

## Improving tourism yield on Niue: relevant lessons for other South Pacific nations

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### Abstract

Tourism is playing a growing role in many Pacific Island economies and is seen as an area of policy significance by governments and donors. One area that is often highlighted as having potential to enhance the local benefits of tourism is the creation of linkages to agriculture. The objectives of this paper are to present an overview of the existing linkages between tourism and agriculture and the potential to nurture their linkages in Niue. This paper also highlights relevant lessons in nurturing tourism–agriculture linkages for other ‘islands’ in the Pacific. The discussion within this paper is built from a total of 284 responses received from the online tourist survey, semi-structured interviews with 29 growers, 34 tourism operators and 12 government officials, and conversations held with ten elders, three village councillors and 60 tourists in Niue. Although tourism in Niue will continue to exist as a small-scale activity and its linkages to agriculture will be limited, there is potential to nurture the linkages between them incrementally over time. The latent demand that exists for ‘local and unique’ experiences is something that can improve tourism–agriculture linkages. Attempts made by the administrators of tourist websites in Niue to provide up-to-date information and the increasing number of small-scale enterprises and village projects reflect the participation of Niueans and

the eagerness of both the governments of Niue and New Zealand to nurture a yield-based tourism industry.

**Keywords:** tourism, agriculture, linkages, South Pacific, economies

## **Introduction**

South Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS) including Niue face an immediate problem of creating employment opportunities, generating income and sustaining livelihoods (Australian Agency for International Development [AUSAID], 2006; Prasad & Roy, 2008, p. 165). The tourism industry is considered by governments and donor agencies to be a key force in creating future economic development (Connell, 2007; Government of Niue, 2008). The industry is seen as an attractive development option in part because, if well managed, it has the potential to generate income while also sustaining the cultural and natural resources of these small nations (Government of New Zealand, 2011; Milne, 1992, 2005; World Tourism Organization [WTO], 2006).

The Government of Niue has turned to the tourism industry as a source of sustainable economic development (Brown & Connell, 2006, p. 17; Connell & Brown, 2005; Government of Niue, 2007, 2008). The challenge for the government is how to manage the development of the tourism industry in such a way that it can be a lasting source of livelihood and not degrade the quality of life and natural and cultural resources upon which it depends (AUSAID, 2006; Government of New Zealand, 2011; Government of Niue, 2005).

One way to build the economic development potential of tourism is to link it more effectively to other sectors of the economy (Meyer, 2007; Milne, 2009, 2010a; Sims, 2009; WTO, 2006). Research into the linkages between tourism and agriculture is imperative if we are to improve the distribution of tourism's benefits to both rural and urban populations, and to strengthen local food systems (Milne, 2010b; Telfer & Wall, 1996; Torres & Momsen, 2004).

The objectives of this paper are: (i) to present an overview of the existing linkages between tourism and agriculture in Niue; (ii) to shed light on the potential to nurture the linkages between the two sectors on the island and, (iii) to highlight relevant lessons learned

from the case of Niue for other island nations in the Pacific region, especially those that are struggling to foster a small-scale tourism industry.

## **Method**

This paper adopts a post-positivist paradigm in order to gain a deeper understanding of the current linkages between tourism and agriculture in Niue and the potential to nurture these between the two sectors. The aim of post-positivist research is explanation, ultimately enabling the prediction and control of phenomena, whether physical or human (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 211). Post-positivism relies on multiple methods as a way of capturing as much of reality as possible and emphasises the discovery and verification of theories (Bryman, 2008, p. 18; Crotty, 1998, p. 33; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 9; Denzin & Ryan, 2007, p. 583; Teddlie & Johnson, 2009, p. 69). Post-positivists believe that the world may not be 'knowable' because of its infinite complexity and openness to interpretation (Crotty, 1998, p. 33; Denzin & Ryan, 2007, p. 588; Miller, 2005, p. 39; O'Leary, 2004, p. 6). The post-positivist paradigm illustrates that the world is not fixed because 'the truth' depends on the limits of a researcher's ability to define shifting phenomena and what might be 'the truth' for one person or cultural group may not be for another (Bryman, 2008, p. 18; O'Leary, 2004, p. 6; Pernecky, 2007, p. 216).

For post-positivists, reflexive research demands that understandings of scientific endeavour begin to shift because a study can be based on the senses while also being intuitive – hunches, metaphorical understandings and creativity are all legitimate ways of knowing and exploring the world. Research is regarded as 'holistic' due to its ability to explore systems, and the whole is often seen as more than merely the sum of its parts (Crotty, 1998, p. 33; Guba & Lincoln, 1998, pp. 212–213; O'Leary, 2004, p. 6; Teddlie & Johnson, 2009, p. 69). The paradigm allows the researcher to work for and with the participants and to be subjective, and the researcher's knowledge is acknowledged as being value-bound (O'Leary, 2004, pp. 6–7; Pernecky, 2007, p. 216; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2006, p. 80).

Post-positivists attempt to use systematic and rigorous research approaches to achieve reliable findings. The paradigm demonstrates that the context-specific nature of research may not lend itself to reproducibility, but research can be verifiable through full and transparent explication of method (Crotty, 1998, p. 41; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 9; O’Leary, 2004, p. 7). Post-positivists recognise the uniqueness of situations and/or cultural groups but can still seek broader value in their findings. Although the findings may not be able to be generalised, they have their own intrinsic worth or are transferable, i.e. the lessons learned from one context are applicable to other contexts (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 9; Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 212). Replicated findings are probably true but always subject to falsification (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 205; Jamal & Everett, 2007, p. 62). The post-positivist stance asserts the importance of values, passion and politics in research because the researcher is required to see the whole picture, to take a distanced view or an overview. A researcher views oneself as someone who conducts research among other people and learns with them, rather than conducting research on them (Crotty, 1998, p. 41; Miller, 2005, p. 40; Ryan, 2006, p. 18).

Tourism research usually lies on a continuum between quantitative and qualitative methods (Denzin & Ryan, 2007, p. 583; Teddlie & Johnson, 2009, p. 69). Pansiri (2005) argues that researchers need to embrace a general recognition of the legitimacy of a variety of research strategies in order to enhance the quest for human understanding. This paper illustrates the assumptions and elements of the post-positivist paradigm through the steps taken in organising, collecting and applying the research data. The assumptions of this study coincide with many of the key assumptions and elements of post-positivism, such as the participation of key stakeholders in designing research tools and the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data.

The world view of this study also coincides with the assumptions of the post-positivist paradigm such as the use of multiple stakeholder groups in order to explore the potential of tourism and agriculture linkages in Niue. Overall, the adoption of a post-positivist paradigm means that the findings are assumed to be of value to the stakeholders of tourism and agriculture sectors in

Niue, including government and donor agencies, as well as of relevance to other MIRAB nations in the region. This research uses the case of Niue to examine the linkages between tourism and agriculture in Pacific SIDS, especially the smaller island nations that are an exemplar of an economy that characterises of Migration, Remittances, Aid and Bureaucracy (MIRAB) and a relatively underdeveloped tourism industry (Bertram, 1986, 1999; Bertram & Watters, 1985; Panakera, Willson, Ryan & Liu, 2011; Taumoepeau, 2009). Understanding the current status of agriculture and tourism and the linkages between the two sectors is critical in comprehending the factors that influence the links between them.

A mixed-methods approach was used to gather the necessary data for this research. The triangulation of research methods is crucial because it enable a thorough exploration of the linkages between tourism and agriculture in Pacific SIDS, by using multiple data collection, analytical methods and perspectives (Ivankova & Creswell, 2009, p. 137; Rocco, Bliss, Gallagher & Perez-Prado, 2003; Veal, 2006, p. 40). The pre-field-work phase consisted of a secondary literature review and discussion with key stakeholders in order to design the research tools. The field-work phase that was conducted for a period of three months in Niue included an online visitor survey, semi-structured interviews with growers, SMTEs and government officials, and discussions with village councillors and elders. Each step fed into the next, with the secondary literature review and discussion with key stakeholders informing the tourist survey and the interviews of the SMTEs, growers, and tourism and agriculture industry officials. The researcher, with assistance from tourism and agriculture industry officials in Niue, identified growers, SMTEs, government officials, village councils and elders and organised interviews with them. The tourism and agriculture officials in Niue also assisted the researcher in informing the tourists on the island about the online visitor departure survey. The discussion within this paper is built from a total of 284 responses received from the online tourist survey, semi-structured interviews with 29 growers, 34 tourism operators and 12 government officials, and informal conversations held with ten elders, three village councillors and 60 tourists in Niue.

## **An overview of the tourism and agriculture sectors in Niue and the existing linkages between them**

The agriculture sector in Niue operates mainly at the subsistence level, and exports are relatively limited with a focus on taro and coconuts exported to New Zealand on an ad hoc basis. The majority of households grow root crops such as taro, yams, cassava and kumara and local greens including *polo*, *liku* and *sinapi* in their bush gardens. The food is grown for family consumption with the occasional sale of surplus to generate a small income. Pigs have an important cultural significance as they are kept for special feasts and ceremonies, and most households keep a few pigs which are fed food scraps and coconuts. Currently the government is trying to encourage locals to grow more fruit and vegetables as part of a healthy diet and as a way of earning supplementary income. Producing surplus for sale will minimise imports and meet the demand for locally grown produce from the tourism sector.

The tourism sector is described by stakeholders as “small”. The industry is dominated by donor-assisted government investment in the island’s only resort hotel and a few small-scale operations run by locals. The online visitor survey and government statistics (Statistics Niue, 2007) show that New Zealanders make up the majority (72%) of arrivals to Niue. Visitors from outside New Zealand are mostly from Australia and other Pacific Islands. Approximately 13% of the visitors surveyed during the research period are of Niuean background. The majority of the visitors to Niue have a tertiary qualification and are high-income earners. The findings from the online survey and discussions with visitors show that a latent demand exists for local and unique experiences in Niue. In particular, returning Niueans are eager to show their children their roots and culture and visit extended family on the island. The average expenditure per visitor per night is NZ\$92 and this is due in part to the limited availability of products and services for tourists to purchase or participate in. Currently the ability to experience local food and connect to village life and really begin to understand Niue is relatively limited for most visitors.

The most influential factors leading visitors to travel to Niue (in order of declining importance) are the island’s natural scenery, nature-based or marine-related activities, people, its climate, local culture, local food and cuisine, value for money and travel time. Tourists to

Niue are generally eager to escape their hectic daily lifestyle and experience a slower pace of life while participating in nature-based activities. The elements of the visit providing the greatest satisfaction to tourists are the friendliness of locals, ability to experience the environment, sightseeing and watching nature, snorkelling and interactions with local people. Tourists' evident interest in gaining a greater sense of Niue and its people is paralleled by their limited satisfaction with the range of and ability to access village and agricultural activities and local food. Slightly more than half of the visitors brought some canned food with them to Niue. The reasons for bringing canned food to Niue are the irregular opening times of the relatively few cafés, restaurants and shops located around the island and the high cost of imported groceries. It is also important to note that for some visitors eating local food does not matter to them as they may want to eat only a bit of Niuean cuisine while relying mostly on their usual food from their country of residence – the findings from the online survey highlighted that about 30% of visitors said that eating more local food did not matter to them.

Nearly all the meals offered at cafés and restaurants are made from imported produce and largely consist of western-style fast-food dishes such as burgers, fish and chips, paninis and wraps; the visitors in Niue have little opportunity to experience local food during their stay on the island. The only opportunity for many is a weekly island buffet night provided by one restaurant operator. Nearly all of the visitors who had the opportunity to taste Niuean food stated that they enjoyed eating local cuisine and would have liked to eat more of it.

Similarly, agriculture-related, village, or food-based experiences are very rarely offered and are dependent on special requests made by tourists. It is important to note that visitors showed a strong interest in participating in village feasts, local food preparation and farm visits, if they were available.

### **The potential to nurture the linkages between tourism and agriculture sectors in Niue**

It is clear that tourists have a positive and unique experience when visiting Niue. The average Niuean visitor is highly educated, relatively wealthy and very much interested in interactive experiences and in getting a real 'sense of place' while in Niue. This is the ideal visitor around which to build a yield-based sustainable tourism strategy – however, the potential opportunity

to generate additional income and stimulate local economies is not necessarily exploited. The challenge is to ensure that the experiences and products on offer in Niue can meet these visitors' desire for something unique and 'local' (New Zealand Tourism Research Institute [NZTRI], 2009).

The research shows that visitors would be willing to spend more but they find it difficult to access products and experiences that they can purchase or participate in. Visitors stated that they would like to experience local culture and agriculture-related activities during their return holiday on the island. While there is potential to package and present the physical landscape to the visitor, what is missing at the moment is the cultural dimension and the related stories and local knowledge that provide a true 'sense of place' – these would encourage tourists to stay longer and spend more money.

The majority of the stakeholders from the tourism and agriculture sectors said that the linkages between the two sectors are minimal. Currently the main avenue for visitors to access local produce is through the market; however, due to its limited supply, the produce is normally all sold by 9 a.m. – when tourists are usually just arriving. The purchase of imported food by café and restaurant operators represents more than 90% of their total food costs. The most commonly used imported foods include meat, dairy products, fruits and vegetables. The Small and Medium Tourism Enterprise (SMTE) operators prefer to purchase local produce, if available, due to its freshness and, generally, lower costs. And even during the off-season when locally grown produce can be more expensive than the imported products, many SMTE operators feel that they have a social responsibility to support local agriculture. The types of local produce that café and restaurant operators usually bought from growers include tomato, lettuce, cabbage, cucumber, capsicum, taro, banana, pawpaw, passionfruit and drinking coconut for use in meal preparations for tourists. The café and restaurant operators mentioned that when they visit the local marketplace they usually buy whatever local produce is available and then use it in meals so that visitors can taste local cuisine.

There are a few cases of emerging success stories of local food and agriculture-related experiences by SMTEs on Niue. These range from weekly food buffet nights and bush-walk tours, to village lifestyle and agriculture-related experiences. Returning Niueans are usually at

the forefront of setting up small-scale tourism enterprises on the island, using their savings and the skills that they have gained from overseas. These returning Niueans display their desire to get back to their roots by setting up small enterprises that provide local experiences for tourists but that still allow the operators to spend time with extended family and participate in village activities – something that underpins their eagerness for a ‘balanced Niuean life’.

Small-scale tourism developments such as well-managed village-based experiences create linkages to the local economy and increase local participation in the industry (Gladstone, 2005, p. 196; Scheyvens, 2002, p. 11; Weaver, 2006, p. 43). Recently initiatives have been made by villages to offer cultural experiences for tourists, including village-based accommodation. One village (Lakepa) has completed the renovation of an old school building at the end of 2010 in order to provide village-based accommodation for tourists. The village-based accommodation will mainly be for returning Niueans who would like to spend their holiday in the village and participate in cultural activities. Villagers are also looking at providing village-based activities when the renovation and construction of the accommodation is complete. In particular, there will be a focus on providing local produce cooked in traditional ways.

While new and existing products can offer the opportunity to create linkages between tourism and agriculture and food in Niue, such developments cannot occur without effective dissemination of information to visitors. The surveyed tourists said they mainly relied on the internet and word of mouth for information when planning their trip to Niue. Other sources of information such as prior personal knowledge, travel books and guides, travel agents and television were less commonly used. More than two-thirds of visitors surveyed went to the niueisland.com website prior to their travel. This site is the main source of tourism information about the island used on the web. Most of the visitors noted that the website is easy to find, a good source of information, and a useful tool for trip planning.

An audit in 2009 of the major websites that promote tourism in Niue ([www.niueisland.com](http://www.niueisland.com), [www.gov.nu](http://www.gov.nu) and [www.spto.org/spto/cms/destinations/niue/](http://www.spto.org/spto/cms/destinations/niue/)) showed that they contained very little information about local food and cuisine, or about village- or agriculture-based activities and experiences available for tourists. The lack of information about local activities and experiences on the major tourism websites that promote Niue means that

key information is not imparted to the visitor prior to their arrival – something found in other destinations as well (Milne, 2009; NZTRI, 2009).

Increased accessibility of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), especially the internet, enables SMTEs and local communities to communicate directly with potential tourists at relatively low cost, and this trend will only grow over time (Levinson & Milne, 2004; Milne, Mason & Hasse, 2004, p. 185; Soteriades, Aivalis & Varvaressos, 2004). Unfortunately, as with the three major websites, very few of the local Niuean business websites feature or discuss local food and related cultural experiences available for the visitor during their stay in Niue. In 2011 the major tourism website in Niue ([www.niueisland.com](http://www.niueisland.com)) was upgraded, possibly as a result of the 2009 NZTRI report prepared for the Government of Niue. While the site does now provide more thorough and up-to-date tourist information than it did previously, there is still more work to be done in developing tourist information on local village and agriculture-related experiences in Niue.

Tourism products are most commonly promoted to visitors after their arrival on the island by word of mouth. In 2007 the local SMTEs started to produce a weekly newsletter to inform tourists on the activities available on the island that week. This newsletter still has potential to present more information about local food, village and agricultural activities. It is important to note that Berno and Oliver's (2010) South Pacific recipe book *Me' a Kai* is an exemplar of increasing awareness of the overall South Pacific cuisine in the marketplace and books like this nurture the linkages between tourism and agriculture in island nations. Although Niue is not featured in *Me' a Kai*, the stakeholders on the island are eager to gather and present local recipes in future publications. All the stakeholders in Niue are enthusiastic about also documenting stories related to local food and culture through podcasts in the future.

Several visitors highlighted the limited availability of suitable signage and brochures on the island as a critical issue. Information connects potential visitors with a tourism site via promotional and informational media; it also helps orient visitors to new sites and assists them in creating their own tourism experiences (Miyakuni & Stoep, 2006).

Researchers (Berno & Oliver, 2010, pp. 14–16; Milne & Mason, 2000; Sims, 2009; Telfer & Wall, 1996) have highlighted that the failure of a country's agriculture sector to consistently

supply the tourism industry results in reduced multiplier effects and greater leakages. The most critical constraints that limit tourism's linkage to agriculture in Niue are the inconsistent supply and limited promotion of local produce and tourist products, and the non-existence of an overarching strategy for tourism and agriculture linkages. Currently agricultural produce is highly seasonal, the supply is irregular throughout the year, and no formal arrangements exist between the growers and SMTEs for the sale or purchase of local produce. Considering that the peak tourism seasons (June to September and December to January) coincide with the peak growing season for fruit and vegetables, then the agriculture sector could at least meet some of the demand for local produce. Furthermore, these linkages between tourism and agriculture can incrementally improve over time.

Local residents can increase the potential for greater involvement in the tourism industry by providing cultural and agriculture-related experiences for tourists (Weaver, 2006, p. 43). However, SMTE operators in Niue feel that locals lack interest in earning additional income from the tourism sector due to their dependence on "government handouts". Niue is categorised by low levels of community involvement in tourism planning and development. Poor community understanding of tourism and limited mechanisms to engage local people in the tourism development process can lead to conflict at a later date (Milne, 2008). The way forward for Niue is to encourage locals, especially returning Niueans, to set up small tourism enterprises in order to improve their participation in the industry.

The population decline and consequent small numbers of young people on the island further threaten the future sustainability of tourism and agriculture sectors. This means that fewer people will remain in Niue to either engage in semi-commercial agriculture or entrepreneurial activities for the tourism industry. The challenge is to find ways to encourage the broader population (including youth) to engage in backyard gardening or small-scale tourism entrepreneurial activities and consequently build skills and passion among the young generation. If the tourism industry continues in the direction that it is currently developing towards, that is to remain small-scale, then given the small tourist numbers, local communities in Niue will be able to at least meet part of the demand for local experiences and continue to nurture the linkages between tourism and agriculture.

The absence of a national strategic focus on nurturing the linkages between tourism and agriculture further constrains the development of linkages between the two sectors. Meyer (2007) and Bricker (2001, p. 248) feel that national tourism development plans need to be drawn up based on the assumption that the economic benefits of tourism will stimulate other sectors of the economy, in particular agriculture. The government is seen to be at the forefront of developing a strategy and policy framework for sustainable development of the tourism industry, including a focus on its linkages to the local agriculture sector (Jenkins & Henry, 1982; NZTRI, 2009; United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific [UNESCAP], 1999). For example, the government can develop a policy that enables the tourism and agriculture departments to work together on development projects; such cooperation will, in turn, be more attractive to donors and potentially enhance their technical and financial assistance.

Chakravarty (2008, pp. 200–201) suggests the government needs to play a leadership role in assisting communities to develop local experiences and products for the tourism sector. The government and private sector in Niue are faced with a challenging task to develop sustainable tourism products and services. The government's goal is to attract a regular flow of visitors throughout the year and not just during the two peak tourism seasons; this will ensure a viable industry on the island that will provide incentives for local investment. In Niue, the government can assist and encourage growers to provide local produce and agriculture-related activities for the tourism industry. The department of agriculture is already encouraging growers to grow vegetables in small backyard gardens and plots by creating awareness of the benefits of incorporating vegetables in meal preparations and also of selling surpluses to the tourism industry. Agriculture officials often conduct workshops and provide technical advice and training on growing vegetables and sometimes distribute seedlings to growers to start their own gardens. Small-scale entrepreneurial activities such as backyard or bush gardens are important in supplying local produce to cafés and restaurants in an island nation with a small tourism industry.

Coordination and networking between stakeholders of the tourism and agriculture sectors will increase the chances that linkages between the two sectors are sustainably

developed (Haywood, 2000, p. 168; Jamal & Getz, 2000, pp. 159–160; Page, 2000, p. 133). The dominant feeling to emerge from the interviews with growers and SMTE operators is that the government needs to facilitate communication and networking among the stakeholders of the two sectors. The Niue Tourism Office is seen as having a key role to play in initiating collaboration between the tourism and agriculture sectors. The government is the only body that can provide long-term planning, policy frameworks and management of local resources.

However, the government needs to avoid nepotism when distributing farming materials and donor-funded benefits to the locals. Poor governance and corruption has seriously affected tourism and economic development and investment in Pacific SIDS (Prasad & Roy, 2008, p. 170). Prior to commencing any government projects, the local communities need to be thoroughly consulted and effectively involved in the planning and decision-making process (Telfer & Wall, 2000). This paper suggest that there is no doubt that the Niuean government has an important role to play in improving collaboration among the stakeholders in tourism and agriculture and in nurturing the linkages between the two sectors. However, corrupt practices by officials in the past have led some growers and SMTE operators to doubt whether the government can effectively carry out its role in fostering a tourism industry that is linked to local agriculture.

In theory, having a regular airline service and the opportunity to develop new tourist experiences that can be carefully developed and managed, such as village- and agriculture-related activities, can potentially lay the foundation for a more economically beneficial and sustainable industry. In practice, though, it is the level of commitment and initiatives and the ability of the government and the local communities to overcome the constraints that limit tourism's linkage to the agriculture sector that will determine the future sustainability of the two sectors in Niue.

Connell (2007) and Milne (1992) noted that while tourism will continue to be an important source of additional income and employment for Niue, the nation will remain dependent on public sector employment and international aid flows for the foreseeable future. While this situation is unlikely to change, this paper shows that tourism remains the single most

important economic sector and source of employment after the public sector, and tourism will continue to be a key element in economic development and donor-aid policy.

This paper points out that currently the small-scale tourism industry in Niue has minimal links to the local economy, including the subsistence-focused agriculture sector. This paper suggests that in the future tourism will continue to exist as a small-scale activity and its linkages to the local economy including agriculture will be limited due to its inability to completely overcome the given constraints. The future fluctuation in tourist numbers and the sole reliance on international aid flows, remittances and public sector employment, combined with the high migration rates and alleged practices of corruption in the government, will further challenge the development of linkages between tourism and agriculture.

However, in spite of these challenges, the way forward for tourism and agriculture in Niue is to focus on incrementally improving the linkages between the two sectors over time. The increasing levels of local participation in tourism through the cases of emerging success stories of tourism enterprises and the commitment of New Zealand to build the capacity of Niueans through various village-based projects suggest a way forward for nurturing the linkages between tourism and agriculture. The NZTRI report prepared for the Government of Niue in 2009 challenged the administrators of the Niue Tourism Office website to improve the online information on agriculture- and village-related experiences, and it is clear that the stakeholders are making an effort to develop tourist experiences that are linked to the local economy. Given that there is a latent tourist demand for local food and for village- and agriculture-related experiences, this is positive progress for the goal of enhancing linkages between the tourism and agriculture sectors in Niue. It is accepted that in the future Niue's tourism sector will continue to revolve around small-scale community-based activities, and the key stakeholders, especially the Niuean government with push from New Zealand, will endeavour to nurture and support tourism's linkages to the local economy, especially the agriculture sector, in order to gradually increase the sector's yield.

### **Relevant lessons for other South Pacific nations**

The lessons learned from the case of Niue have broader reverberations to all the nations in the South Pacific region. Pacific SIDS are struggling to nurture the linkages between tourism and agriculture and while context and resources bases differ, all are looking to find ways to better understand the links between the two sectors and how they might be nurtured – even if only in incremental steps. The case of Niue highlights critical issues that are of relevance to SIDS everywhere, and especially to the MIRAB-focused nations in the South Pacific.

A key lesson for other island nations in the region is that collaboration between the tourism and agriculture sectors is essential in order to nurture and support sustainable linkages between them (Hall, 2008, p. 166; Meyer, 2007; WTO, 2002, p. 37). The passion and initiative of key stakeholders are critical for facilitating tourism development and its links to the local economy. An important factor in facilitating the linkage process is the latent tourist demand for local experiences relating to food, agriculture and village lifestyle. The research has also highlighted the importance of the internet in promoting and marketing tourism experiences in Niue. Without the commitment and initiative of the stakeholders from the tourism and agriculture sectors who are attempting to meet the potential demand, it is difficult to see how the linkages between the two sectors can incrementally improve over time. The role of the governments of both Niue and New Zealand is critical in building the capacity of the local community in Niue to meet the latent demand and in maintaining tourism infrastructure on the island. The participation of local community in Niue, including growers, SMTE operators and village councils, in providing tourist activities that revolve around village and agriculture-related experiences is also important in facilitating the linkages between the two sectors.

This research also brings into focus the constraining factors that limit the development of linkages between tourism and agriculture. Constraints on the development of tourism and agriculture linkages include the inconsistent production of local produce and the limited supply of tourism experiences, especially village, food and agriculture-related activities. The lack of a marketing focus and an overarching strategy for nurturing the links between tourism and agriculture further compound the barriers to the linkage process.

This paper has shown that the linkages between the two sectors will be limited. Key stakeholders will continue to focus on nurturing a small-scale tourism industry that is linked to local agriculture. To this extent this paper suggests over time incremental improvements can be made in the linkages between tourism and the agriculture sector. This research has shown that tourism and agriculture linkages could be nurtured and supported in the long term, but only if all stakeholders – including the government, village councils, growers and SMTEs – cooperate in the endeavour and share a common interest in sustainability.

The visitor survey supports the notion that agriculture should be seen as being more than simply a source of food: it has the potential to contribute positively to more general tourism experiences through landscapes, rural activities and general village life (Fleischer & Pizam, 1997; Telfer & Wall, 1996). Local food products are a particularly effective means of creating a sense (or an image) of a place because they can be linked to the kind of ‘traditional’ landscape and farming methods that tourists will ‘gaze’ upon during their holiday (Canoves, Villarino, Priestley & Blanco, 2004; Sims, 2009; Skuras, Dimara & Petrou, 2006).

This research shows that local food appeals to tourists on a number of levels, from the simple demand for ‘typical’ food which can be purchased and consumed occasionally as a symbol of place through to the complex and deep-seated quest for a more authentic sense of self. Therefore, visitors who are worried about the environmental consequences of modern agricultural practices or who are disillusioned with what they perceive to be the ‘inauthentic’ nature of modern life can choose to engage with ‘local’ food while on holiday as a way of restoring a more meaningful sense of connection between themselves as consumers and the people and places that produce their food (Sims, 2009). For these tourists, the fact that local products are equated with economically and socially sustainable behaviour acts as further attraction because it enables them to cast themselves in the role of the ‘good’ and ‘responsible’ tourists who care about the destinations they are visiting. The visitor research conducted as part of this study supports the literature that says it is the meaning behind food that many tourists are seeking and by harnessing this meaning through local produce on offer at particular destinations, sustainable initiatives can have a better chance of success (Canoves et al., 2004; Sims, 2009).

The research has stressed that it is critical that Niue and other SIDS look for ways that this cultural dimension of its product can be strengthened, even if only in small ways. In so doing, there is real potential that linkages between tourism and the local economy will be nurtured and supported – with food and cultural experiences potentially connecting resident Niueans to the tourism industry in new and productive ways. The government is spending money on building tourist accommodation and infrastructure to attract a regular flow of visitors throughout the year for a viable industry. Any significant investment like this carries risk, but this risk can be minimised through the adoption of a marketing philosophy which emphasizes products related to the needs and interests of visitors (Cooper, Fletcher, Gilbert, Wanhill & Shepherd, 1998, p. 228) – products such as the agriculture-related and village-based experiences highlighted in this paper.

Like Niue, MIRAB economies elsewhere in the Pacific will remain dependent on overseas aid, remittances and public sector employment for the foreseeable future. Nonetheless, tourism will also remain an important economic sector and source of additional income for these nations, and hence will continue to be a key element in their economic development, though the challenges to success will increase. The development of locally owned, small-scale agriculture-related experiences for tourists (Brohman, 1996; Slee, Farr & Snowdon, 1997), such as tours and samplings from backyard gardens or broader village-based accommodation and experiences, has great potential to support and nurture the linkages between tourism and local agriculture (Slee et al., 1997; Telfer, 2000). This paper supports the approach taken by the Government of Niue (2007) in 'The Tourism Sustainable Development Strategy 2010' which anticipates developing village-based tours and activities for tourists in order to help create linkages between the industry and the local economy.

Brohman (1996), Gursoy, Chi and Dyer, (2010), Harrison, (2004), Milne (2010a), Scheyvens and Momsen (2008a; 2008b), UNESCAP (2000) and WTO (2006) point out that the development of small-scale locally owned enterprises also requires greater community participation in tourism planning and more attention to the cultural and environmental sustainability of tourism projects. Che, Veeck & Veeck (2005) argue that small-scale growers who supply the tourism industry with local produce or agriculture-related activities and tours

for tourists do not always see each other as competitors, and that they often practise collaboration and service-driven good will by referring tourists to other businesses that can satisfy their needs and purchasing items from their peers that they do not produce themselves.

The paper supports the notion that when SMTEs use small-scale growers and suppliers, they are afforded an element of flexibility (NZTRI, 2009; Telfer & Wall, 2000). Small-scale growers are often willing to handle smaller and irregular orders from an SMTE. In other words, growers who plant vegetables such as tomatoes and lettuce in their small backyard gardens prefer to supply cafés and restaurants on an irregular basis – their supply being dependent on whether there are any surpluses. This means that the café and restaurant operators have to use a number of small-scale growers who sell fruit and vegetables at the local marketplace or make use of imported produce sold at the local shops located around the island. Small entrepreneurial activities such as backyard or bush gardens in an island nation with a small tourism industry are important in providing the farm-to-table experience for tourists, something that the visitor survey showed would appeal to visitors.

Overall, this paper has attempted to illustrate the value of ensuring that all the stakeholders in both the sectors participate in an in-depth study, either through semi-structured interviews or by online survey, in order to highlight the potential common ground between them. It is through the collaboration of multiple stakeholders in this study that the researcher managed to gain a meaningful insight into the complexities of inter-sectoral analysis, especially given the lack of data on the tourism and agriculture sectors and their linkage process in Pacific SIDS.

## **Conclusion**

In exploring the potential to create links between tourism and agriculture in Niue, this research has examined the complexities involved in the linkage process. The paper brings into focus the struggles faced by a variety of stakeholders in nurturing the linkages between the two sectors. It is important to note that in spite of the struggles, the stakeholders are showing increasing levels of commitment and initiatives to facilitate the linkage processes that will foster a yield-based tourism industry as well as boost the sustainability of the agriculture sector. This

research has also provided a methodological approach that is relevant to conduct research on an island in the Pacific, especially in gaining a deeper understanding of the intricacies involved in sustaining their macro-economies.

### **Research Agenda**

Further research is needed to probe deeper into the issues that facilitate and constrain the development of linkages between tourism and agriculture sectors in Niue. There are a number of areas that could not be addressed in this research due to time and other constraints. The researcher will now attempt to highlight some issues that can be explored in future research.

It is important to note the absence of a gender component in the studies that have attempted to comprehend the linkage process (Brohman, 1996; Singh, Milne & Hull, 2011). There are women producers, retailers and entrepreneurs, and although this paper has not addressed the role of women in the linkage process, it is an area for future development of the data. The researcher suggests that a gender perspective needs to be integrated into future studies on tourism and agriculture linkages in Pacific SIDS. A greater recognition of women's role in the linkage process will contribute to the overall value of the tourist experience, with a considerable impact on profitability and quality across all aspects of the industry (Singh et al., 2011). With women comprising 41% of the growers on Niue (12 of the 29 growers interviewed), their role in the linkage process cannot be overlooked. Research can be more gender specific in terms of exploring the role of women in the linkages between the two sectors in island nations. If there is to be a revitalisation of domestic agriculture then women must be explicitly included in the process.

Detailed research is needed to analyse tourism–agriculture linkage forms and their elasticity and potential in order to determine how strongly the links between them can be forged. An increased awareness of the role that growers play in the tourism experience flows from an understanding of the interconnected relationship between agriculture and tourism and from the commercial relationships that emerge in the economy (Knowd, 2006). Future research could focus on the business-development needs of SMTEs.

Detailed research is required to identify a programme for human resource development that meets the training needs of the local population. Appropriate training of local communities so they can meet the demand for agriculture-related activities and experiences for potential tourists will assist in improving the linkages between the two sectors. Further research can look at examining the current school curriculum in Niue in terms of how to attract the young generation to participate in the tourism industry and meet potential demand for agriculture-related experiences. Building the capacity of the young generation to meet the demands of the tourism industry will in turn boost the profile of the agriculture sector because the young people will be motivated to provide agriculture-related experiences for tourists and earn a significant income. Further research is also needed to assess the capacity of local growers to meet the demands of the tourism industry, such as their potential to supply locally grown produce and offer agriculture-related experiences.

One way to improve the benefits of tourism is to expand economic linkages by increasing the amount of local food used in the industry (Berno as cited in Young and Vinning, 2007, pp. 41, 43; Berno as cited in Veit, 2009, p. 23; Berno & Oliver, 2010, p. 16). Understanding tourist consumption patterns is critical to the analysis of tourism and agriculture linkages. Research is required to identify and develop creative methods for incorporating local produce into the meals offered to tourists. Detailed interviews are required with the relevant stakeholders to develop these niche products and ensure their viability in the tourism sector. Research is important in identifying how tourism can help local communities value and appreciate their culture, history, environment and traditions, and ensure that these are preserved and passed on to the next generation. The researcher feels that although the findings of this study show the economic opportunities provided by the 'new tourist', more research is required to better understand the nature and potential impacts of alternative tourism development in Niue and other island nations in the region.

The research has also highlighted the importance of tourism industry involvement in publicising the online surveys and collecting email addresses from guests. A challenge now is to ensure that effective ways are found to 'harvest' emails and to keep the profile of the survey high when needed. Constant support from the government and local community leaders can

maximise tourists' participation and pave the way for stakeholders to share their knowledge. The difficulties of applying a mixed-methods approach can be further minimised through the researcher's strong personal experience and awareness of social and cultural intricacies when conducting research in that particular community.

In exploring the potential to create links between tourism and agriculture in Niue, this research has examined the complexities involved in the linkage process. This paper brings into focus the struggles faced by a variety of stakeholders in nurturing the linkages between the two sectors. It is important to note that in spite of the struggles, the stakeholders are showing increasing levels of commitment and initiatives to facilitate the linkage processes that will foster a yield-based tourism industry as well as boost the sustainability of the agriculture sector. This research has provided a methodological approach that is relevant to conduct research on an island in the Pacific, especially in gaining a deeper understanding of the intricacies involved in sustaining their macro-economies. Perhaps the most important contribution of this research is that it has highlighted that timely and robust research is critical for Niue and other Pacific SIDS if these nations are serious about measuring and enhancing tourism's ability to achieve the strategic objectives set for the sector.

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