



# The Solomon Islands

## Introduction

The first two communities to undergo the CCRI assessment process in the Solomon Islands were Sulufou and Fera Subua in northeast Malaita. A third community—in Hageulu Village, Isabel Province—was also consulted at a later date.

The CCRI was based on questionnaires, workshops, face-to-face interviews with community leaders and a capacity-building workshop in Honiara. It prompted the development of a CCRI advocacy strategy and a legal review. Another 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 the women took the lead in group discussions and presentations, and the youths have been captivated by the programme, participating actively and looking forward to future CCRI engagements.

The two communities of Sulufou and Fera Subua are built on traditional artificial islands made of coral stones, and depend on both land and sea resources. For example, root crops and fruit trees are cultivated on the mainland nearby.

The communities explained that they have rules about the uses of and access to different terrestrial and marine areas. For instance, there are Bae abu' burial sites and mana bisi' areas where women give birth and men are not allowed, and custom houses or beu to'ofi', where only men are permitted.

In complete contrast, the village of Hageulu is located high up in the mountains, and is about 8km from the coast of East Gao Bugotu Constituency. There is no proper road access to the Hageulu community, only forest and mountain tracks the people have been using for many years. Community participants stated that their community's core values are communal work and respect for their culture and traditions. They help each other when the need arises, assisting one another in cultivation, building houses and sharing the day's catch. They still preserve their traditional war canoe, the only one



Women preparing to go to their gardens downhill.  
Ayda Akao/CIC

left in Isabel Province, which their forefathers used during headhunting days for war and for fishing (using traditional techniques still practiced today). The people depend mainly on land and freshwater resources for food, and occasionally the sea. Foods include fruit trees, root crops, vegetables, pigs, opossum, iguana, river prawns, fresh water eels, and crabs and fish from the coast. The major cash crops grown by the community are savusavu (traditional tobacco), kumara, taro and yam.

The people of Hageulu live in one of the few areas that is still rich in biodiversity. The territory contains primary forests with the second highest number of Tubi trees' (iron wood) in Isabel Province (after San Jorge Island). But the land is also in



an area earmarked for nickel mining prospecting, as identified by the Ministry of Mines and Energy.

In the Solomon Islands some customary laws are already accepted by the state. For example, the Fisheries Act recognises customary usage of marine fisheries. The state also recognises customary practices including rights of landowners, taboo sites and various

kinds of evidence including spoken history. On the other hand the Protected Areas Act does not address indigenous people's involvement in traditional conservation and stewardship, and the national River Waters Act does not mention indigenous people's rights at all. Furthermore, the Minister has the power to declare the erection of dams and bridges and the diversion of water pipes.

One of NIPS's long term goals is to get the Solomon Islands government to endorse the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and embed the rights of indigenous peoples in all national laws.



Group discussion during CCRI workshop in Hageulu. James Meimana/CIC



Discussion with women of Fera Subua community during CCRI workshop. Aydah Vahia/CIC

## Community Conservation Resilience in the Solomon Islands

The CCRI in Sulufou and Fera Subua showed that both communities have numerous traditions that conserve biodiversity. These include preserving small streams and their surroundings to conserve habitat and ensure water for drinking, and protecting land that has been cultivated for a certain length of time. There are also customs and taboos that govern access to fishing grounds, reefs and inland sites, which prohibit or limit access and govern when and how to harvest resources. There are

seasonal prohibitions relating to areas such as fishing grounds and mangroves. Bae abu' sacred burial sites cover about 0.5km<sup>2</sup> and result in ecosystems being left undisturbed for many years. There are about four Bae abu' owned by the main tribes of Sulufou and Fera Subua.

However, the population is growing and the cost of living is increasing. As a result crops are being rotated more quickly, and root crops are smaller and not as healthy as they used to be. Marine resources are

also being over harvested for food, income and bartering. Mangroves are harvested unsustainably for firewood and house building. Nevertheless, most customs and taboos are respected and play an important role in conserving ecosystems. In addition both communities are looking forward to their first ever mangrove replanting programme with NIPS.

The communities consider dolphin hunting a sustainable traditional practice, with elders and chiefs



ensuring the dolphins are not over harvested by enforcing breaks between hunts, normally for a year or two. Only large dolphins are harvested, the smaller ones are left. Dolphin teeth are culturally important, being used to pay bride prices and to settle disputes. Dolphin meat is also considered a delicacy.

In general, the communities are particularly concerned about the survival of traditional knowledge and overharvesting of land and sea resources. The influence of western lifestyles has had a major impact and community governance systems are not as recognised and respected as they once were.

Finally, sea level rise is one of the biggest challenges they face. Both communities said that they are thinking of relocating to the mainland in Malaita in spite of the potential for conflicts with current settlers and other tribes. Such a move would need to be carefully negotiated.

In Hageulu Village there are traditional boundaries and unique

values and roles of ecosystems in existence. For example, there are a number of fresh streams in the Hageulu territory, which the women and youths use in particular, for washing and collecting fresh drinking water as well as catching eels and shrimps and vegetation for food. Throwing rubbish in these streams is forbidden. The streams are also protected by occasional taboos, when the chief indicates a specific area is to be set aside for a particular period of time, indicating the boundaries by referring to specific trees.

Taboos are also applied to mangroves for certain periods of time in order to conserve and increase the number of crabs and a variety of fresh water shells, called Tue' and dovili', which are considered to be delicacies. Sticks are erected around the preserved mangrove areas as markers, or a red-leaved plant called Lahoglo' may be planted. In general, trees and vines are used extensively for medicine, house building, and canoe making and the community said that

they will not allow any companies to log their forests.

Other sacred sites, known as tifuni', include burial grounds and areas used to conserve traditional war equipment, such as spears, bows and arrows, shields and stone axes. Access to these sites is forbidden.

There is a wealth of traditional knowledge that the people still practice and use in their daily living, including custom dances, and making music with bamboo panpipes to mark special traditional occasions like harvests, the cementing of graves and Christmas.

Hageulu community is a valuable example of how strong traditional governance can lead to the conservation of biodiversity. They still have rich unlogged primary forest, and consent for nickel prospecting has not been given.

## Preliminary Conclusions and Recommendations

The communities concluded that they would appreciate support to undertake the CCRI assessment in more depth and rebuild their capacity to pursue community conservation plans and priorities.

Traditional knowledge and customary practices need to be promoted and/or revitalised and there needs to be support for economic livelihoods, as particularly noted by the women. The youths are also eager to document traditional knowledge.

The communities are keen to map land resources, traditional boundaries and taboo sites, and to plan for future generations. They expressed particular interest in revitalising customary practices that enable mangrove conservation, and would welcome training for men and women in land management and conserving and replanting mangroves (including by finding alternative cooking techniques and resources). The communities in Sulufou and Fera Subua also want

to rebuild a custom house and a community house. This would provide a central physical space facilitating traditional governance, and a further space for discussions and activities amongst the broader community, including women.

With respect to climate change there may be opportunities to promote indigenous people's rights and community conservation initiatives under the Solomon Islands' National Adaptation Programme of Actions





(NAPA). Ultimately however, moving inland is an overwhelming priority for many in the island communities. Sulufou and Fera Subua women are particularly keen on resettling on the mainland and they are grateful that the CCRI process has brought this issue into the open. They argue that resettling inland will help them to cultivate land and access fresh

water. As observed by Wilfred Akao, Maloa landowner and Sulufou elder, resettling inland means reconnecting with their land and their ancestral heritage that they left behind many years ago when they migrated to the coast during the colonisation era.

There is also a need for a proper biodiversity survey to identify the

different flora and fauna species in the area, with a particular focus on endemic species and mangrove species.



Fera Subua Island, Solomon Islands. Aydah Vahia/CIC



Sulufou Island, Solomon Islands CCRI. Aydah Vahia/CIC

## Testimony

Mr James Iroga is a Fera Subua Community Elder. This is his personal testimony concerning the needs of the people of Sulufou and Fera Subua of North East Malaita.

"Suluofu island is the first artificial island to be built 200 years ago by our forefathers. However, we believe that the only solution for our people now is relocating to the mainland. But this is very difficult because the mainland is owned by different tribes and to negotiate is very difficult. It is also very important that our people move inland as we want to participate fully in our mangrove ecosystem replanting and recovery work plans. I'm grateful to the Director of Global Forest Coalition and NIPS for bringing this issue to the surface for other stakeholders to also see our need and provide support to our people. We, the people of Sulufou and Fera Subua, look forward to working collaboratively with you to find solutions to resettle our people."



Aydah Vahia/CIC

