tourism sector, as tourism development for the indigenous communities in Solomon Islands requires a collaborative effort from indigenous communities, tourism stakeholders, and the Government.

6.4 Limitations

Limitations are usually parts in a research which a researcher has no control, and can include methodological constraints, the length of the study, and response rates (Roberts, 2010). Limitations to this research included the absence of the local voices, as the analysis was based on secondary data. Therefore, the inability to interview indigenous people and

collect primary data was a limitation in this study. Distance was also a limitation due to travel restrictions because of COVID-19, as border closings for both New Zealand and the Solomon Islands did not permit the researcher to travel home to the Solomons to collect primary data.

Another limitation was in the paucity of web-based information, as relevant evidence and information about ecotourism in the Solomon Islands on websites and Facebook were limited. Each island in the Solomon Islands is different and faces different challenges. The case studies in this research were based on Guadalcanal, where the capital city is located, and did not reflect the wider audience representing indigenous ecotourism operators in the Solomon Islands. Therefore, there is a need to gain insights into the ecotourism potential of the outer islands and provinces of the Solomon Islands. This would provide a wider context of ecotourism development potential in the Solomon Islands.

6.5 Future research

Future research should include small ecotourism ventures in remote and other provinces in the Solomon Islands to provide a wider understanding and reflection on what ecotourism means for the Solomon Islands. An in-depth study using primary data research is recommended rather than further research based on secondary data, as it is important to uncover the real issues faced by indigenous people. Collecting primary data will allow researchers to conduct a thorough investigation into ecotourism's characteristics and extend the knowledge based to cover remote and outer islands. Data and information collected from a wider region will better reflect the ecotourism potential of the Solomon Islands.

6.6 Conclusion

Ecotourism in the Solomon Islands is a viable option, however, there are barriers to ecotourism in the Solomon Islands. These include issues such as poor infrastructure, lack of marketing skills, and limited communications and internet capacity to access international markets and education. This needs to be overcome, ecotourism needs to be supported in order to improve the livelihoods of the local indigenous people. However, due to the inability of local communities to address barriers to tourism development at the local level, national strategies must respond to these critical issues to improve the

infrastructure and deal with training for skilled personnel, and improve marketing and communication, as these deficits are hindering the development of the country.

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