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The restoration of ecosystem services and their contribution to cultural identity and sustainability

Key words: Cultural Identity, Cultural Sustainability, Community Resilience

Abstract:

The provision of ecosystem services is crucial not only to secure livelihoods but also to the restoration of the cultural fabric of indigenous people. Accelerating the enhancement of ecosystem services should be at the heart of any action research project with local communities living in highly vulnerable environments. In New Zealand, the Waiapu River is of great cultural significance to the indigenous people of Ngāti Porou. For a century, the Catchment and the people who depend on its resources have been subjected to a series of significant environmental, social and economic shocks leaving it one of the poorest communities in the country. The loss of ecosystem services has also led to the loss of cultural identity. To reverse the social, cultural and environmental erosion, the government has formally committed to a historic 100-year partnership to restore the Catchment with Ngāti Porou under a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in 2014 with the aspirational aim of 'healthy land, healthy rivers, healthy people'. We argue that using adaptive governance approaches will help delivering these three interlinked outcomes and hence, improving ecosystem services in one of the most challenging and culturally significant environments. This presentation will reflect on progress and challenges in setting up a process for enacting transformational change to address urgent environmental and socio-cultural problems, so that the 100-year vision between MoU parties can be achieved. The emphasis will be on the link between restoring ecosystem services and cultural identity and sustainability. This process involves: a transformational approach to inter-agency partnership, a systemic understanding of roles and functions and an innovative approach to the co-development of solutions with end-users.