



Report of the Community Conservation Resilience Initiative



in the Solomon Islands

Country report on the Solomon Islands Community Conservation Resilience Initiative (CCRI) November 2015

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Cover photo: Discussion with women of Fera Subua community during CCRI workshop, Solomon Islands.
Aydah Vahia/CIC

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Community Conservation Resilience Initiative (CCRI), coordinated by the Global Forest Coalition (GFC), involves a range of national and international indigenous peoples' organisations, non-governmental organisations and social movements. The goal of the Initiative is to sustain and strengthen the resilience of community conservation practices in light of existing or potential external and internal threats. The main objective of the CCRI is to perform a bottom-up assessment of a) the resilience of indigenous peoples' and local communities' initiatives and approaches to conservation and restoration and b) the legal, political, socio-economic, financial, technical, and capacity-building support that could be provided to sustain and strengthen these initiatives and approaches. A guiding methodology (GFC, 2014) is intended to provide a framework for the facilitating and support organisations undertaking the CCRI in each country.

The CCRI will involve at least 20 countries and 60 communities over the course of four years. The Solomon Islands is one of 10 countries involved in the first year of the Initiative, with the Network for the Indigenous Peoples-Solomons (NIPS) serving as the facilitating and support organisation for the CCRI process. Community conservation resilience assessments were conducted in three communities: Sulufou and Fera Subua in Northeast Malaita in May 2015 and Hageulu in the province of Santa Isabel in September 2015. This report details the preliminary findings of each assessment, including existing community conservation practices and threats and challenges to their resilience.

In addition to the community assessments, the CCRI in the Solomon Islands has included the development of a national legal review and preliminary advocacy strategies. The legal review assesses the extent to which select national environmental laws recognise the rights and traditional practices of the country's indigenous peoples and local communities. The preliminary advocacy strategies aim to find ways to remedy the internal and external threats and challenges faced by the three communities in relation to their community conservation resilience initiatives. Immediate next steps include documentation of traditional knowledge, mapping of land and sea resources, land management trainings and development of mangrove ecosystem recovery plans, among other things.

NIPS plans to facilitate similar assessments with other communities in the Solomon Islands in the next two years and strives to take forwards the recommendations of Sulufou, Fera Subua and Hageulu through concerted advocacy strategies.

2. SOLOMON ISLANDS COUNTRY PROFILE

The Solomon Islands gained its independence in 1978 and has a total population of only 572,200 (World Bank, 2014), approximately 85% of which is rural. Geographically, the country consists of six major islands and approximately 900 smaller volcanic islands, coral atolls and reefs, more than 300 of which are inhabited. The total land mass is 28,400 square kilometres. The islands extend about 900 miles in a southeasterly direction from Papua New Guinea toward Fiji. In general, the biodiversity of the Solomon Islands is in good health, at least partly attributed to a combination of low human population density, uninhabited islands, difficulties of accessing and using natural resources, and both customary and state legal protection.

In terms of marine biodiversity, species like tuna contribute significantly to the economic and institutional development of the country. Dolphins, dugong, turtles and fish (including sharks and coral reef fish) also have similar economic and institutional importance, nationally, regionally and globally. At the local level, the majority of rural people depend directly on biodiversity and natural resources for wellbeing and livelihoods. This is particularly true for those who practice subsistence ways of life, as biodiversity also constitutes a key source of cultural identity, spiritual attachment and health..

Major direct threats to biodiversity and indigenous peoples' territories include industrial fishing, logging, mining and prospecting, monoculture plantations of oil palm, coconut and cocoa, and the clearance of land for subsistence gardens. In both the terrestrial and coastal environments, poor land use management has degraded and continues to degrade coastal, inland water and terrestrial biodiversity. In many cases, people view the coastal land and aquatic environment as a dumping ground for waste disposal (Solomon Islands Government, 2014). However, rural people with a close dependency on their surrounding resources will be hard-hit by any biodiversity loss and it is likely that unabated biodiversity loss will contribute to rural poverty.



Figure 1: Map of the Solomon Islands (credit: US Central Intelligence Agency via www.lib.utexas.edu), with the provinces of Santa Isabel and Malaita highlighted (emphasis added)

2.1. Summary of National Legal Review

As part of the CCRI, NIPS undertook a review of the national environmental legal framework in relation to the customary laws and traditional practices of indigenous peoples and local communities (for the full review, see Meimana and Jonas, 2015). The review analyses select national laws relating to land, protected areas, rivers, forests, fisheries, and mining and their interactions with indigenous peoples' and communities' customary laws and practices, with a particular focus on how the latter are either supported or undermined.

The Solomon Islands has a plural legal system, with strong customary laws primarily operating at the community level across the country, and state laws – partly inherited by the British colonial administration – operating at the national and provincial levels. In certain situations, these parallel legal systems conflict with each other, and despite recognition of customary rights in the Constitution, state laws tend to take precedence over customary laws.

Of the select national laws reviewed, the following actively undermine or fail to explicitly support indigenous peoples' and local communities' rights and conservation practices:

1. The Land Titles Act 1996;
2. The Forest Resources and Timber Utilisation Act 1996;
3. The River Waters Act 1996; and
4. The Mines and Minerals Act 1996.

On the other hand, the following laws support or explicitly recognise indigenous peoples' and local communities' rights and conservation practices and provide useful hooks for community advocacy strategies:

1. The Protected Areas Act 2010, which includes safeguards for declaration of protected areas in customary lands and areas;
2. The Protected Areas Regulations 2012, which include recognition of customary owners' rights, tenure and interests and potential recognition of existing community conservation programmes as management committees; and
3. The Fisheries Management Act 2015, which includes recognition of Community Fisheries Management Plans and explicit recognition of customary rights.

Each of the laws reviewed was neither fully supportive nor fully undermining of customary landowners and rights holders. Even the 'best' laws (the Protected Areas Regulations and Fisheries Management Act) had certain provisions of concern and even the 'worst' laws (particularly the Forest Resources and Timber Utilisation Act) contained one or more potentially supportive provisions or safeguards. It is thus important to review each law in its entirety as well as its interactions with other laws to truly understand its importance in relation to indigenous peoples and local communities. In addition, the laws gazetted within the past five years have a much more progressive approach, in line with leading international law and standards, than those gazetted in the 1990s. This underscores the importance of regular judicial review, amendment and reform of legislation in order to remain in step with the most current regulatory frameworks, standards and guidance concerning indigenous peoples, local communities and the environment. The lead author plans to undertake further research on additional environmental laws, case law and the impacts of their implementation on indigenous peoples and communities.

3. METHODOLOGY

As the key facilitator for the national CCRI process, NIPS first conducted a scoping mission in Honiara to map the work of different stakeholders on related issues and to formulate an advisory team for the CCRI in the Solomon Islands. The mission was conducted with the following stakeholders, and a representative of each joined NIPS staff on the advisory team: the Climate Change Coordinator at the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology, the Community Resilience to Climate and Disaster Risk in Solomon Islands Project, and the National Coordinator of the GEF Small Grants Program of the UN Development Program. NIPS also held an initial visioning and planning meeting with its staff and advisors to identify strategic priorities for the CCRI. GFC provided seed funds for the assessments as well as technical advice and support to the NIPS staff, including on the CCRI methodology, legal review, and fundraising.

For the national baselines on community conservation and biodiversity, NIPS undertook consultations with the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology. To seek inputs and feedback on the national legal review, NIPS consulted with the Public Solicitors office and its Land Owners Advocacy and Legal Support Unit, and a prominent local lawyer in the Political Party Registrar.

The local CCRI process began in earnest with a process to seek the free, prior and informed consent of each of the three communities, namely, Sulufou, Fera Subua and Hageulu. This included meetings, communication by phone and letters, and a workshop facilitated by Sulufou leaders. After the communities agreed to participate in the CCRI, NIPS designed questionnaires and facilitated workshops in each community to initiate the assessments. Face-to-face interviews were also conducted with community leaders, elders, women and youths to elaborate on, consolidate and verify preliminary results of the assessments. The workshops, community visits and interviews included documentation of each community's natural, social-cultural, economic, political and institutional, and legal foundations and changes to them over time.



Figure 2: James Meimana (NIPS) presenting at the Fostering Community Conservation Conference in Durban, South Africa (credit: Ronnie Hall)

In July 2015, a national CCRI workshop was conducted in Honiara to discuss the preliminary results and advocacy strategies. Participants included community representatives from Sulufou and Fera Subua (including women and youths), government officials, civil society organisations, representatives from GFC, and the media. NIPS also presented at the international Fostering Community Conservation Conference (held in Durban, South Africa, from 31 August to 4 September 2015) and produced both summary and full-length reports of the assessments for broad dissemination.

4. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES FOR THE CCRI IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

As part of the preparatory process, NIPS held a planning meeting with its staff and advisors to discuss strategic objectives for the CCRI. One of NIPS' key objectives in undertaking the CCRI in the Solomon Islands is to address the challenges and priority issues of indigenous peoples as the traditional owners and custodians of lands, territories and terrestrial and marine resources. The CCRI has given NIPS the opportunity to assess the current needs in the three selected rural communities (Sulufou and Fera Subua in the province of Malaita and Hageulu in the province of Santa Isabel) in relation to their community conservation initiatives and the impacts of internal and external threats and influences. The CCRI also catalysed the development of community-specific strategies to address biodiversity loss and the effects on climate change, particularly sea level rise and its impacts on women and children and the communities' livelihoods.

More broadly, NIPS aims to use the CCRI as a platform for engaging with the national government on environmental law and policy and encouraging the government to endorse the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and incorporate the Declaration's key provisions into national legislation.



Figure 3: Community assessment workshop in Hageulu (credit: James C. Meimana)

5. PRELIMINARY FINDINGS OF THE COMMUNITY CONSERVATION RESILIENCE ASSESSMENTS

5.1. Sulufou

The Sulufou community is located in northeast of Malaita Province. The population is about 1,450 people, including 540 men, 610 women and 300 children. Their religion is the Anglican Church of Melanesia. There are five main tribal groups in the community, each of which has their own story of origin. The Aena'alu, Beubaita and Kaori tribes believe that their forefathers originate from the Walo tribe. The Etagwasu tribe comes from Maloa and the Ngolufa tribe from Onoia. The core values of the people of Sulufou are their culture, traditions and Christianity.



Figure 4: Sulufou Island (credit: Aydah Gwaena Akao)

Sulufou is built on a traditional artificial island made of coral stones, which was built around two hundred years ago. The people depend on both land and sea resources. For example, root crops and fruit trees are cultivated on the nearby mainland and their major cash crops are yam, cassava, pana and taro. The major sea resources of the community are fish, sea cucumber, trochus shells, and shells to make the traditional shell money called *tafuliae*.



Figure 5: Houses built on top of coral limestone (credit: Aydah Gwaena Akao)

The people of Sulufou have rules about the uses of and access to different terrestrial and marine areas, including in the *bae abu'* (burial sites), *mana bisi* (where women give birth) and *beu to'ofi* (custom house). *Bae abu'* is the site restricted for traditional sacrifices and burial sites of *to'oa baitagi'* (important tribal leaders and people with status in the community). In the past, only the pagan priest and certain elders and tribal men could enter the *bae abu'* to offer sacrifices to their gods. Women were forbidden to enter such sacred areas. Today tribesmen can enter but not at all times; *bae abu'* are still very sacred and entering one without permission could result in bad consequences. All five tribes have their *bae abu'* on the mainland. The Etagwasu tribe has a much larger area conserved as *bae abu'* called Mantafa, which remains very restricted today. *Mana Bisi* is the area where women give birth and remain until their children reach a certain age; only then do they return to the main village. Men are forbidden to enter the *Mana bisi*. However, this tradition is not commonly practiced today. *Beu to'ofi* is a custom house where traditional knowledge is passed down through stories from the elders to the younger generations. It is also the location of planning of all of the traditional feasts or *maoma*. *Beu to'ofi* is restricted only to men; women are not allowed to enter or join meetings there.

Traditional methods and indicators for resource use are still practiced, for example, temporal taboo signs over fishing grounds, land and mangrove forests. Fishing grounds in particular can be preserved for several months or years through *oto'*, where poles are put up to indicate taboos over reefs. These practices are used to ensure there is sufficient food for important gatherings or feasts.



Figure 6: Poles indicating taboo over reef in Sulufou (credit: Aydah Gwaena Akao)

Taboos over land – which can also extend for several months – are especially done over gardens of yam, pana, cassava and potato and fruit trees such as breadfruit, mango, *kabarai'* bush apples and *ngalinut*. Yam or *kai* is the main root crop for the Sulufou community and has special cultural significance for its uses in several cultural exchanges, including bride price exchanges known as *foe la geni*, custom weddings and reconciliation ceremonies. There are also rituals practiced in the cultivation of yams. For example, the women who plant and work in the yam gardens must not enter them when they are having their menstrual cycles and planting is only done from around September to October. *Lolo'* or mangrove forests are also taboo for several months, mainly to preserve them for feasts or other cultural celebrations. The mangrove fruit is also one of the main food sources for the Sulufou community aside from shells, crabs and fish. Mangrove trees are also used as firewood and posts for building houses.

The community has specific rules and practices pertaining to the sharing or restriction of resources and knowledge. For example, only certain people in the tribe who have the gift or *mamu* can put up poles as taboo to preserve the reefs (*oto'*). Certain specialised people who have the gift taboo resources only after announcements by tribal chiefs.

Other people have gifts for fishing, gardening, crafting, and traditional medicinal plants; others still may be warriors or strong men. The people with these gifts have to go through rituals before they perform their respective tasks. For example, the tribesmen who have the *mamu'* to fish should not be seen when they embark on a fishing trip. This is especially true for men preparing to hunt dolphins; they are required to stay in a secluded custom house (*Beuto'ofi*) as part of their ritual preparations for the expedition.

The passing of traditional information or knowledge through tribesmen and women is done only at a certain age. *Mamu'* is normally passed on by tribesmen and women through careful selection, with particular attention paid to the skills of the candidates. Each tribe has its own gifted people and they still continue with these practices to date, though some rituals are no longer carried out as strictly as they were in the past.



Figure 7: Mangroves and gardens on mainland Sulufou (credit: Aydah Gwaena Akao)

The Sulufou community considers dolphin hunting a sustainable traditional practice. Elders and chiefs ensure the dolphins are not over-harvested by enforcing extended breaks between hunts, normally for one or two years, and by only taking large dolphins. Dolphin teeth are culturally important as they are used to pay bride prices and settle disputes. They are also very important decorations on traditional shell necklaces, especially for a bride's attire or *laungi*, which includes a headdress (*fodara*), chest dress (*abarao'*) and earrings. Dolphin teeth give so much value to these traditional attires that they identify people from Sulufou and Fera Subua and other northeast Malaita communities. Dolphin meat is also considered a delicacy.



Figure 8: Boy wearing *babarao'* with dolphin teeth (credit: Aydah Gwaena Akao)

Sulufou people believe that their land and sea resources are effectively conserved because of their customary practices and norms, which in turn also ensure the continuation of the community's culture and traditions and respect for elders and chiefs. For example the *maoma* or feasting is still done today and showcases all of the custom dances.

Sulufou's political and institutional foundations are comprised of three existing structures: the chiefly structure, the community executive committee and the vestry committee of the church. The chiefly structure has the Paramount chief as the head and five tribal chiefs of the five tribes of Sulufou. The Sulufou community executive committee consists of the community chairperson, vice-chairperson, secretary and treasurer. The priest is the head of the church and supported by the vestry committee, which also has a chairman, vice-chairman, secretary and treasurer.

These structures have specific decision-making processes, for example, the paramount chief and tribal chiefs have meetings to come up with solutions to any cultural issues and then consult with the people. The community executive committee has meetings before consulting with people, as do the church leaders to discuss church matters. In terms of natural resources, tribal landowners look after the resources on the land and tribal chiefs make the decisions about the use of resources on their respective land and sea territories.

Sulufou women may be elected into the community executive committee and they participate in decision-making relating to any community activities. However, only the chiefs deal with customary matters and women are never part of the house of chiefs.

5.2. Fera Subua

Fera Subua is also located northeast of Malaita province. It has a total population of approximately 1159 people, including 400 men, 500 women and 259 children. The only religion in the community is the Anglican Church of Melanesia. The people of Fera Subua believe that their ancestors came from Walo, Fataleka and Maloa. The core value is working together in the community; whether for the church, school or traditional ceremonies, community activities always unite the people. The major resources of the community are fish, bêche-de-mer and trochus and the major cash crops are cassava, yam, potato and pana.



Figure 9: Fera Subua Island (credit: Aydah Gwaena Akao)

The Fera Subua community has traditional boundaries with unique values and still have traditional burial sites (*bae abu'*). The *bae abu'* are where important leading tribesmen are buried and where all the traditional shrines are conserved. In the past, the pagan priest would go there to offer sacrifices to their gods. These sites are left undisturbed to date because they are restricted and out-of-bounds to everyone and it is believed that entering can cause bad luck.

Several freshwater streams on the mainland of Fera Subua are preserved together with the surrounding trees, and it is forbidden to throw rubbish, wash or swim in them. The community also conserves reefs, land and trees by placing taboos over particular areas; each tribe does this on their respective fishing grounds and lands. They normally place a taboo over fishing grounds for several months or for a year. Gardens are also preserved by placing taboos over them in order to prepare for important traditional feasts.



Figure 10: Mainland of Fera Subua (credit: Aydah Gwaena Akao)

The traditional knowledge and resource stewardship systems are governed and managed by tribal chiefs and land-owning groups. The tribal chiefs make decisions together with the landowners, including for the strict preservation of certain areas through taboos and controlled harvesting of both land and sea resources. Traditional knowledge is continually passed down from one generation to the next in the *beu to'ofi* (custom house for men); of particular importance is the transmission of valuable knowledge concerning resource harvesting techniques and special gifts for fishing and traditional medicine. Dolphin hunting is one tradition that is still practiced as it encompasses many aspects of their traditional knowledge and cultural values. The women of Fera Subua pass down important knowledge about gardening, weaving and traditional food preparations to the young girls, primarily through practice. Other knowledge is passed through songs, dances and storytelling; the vast majority is done through hands-on practice.

The chiefs in Fera Subua make decisions relating to any traditional matters and organise traditional events in the community. The chiefs and elders address issues such as tribal land disputes. The chiefs also keep records of land and sea boundaries and hand down this important information from one generation to the next for the survival of their culture and traditions as well as for security of the people. The Fera Subua executive committee and church structure work together and alongside the tribal chiefs.

5.2.1. Threats and Challenges to Community Conservation in Sulufou and Fera Subua

In Sulufou and Fera Subua, most customs and taboos are respected and play an important role in conserving species and ecosystems. However, the populations of both communities are growing and the cost of living is steadily increasing. As a result, crops are being rotated more quickly and root crops are smaller and less nutritious than in the past. Marine resources are over-harvested for food, income and bartering, and mangroves are harvested unsustainably for firewood and building materials. The communities are particularly concerned about the survival of traditional knowledge and over-harvesting of land and sea resources. The influence of foreign lifestyles has had a major impact and community governance systems are not as recognised and respected as they once were.



Figure 11: Sulufou woman collecting mangrove branches for firewood (credit: Aydah Gwaena Akao)

Sea level rise is a major external threat that impacts not only these two communities but also other islands and communities throughout the Solomon Islands. It is one of the biggest challenges in both the short- and long-term and is forcing the communities to consider measures as drastic as relocating to the mainland in Malaita, despite the potential for conflicts with current settlers and other tribes. Such a move would need to be carefully negotiated.

Sea level rise is particularly affecting the daily activities of women in Fera Subua. They are spending more time collecting coral stones to raise the island upon which their homes are built and their husbands are building new houses on higher grounds. They are also having issues preparing their food using traditional methods because their kitchens and ground ovens are already partly submerged in the sea. They are concerned about the prospect of moving inland soon because they fear that some important traditional food preparation methods will be lost if they are no longer practiced by the younger generation.

Another external threat can be found in the overlaps and conflicts between customary and state laws, in particular due to insufficient recognition of indigenous peoples' traditional stewardship, governance and knowledge systems in national environmental laws. The people of Fera Subua recently experienced clashes between their customary law and national law when they weren't properly consulted about an area in their traditional lands that was earmarked by the government for the construction of a police post and clinic. Now they refuse to give their consent to any external development as they feel their traditional land ownership is being undermined.



Figure 12: Fera Subua women discussing their concerns during a CCRI workshop (credit: Aydah Gwaena Akao)

5.3. Hageulu

Hageulu, in Isabel Province, was the third community to undertake a community conservation resilience assessment. As with the assessments in Sulufou and Fera Subua, it was also based on questionnaires, a community workshop, and face-to-face interviews with community leaders. A forthcoming workshop will share the preliminary findings with the Hageulu community and brainstorm their recommendations and priorities for strategic advocacy.



Figure 13: Women in Hageulu (Credit: James C. Meimana)

Situated in the mountains about eight kilometres from the coast of East Gao Bugotu Constituency, Hageulu is the community at the highest elevation in the province. There is no proper road access and the people use age-old forest and mountain tracks.

With a population of 758, the people of Hageulu believe that most of them originated from Gonognano and the rest from other parts of Isabel. Their core values are communal work and respect for their culture and traditions. They help each other when the need arises and assist one another in cultivation and building houses and share the day's catch. They are very respectful of their cultures and tradition. For example, they still preserve their traditional war canoe – the only one remaining in Isabel Province – that was used by their forefathers during headhunting days for war and for traditional fishing.



Figure 14: Traditional war canoe (left); boy with bamboo panpipe (right) (credit: James C. Meimana)

The people of Hageulu live in one of the few areas of the province still very rich in biodiversity. The territory contains primary forests with the second highest number of *Tubi* trees (ironwood) in Isabel province (after San Jorge Island). The people depend mainly on land and water resources for food and occasionally on sea resources, for example, fruit trees, root crops, vegetables, pigs, opossum, iguana, river prawns, freshwater eels, crabs and fish from the coast. The major cash crops are *savusavu* (traditional smoking tobacco), kumara, taro and yam. Trees and vines are also used extensively for medicine and building houses and canoes, all of which have great value for the Hageulu community.



Figure 15: *Tubi*, ironwood forests (credit: James C. Meimana)

The people still use a wealth of traditional knowledge and practices in their daily lives. They dance custom dances, make musical instruments such as panpipes out of bamboo, and hold custom feasts to mark special traditional occasions such as harvests, Christmas, and cementing of graves. They also taboo mangroves, streams, forests and sacred traditional sites. Mangrove taboos are often marked with sticks or a red leaf plant

called *nahogle'* and are used in part to increase the number of crabs and *Tue'* and *dovili'*, types of shells that are considered a delicacy.

The Hageulu territory has a number of freshwater streams, which are especially used by women and youths for washing, collecting fresh drinking water, catching eels and shrimp and gathering vegetation for food. It is strictly forbidden to throw rubbish in these streams. The chief may also make announcements to conserve them for ceremonies, indicating the area to be set aside for a certain period of time with a taboo from one tree to another.



Figure 16: Gathering medicine from a betel nut tree (credit: James C. Meimana)

Traditional boundaries also perform important roles in ecosystem conservation. Sacred sites (known as *tifuni'*) are still maintained and access to them is forbidden. This practice conserves burial grounds as well as traditional war equipment such as spears, bows and arrows, shields and stone axes.



Figure 17: Clear freshwater streams in Hageulu (credit: James C. Meimana)

5.3.1. Threats and Challenges to Community Conservation in Hageulu

The two main external threats to Hageulu and the community's conservation practices are industrial logging and mining. The community has agreed that they will not allow any logging companies to log their forests and also strongly opposes mining on their land. However, the people fear that logging will slowly make its way into their community and they are anxious that external players like the government might override their own ban on logging in the coming years.

The threat of mining is likely more imminent. The land in Hageulu is reportedly in an area earmarked for nickel mining prospecting and the community has already been consulted by the Ministry of Mines, Energy and Rural Electrification. The people are worried that they may be displaced by mining activities and relocated to other parts of the province, which would lead to a wide range of negative impacts such as loss of their homes, livelihoods, culture and traditions and sense of ownership.

In terms of internal threats, the people are worried about the potential arrival and influence of foreign cultures; they want to see their traditional knowledge and practices continued for many more years to come. The elders continue to educate the youths of the negative impacts of foreign cultures on traditional knowledge and cultural practices.

Moving forward, the community would like access to technical support from the government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to assist them in their community conservation initiatives and to better understand the impacts of logging and mining. They also need more awareness on the importance of the ecosystems, resource management and sustainable harvesting of resources.

On a more practical level, they also need awareness of how to get funds to assist them in their conservation initiatives as well as their livelihoods. The remote geographical location of Hageulu poses a particular challenge in this respect. Additionally, they feel that funders need to be more inclusive of the priorities of local indigenous communities when setting criteria for funding assistance.

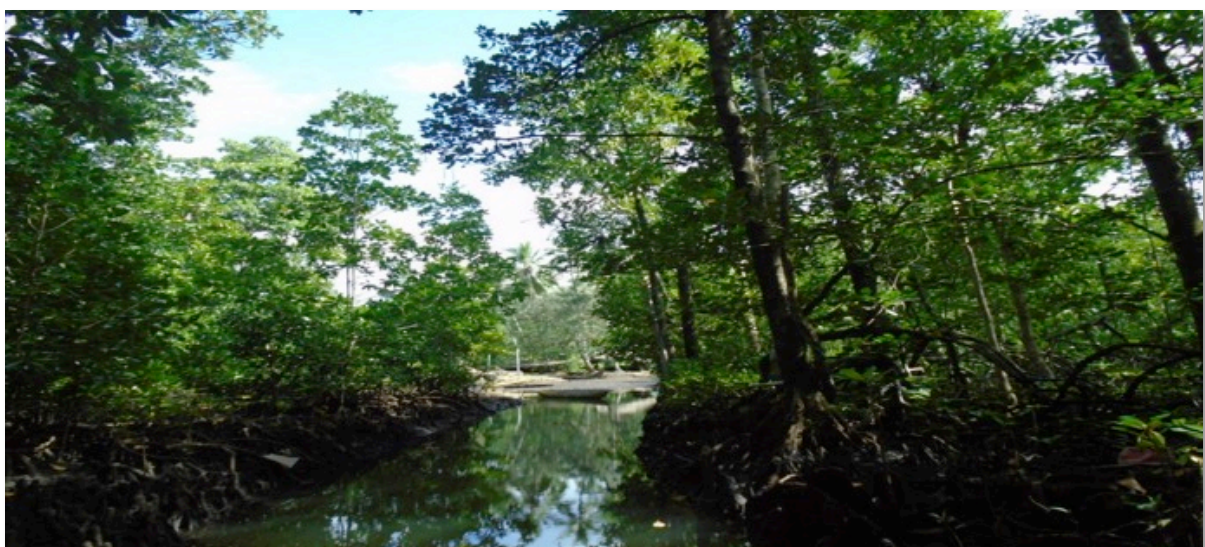


Figure 18: Mangrove forest in Hageulu (credit: James C. Meimana)

6. CONTRIBUTIONS OF COMMUNITY CONSERVATION TO THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

The two communities of Sulufou and Fera Subua contribute to the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) through their traditional knowledge and practices, which play an important role in the conservation and customary sustainable use of biodiversity. For example, *Bae abu'* burial sites in particular cover an area of about half of a square kilometre each and are regarded as so sacred that the ecosystems are left undisturbed for many years. There are about four *Bae abu'* owned by the main tribes of Sulufou and Fera Subua. Each performs the important function of preserving traditional shrines, artefacts and burial sites, and at the same time, conserving the ecosystems within them.

In addition, both communities are taking action to recover and restore mangrove ecosystems and they are looking forward to their first ever mangrove replanting programme, which will soon be organised by NIPS.



Figure 19: *Bae abu'* in the hills of Maloa (credit: Aydah Gwaena Akao)

Hageulu is also very important to the CBD because its territory is rich in biodiversity and its strong traditional governance system facilitates the sustainable harvesting of resources. In particular, the stalwart decision of the community to forbid logging and mining prospecting in Hageulu is an shining example of the power of collective action of indigenous peoples in halting inappropriate and unsustainable development on their territories. Their relative isolation from other communities limits the introduction and negative influences of other cultures into their lives.

7. REFLECTIONS ON THE CCRI PROCESS

One beneficial outcome was the active participation of women. It was encouraging to see Sulufou and Fera Subua women openly discussing their concerns, a rare occurrence in such patrilineal communities. In Hageulu, due to the influence of being a matrilineal system, the women took the lead in group discussions and presentations. The youth have also been captivated by the programme, participating actively and looking forward to subsequent CCRI engagements.

Another notable achievement is the establishment of a CCRI working committee in Sulufou, comprised of community elders, tribal chiefs, church leaders and women. They believe that inclusion of everyone in the committee will foresee the success of future CCRI activities and engagement in Sulufou.

In addition, the CCRI is gaining popularity in other communities in the provinces of Malaita and Santa Isabel. NIPS plans to undertake the CCRI in other communities in the Solomon Islands, in pursuit of their long-term strategic objectives.



Figure 20: Women-led discussions in Hageulu (credit: James C. Meimana)

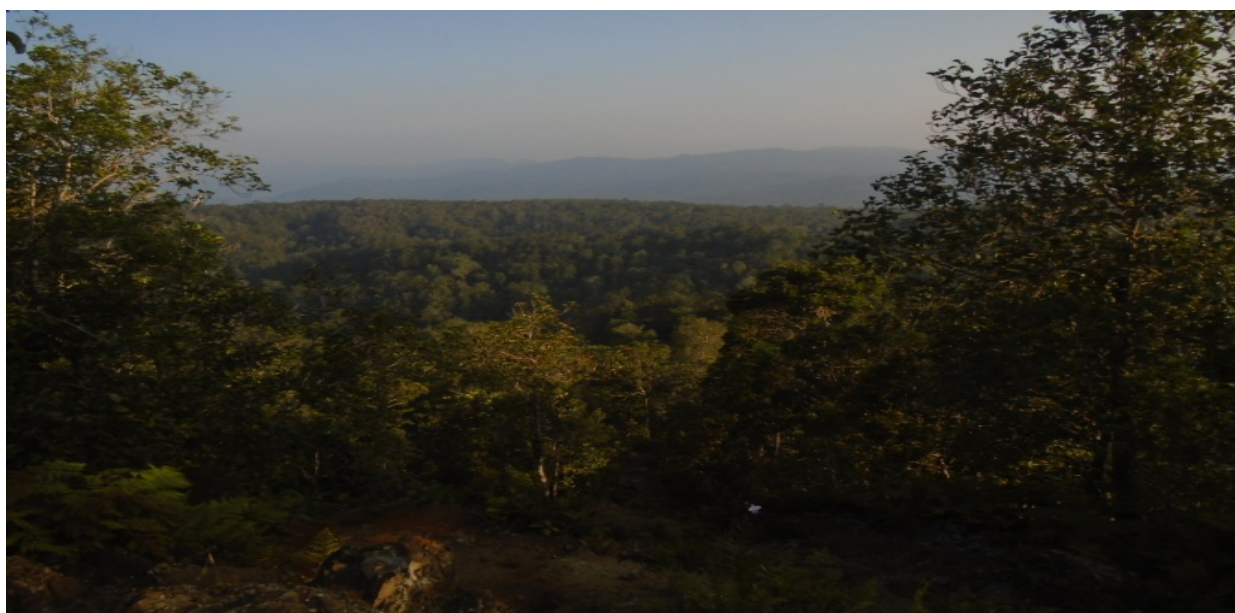


Figure 21: The view of the sea from Hageulu (credit: James C. Meimana)

8. PRELIMINARY ADVOCACY STRATEGIES TO STRENGTHEN AND SUPPORT THE RESILIENCE OF COMMUNITY CONSERVATION INITIATIVES

Preliminary advocacy strategies were developed with the communities of Sulufou and Fera Subua and further discussed with other stakeholders, including government officials and NGOs, during the national CCRI workshop in Honiara in July 2015. Given the timing of the third assessment with Hageulu, advocacy strategies still need to be developed with that community. Listed below are preliminary strategies to address internal and external threats that pose common challenges to the two communities of Sulufou and Fera Subua. These will be further developed in the near future.



Figure 22: Participants of the national CCRI workshop in Honiara in July 2015 (credit: Holly Jonas)

- **In-depth resilience assessments:** The communities would like support to undertake the assessments in more depth and rebuild their capacities to pursue self-determined conservation plans and priorities in partnership with other stakeholders.
- **Strengthening traditional knowledge and customary practices:** The communities will further discuss their plans to promote, conserve, strengthen and revitalise their traditional knowledge and customary practices. The youths are eager to assist with documentation, including of traditional fishing techniques, land cultivation, traditional boundaries and taboo sites. They also call on the Ministries of Culture and of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology to provide appropriate technical assistance.
- **Mapping:** Both communities will conduct more detailed mapping exercises, including of their land resources, traditional boundaries and taboo sites, in order to plan for future generations.

- **Mangrove conservation and restoration:** Both Sulufou and Fera Subua expressed particular interest in revitalising customary practices that enable mangrove conservation, and would welcome training for men and women in land management and conservation and replanting of mangroves (including by finding alternative cooking techniques and resources to reduce direct pressure).
- **Construction of custom house and community hall:** The people of Sulufou wish to rebuild their custom house and construct a community hall. The custom house would provide a central physical space to facilitate traditional decision-making processes, and the community hall would provide further space for discussions and activities amongst the broader community, including women.
- **Sea level rise:** This is one of the biggest challenges to the long-term survival and resilience of coastal communities in the Solomon Islands and more broadly in the South Pacific. Both Sulufou and Fera Subua are considering relocating to the mainland in Malaita in spite of the potential for conflicts with existing settlers and other tribes in the area. Such a move would need to be thoroughly discussed and carefully negotiated, perhaps with a third party mediator and/or using customary mechanisms to prevent and resolve disputes.
- **Conservation initiatives:** The communities call on local and international NGOs and the provincial and national governments to appropriately recognise and support their conservation practices and initiatives and to refrain from imposing foreign conservation methods and knowledge systems that may not be suitable for the indigenous cultures and ecosystems.
- **Financial and fundraising support:** The communities call for more financial support and capacity building to raise their own funds for their conservation initiatives and alternative economic livelihoods, particularly among the women. It is difficult for remote communities to understand what avenues are available for funding and how to respond to funders' complicated criteria and procedures; in this respect, the communities feel that fundraising processes are not inclusive of their needs and practical constraints.
- **Coordinated technical assistance:** The communities call on local and international NGOs to work collaboratively with them and the Solomon Islands government to develop coordinated strategies to support, including through appropriate technical assistance, indigenous peoples and local communities in their efforts to conserve biodiversity through customary means. Both the process and outcomes of such collaboration should be community-determined and -driven and centred on what is most appropriate for communities themselves.
- **Appropriate legal recognition and support:** As illustrated by the national legal review, some environmental laws are very supportive of indigenous peoples' and communities' rights and conservation practices, whereas others actively undermine them. There is a need for collaborative and community-tailored implementation of the former and targeted amendment and reform of the latter to align with the latest community priorities and international standards and guidance.

9. CONCLUSIONS

In the Solomon Islands, an estimated 85-90% of biodiversity is located within indigenous peoples' and local communities' territories and areas. However, traditional practices of indigenous Solomon Islanders and local communities have started to deteriorate due to direct and indirect pressures such as logging, mining and the influence of foreign cultures.

As part of a global initiative currently underway, NIPS was selected to undertake community conservation resilience assessments in the Solomon Islands. Over the course of 2015, NIPS facilitated bottom-up assessments of the resilience of community conservation practices to existing external and internal threats in three communities: Sulufou and Fera Subua in northeast Malaita and Hageulu in the province of Isabel. Through the assessment, people in the three communities gained a greater understanding of the importance of maintaining, strengthening and revitalising their customary laws and traditional languages and practices, particularly how they relate to conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity on which the communities depend for survival, livelihoods and well-being. Through an initial review of relevant environmental law undertaken in parallel to the local assessments, the communities also gained awareness of the extent to which their customary rights and practices are recognised and supported in national laws.

It is therefore critically important for the government and NGOs to work collaboratively with indigenous peoples and local communities to increase appropriate recognition and support for community conservation initiatives and mitigation and adaptation to climate change, in accordance with the communities' self-determined plans, priorities and visions for the future. This is important not only for the individual communities involved in the initiative, but also for the country as a whole, given the fundamental role of indigenous peoples and communities in sustaining the natural and social-cultural foundations of the Solomon Islands.

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