



## Trekking the path less travelled

Walks and Trails (Fiji) Ltd t/a Talanoa Treks

MDF supported Talanoa Treks to increase its market presence both locally and internationally through the development of its website and through hiring a Community Business Development Officer to work with communities.



### The Company

Talanoa Treks is the only dedicated hiking tour company in Fiji which works in partnership with local communities to offer guided multi-day group walks through Viti Levu's interior. Currently, Talanoa Treks works with four communities and supports them with specialised tour guide training, upgrading accommodation facilities in the village and training in food preparation to assist with the hosting of trekking groups.

Talanoa Treks also connects these communities to local and international trekking markets through online promotion, bookings and trip management, as well as providing logistics and quality control.



### The Context

Fijian tourism is more than just sun, sea and sand and friendly locals. With over 300 islands that make up the Fiji group, Destination Fiji offers much more than the romanticised stereotype she is traditionally known for.

Fiji offers unique product offerings that boast her natural and scenic environment, such as diving in pristine waters, bird watching and hiking through untouched forests. Hiking tours allowing visitors to experience Fiji's rich culture are a relatively new concept but are gaining in popularity. Talanoa Treks is the first to tap into this new tourist segment and has pioneered its development since 2013.



## The Challenge

As with most community-based tourism activities, capacity building of community members is needed to ensure the sustainability of the business model. Talanoa Trek's tourism product is a relatively new concept for rural communities which demands the upskilling of community members through training and workshops and requires consistent following up with the community. It also requires the upgrading of facilities like washrooms and accommodation areas which are critical for any community to adequately cater to tourists. The company specifically caters to a different type of tourist segment - the active and adventurous - which also requires considerable marketing and awareness both locally and internationally.



## The Solution

MDF supported Talanoa Treks to increase its market presence both locally and internationally through the development of its website. This support also enabled Talanoa Treks to participate at the 2015 Fijian Tourism Expo - a premier tourism industry event that brings partners in the tourism industry in direct contact with international buyers and travel trade media as a result of the partnership.

MDF further supported Talanoa Treks with the hiring of a Community Business Development Officer (CBDO) to work directly with the communities and raise their technical competencies to better cater to tourists. Through the CBDO, Talanoa Treks identified and implemented physical upgrades that were needed in each of the four communities to enable them to provide better services to their guests.

Male and female community members also underwent trekking guide, first aid and financial management training to equip them with the necessary skills to offer high quality services. Talanoa Treks also upgraded the existing facilities in partner communities in order to meet international market standards and requirements, carried out capacity building of all community trekking guides and facilitated refresher first aid and financial management training.

As hiking is an entirely new segment being offered in the tourism industry, marketing through attendance at the 2015 Fiji Tourism Exchange and website development was crucial to create awareness both locally and internationally.

## The Results



Through this partnership, **184 male and female** community members from 4 communities and 2 new employees benefitted from total incomes of **FJD110,000**.



Women living in Talanoa Treks' partner communities are involved in tour guiding and food preparation. Income earnings for women that prepare meals for trekking tourists were non-existent in two of the communities. However, this has changed due to regular discussion between MDF and Talanoa Treks. The women that prepare visitors meals in the two communities now receive incomes for their service.

Talanoa Treks continues to receive much attention as a new tourist segment for Fiji and has featured on Epic Trails, a program which showcases some of the world's top hiking destinations. The company has also hosted the Vodafone Lost Island Ultra challenge event which is a 220km multi-stage footrace adventure across Fiji's rugged interior which attracted competitors from all over the world.

The company has since expanded its clientele from traditional adventure tourists to international sporting companies and events like the Eco Challenge which will take place in Fiji in September 2019.