

Case Study

Live and Learn

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River Care

Introduction

Rivers are vital life-sustaining eco-systems for the people of the South Pacific. They provide a lifeline to food and subsistence living for present and future generation and are an important link between the forest and the reef. Despite of their importance, rivers fall victim for logging, mining, agriculture and are also being used as prime waste dumps effecting inner-reef lagoons, fisheries habitats and mangrove swamps. The wet season sees fertile soil erode from the large riverbanks and carried through the catchments onto fringing reef causing increases in water nutrients levels and algae growth on hard coral communities. Pesticides from farms are posing an ever present health risk to children, women and fishermen who rely on the river as a resource for washing, collection of shellfish and general fishing.

Poverty due to environmental and health decline is common in the South Pacific. Logging, mining and fishing companies have extracted natural resources from lowland forest and rivers for decades leaving communities divided and, some, without capacity to continue meeting their basic needs. Many companies have failed to follow sustainable practices and many communities affected by unsustainable practices never asked the right questions, which could have lead to decisions preventing this environmental decline and the poverty that follows.

Live & Learn Environmental Education recognizes that it is the young generation which has to face the challenges and threats to the environment including urbanization, outbreak of disease and decline in biodiversity. In order to face these challenges awareness and willingness to act and “own” the challenge is of outmost importance.

River Care will challenge communities to discuss debate and ask the hard questions about the links between the river environment and poverty, health and equality.

The project fills a unique niche in strengthening the capacity of young people and teachers to create changes and improve or prevent degradation of the natural environment.

Objectives

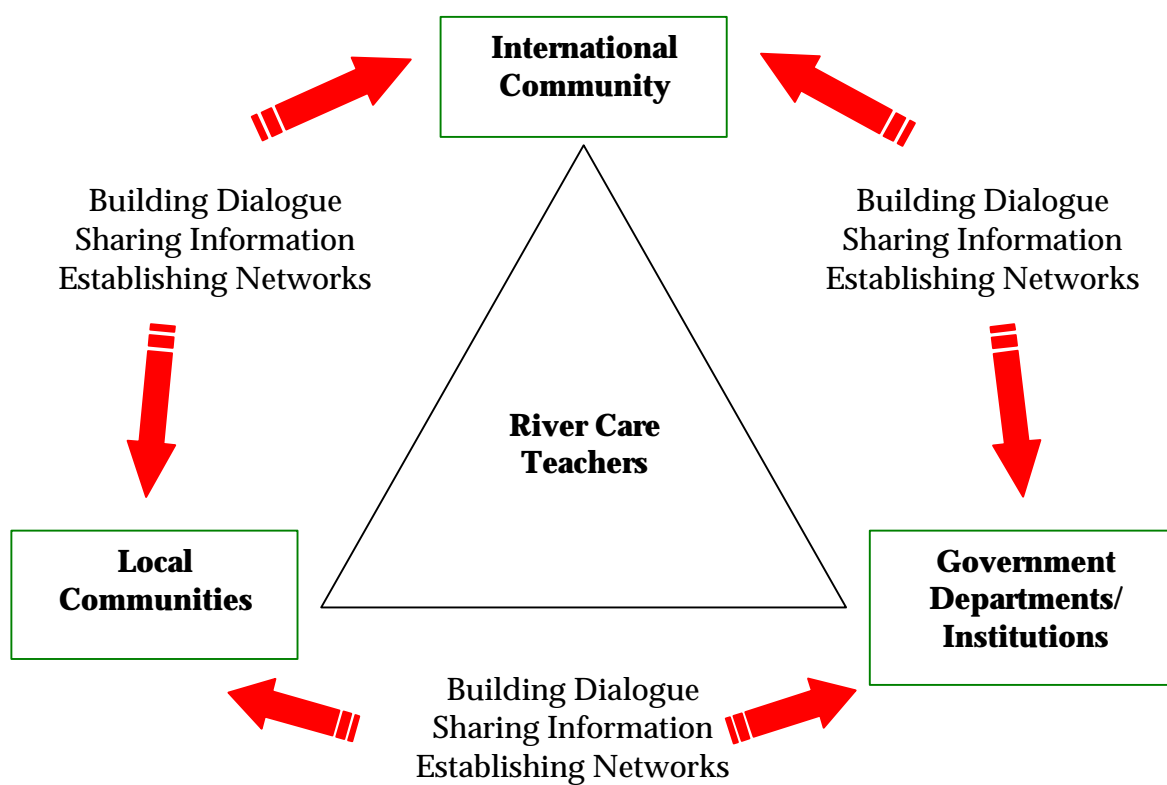
- v Develop an effective water quality-monitoring network throughout individual target countries which specifically aims to promote health conditions.
- v Identify pollution hot spots and create public action to improve river and health conditions.
- v Initiate a learning process that links critical thinking to direct action in protecting and improving rivers in the South Pacific and reduce hardship and poverty.

Methodology

A mobile Live & Learn training team visits schools in rural areas of Fiji and train teachers in river water quality monitoring techniques. The teachers will include water quality monitoring in Basic and Social Science. The newly acquired skills are passed on to the students who will conduct practical tests in their local rivers and:

- ☞ Identify pollution hot-spots;
- ☞ Investigate the pollution cause;
- ☞ Analyze the socio-economic and cultural impacts of water pollution;
- ☞ Present the test to the community, the church and chiefs;
- ☞ Network with NGOs and government departments on possible solutions to the problem;
- ☞ Initiate a debate in the community for solving the problem;
- ☞ Initiate action through practical problem solving strategies.

The Live & Learn training team will not be actors in this process but will only facilitate and provide support to the students and the teachers involved. Teachers are encouraged not to promote solutions and selection of problems.



The curriculum in Fiji is flexible and well suited to emphasize an open and analytical learning process and the Curriculum Development Units and Teachers Training Colleges are working with Live & Learn towards this. Once the pilot project has been completed the Curriculum development Unit in Suva intends to include River Care into the Form 3 Basic Science and Social Science curriculum in Fiji.

Lessons learnt about dialogue, advocacy and change through learning.

During the past 10 years of teacher training Live & Learn Environmental Education has always encouraged teachers and educators to facilitate rather than influence. The learning process in the community school environment is made constructive and stimulating through diversity of ideas as opposed to conformity. By strengthening young people's ability to research and analyze they gain the confidence to discuss and debate and this gives them the capacity to participate in making decisions regarding the environment. Teachers and educators are vital in the learning process for social change

and sustainability. In a world of rapid change and constant global interaction and diversity we are all learners. Global trade and liberalization of the market have so far been the fundamental principles of globalization but the realization that the free market economy does not hold all the solutions to reduction of poverty and inequality has created new opportunities for the learning and education. NGOs and community-based organizations are well placed within the community to facilitate this learning process as they - despite of being diverse, fluid and ever changing - often have the creative capacity to build dialogue between communities, governments, community organizations and international agencies.

Conclusion

The fate of environmental education is directly linked into social development issues and this is why social emphasis is fundamental as a part of the learning process. For example; an effective learning process for young people on the issue of forests would not focus on asking them to plant 1000 trees but asking them to debate who should make decisions regarding the forests; who should reap the benefits and how future generations should be considered? To give young people debating skills and strengthen their ability to communicate and build dialogue with the unfamiliar is a key weapon in the battle against poverty and environmental degradation. Dialogue building brings to the forefront the issues of participation, advocacy and change and, if allowed, the benefits of this learning process extend far beyond the local community or school ground.