

Engaging women and men in community-based resource management processes in Solomon Islands



OVERVIEW

In Solomon Islands, 80 percent of the population lives in rural areas where the use and management of natural resources is central to people's livelihoods. In addition, approximately 90 percent of terrestrial resources and inshore coastal areas, islands and islets in Solomon Islands are under customary tenure, where particular families, clans or tribes have primary rights to decide how resources are used and managed. Given this context, the government has taken a community-based approach to resource management as its primary strategy.

Community-based resource management describes the management that communities carry out themselves over land, sea or freshwater resources. Sometimes communities are supported by external partners like nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), research agencies or the government. Community-based resource management recognizes that community members are the owners and custodians of their resources, and so empowers them as stewards, using local governance structures and institutions. Evidence suggests that basing resource management on local arrangements that are already in place, and on local and traditional knowledge, leads to management that is more likely to be respected and complied with, and that better fits a community's particular context.¹

By definition, community-based resource management approaches aim to benefit all members of the community now and in the future.² In practice, however, management can have different benefits and costs for different groups of people—including men and women. Research across the Pacific, including in Solomon Islands, demonstrates that there is often disparity in access rights, roles, responsibilities and benefits between and among women and men. Achieving equitable participation by women and men in local resource management is challenging in practice, and most decision-making about resource use and management still tends to be dominated by men. However, in some places there are signs that this is changing with the support of both men and women community champions.

Gender equity refers to the process of being fair to women and men, in order that women and men can equally access opportunities and life choices regardless of their sex. It has been proposed that local and national management policies and practices can be more effective if they are more gender equitable and better consider the differences in how men and women participate in natural resource use and in the community, taking into account their potentially different goals.³

The CGIAR Research Program on Aquatic Agricultural Systems (AAS), led by WorldFish, aims to deliver increased food security and income for the millions of people living in and depending on aquatic agricultural systems, and intends to take a gender-transformative approach to integrating gender into research in development. With respect to community-based resource management, this approach aims to foster change in the social environment to maximize the ability of men and women to participate in and benefit from natural resource management. The AAS program approach is participatory and provides opportunities for stakeholders to regularly reflect on social and environmental change, to share lessons, and to plan together.

To further explore what gender-equitable approaches to resource management mean in practice, WorldFish and The Nature Conservancy have documented emerging lessons, gaps and opportunities to better understand how gender-equitable approaches can be taken into account in community-based resource management.

CHALLENGES

Gender equity is increasingly highlighted as core to sustainable development. However, there are many challenges to achieving gender equity in terms of access to resources and decisions about how resources are used and managed.

- **Gender roles.** In rural communities, both men and women are involved in community activities, in producing food and generating income, and in preparing food and taking care of their families, but their roles vary by gender. Men are better represented on local committees and in regional and national politics. Men may have more opportunities to travel outside of the community to meetings and trainings than women, who have the primary responsibility for child care and work longer hours.⁴ These different roles can affect whether and how men and women are able to participate in, and how they are impacted by, decisions about resource management.
- **Lack of information.** Information about programs and activities run by external organizations in communities is commonly addressed first to leaders, chiefs or committee chairs; these are usually men. As a result, women and youth are often dependent on these men to pass on the information through communication channels such as announcements in church. This reliance, combined with the relatively low literacy levels of rural women and men (60.1% with only primary education and 18.6% with no schooling)⁵ means that in some situations information does not reach marginalized members of communities, including many women.
- **Limits to participation.** When both men and women are present in meetings and workshops, there may be social and cultural reasons that mean women are less likely to speak up or contribute toward decisions.⁶ We have also observed that when selection of participants relies on male community leaders, most participants are men, even when the leaders are explicitly requested to invite women to events. When women do attend community events with external organizations, they often have a dual role of preparing food for the participants, and as a result can spend much of the meeting moving in and out, losing the opportunity to participate fully.
- **Assumptions.** Understanding the roles of men and women in a community requires questioning assumptions. For example, a common assumption is that all fishers are men. However, women's roles in fisheries are numerous and diverse, and include collecting, processing, preparing and marketing fish and other marine resources that contribute directly to the well-being of their families and communities.⁷ Yet because fishing is perceived to be a male-dominated sector and "fishing" is taken to mean line or spear fishing and not gleaning for shells and seaweed—and also because the term "fishing" does not capture associated activities such as processing, preparation and marketing—the role of women in fisheries can be overlooked.
- **Differing motivations.** Community consultations often reveal that men and women may have different motivations for getting involved in managing resources and hold different objectives for management. Due to the dominant gender roles and norms in some communities, men can tend to look more at the land and sea for ways to generate income while women may place greater emphasis on how the land and sea can provide adequate food for their families; men's priorities are often more strongly reflected in management strategies.
- **Cultural norms.** Known as *kastom* in Solomon Islands, cultural norms—can play an important role in safeguarding the morality, behavior and attitudes of people, but may not necessarily align with democratic processes and equality. For example, where men are regarded as heads of households and have the role of leading and determining household decisions, they may also directly or indirectly control how women spend their time, including their involvement in activities outside the household. Where ideas such as promoting equal participation in household or community decisions and promoting equal opportunities to access and benefit from resources are considered important to households and communities, there can be some challenges in reaching a balance with cultural norms.

Communities Driving NGO Learning about Gender-Equitable Approaches to Community-Based Resource Management

Since 2006, WorldFish has worked closely with communities in Isabel, Western and Malaita provinces to develop community-based management plans for coastal marine resources. Funded primarily by the Australian Center for International Agricultural Research, the facilitation of community-led processes has evolved over the years into clear stages:

1. a scoping stage involving facilitators becoming informed about a community and building a relationship with that community
2. a participatory diagnosis stage where resource owners and community members identify issues and set a goal for management
3. a management planning phase that involves determining the steps to achieve the management goal.

We have seen that men, women and youth are all well represented in the scoping and participatory diagnosis phases, which tend to utilize full community meetings and facilitated age- and gender-separate focus group discussions. In the management planning phase, however, responsibility to make decisions and consult with the community is typically concentrated into the hands of a limited number of people who make up a resource management committee. It appears that unless they are targeted specifically, women—and in some cases, young men—can become progressively less prominent in discussions and can eventually become relatively invisible in the process.

In 2008, the marine resource management committee in Kia Village, Isabel Province—composed of seven men (all district chiefs) and one woman—decided to have an official launch for their marine resource management plan. On the day of the launch, men and women were heavily involved; however, the role of women was largely confined to preparing food for the more than 100 guests from the community and visiting partner organizations.



Speeches at the launch sparked the interest of some of the women present, who although active in women's groups, had not had the time or opportunity to engage with the management planning process. Subsequently, representatives from the Mothers Union of Kia approached WorldFish to request targeted activities that would enable women to be better informed and able to engage more fully in the marine resource management plan. The Mothers Union is a locally based Anglican Church organization working to improve the well-being of Solomon Island communities, particularly women and children. In Kia, the Mothers Union had an annual program of activities to raise awareness through targeting other women in the district about different topics relating to family and community life.

“*We gained new ideas and knowledge from other women and facilitators, and we felt free to talk and share; a separate workshop for men and women is good.*”

- Anonymous evaluation response from a participant in training-of-trainers sessions

Information sheets and a “training of trainers” were co-designed and tested by the women of the Mothers Union and WorldFish staff in Kia Village. In March 2009, a group of 12 literate and educated women in the Mothers Union were trained as community-based trainers, who then disseminated key messages about marine resource management to other women in the community.

Since this initiative, women in other provinces have also benefited. Training-of-trainers workshops have been held for rural women in Western and Malaita provinces (Hilly et al., 2012), a publically available DVD has been made to support that training, and in 2013, a workshop in Honiara supported by the New Zealand Aid-funded Mekem Strong Solomon Islands Fisheries Program brought together 21 women from four different provinces to a training of trainers and information-sharing forum coordinated by the Solomon Islands Locally Managed Marine Area Network.

The Mothers Union went on to receive short-term funding from a Global Environment Fund-funded Community Small Grants Project to conduct awareness training regarding marine resource management issues in the wider Kia District, alongside men who received funding for monitoring of sea cucumbers. The Mothers Union has progressed to have a strong voice in the resource management agenda for the larger Isabel Province, as shown by their growing work on community awareness with The Nature Conservancy. (See next story.)



Women's workshop in Malaita.

Ridges to Reefs Planning: Women Leading the Way in Isabel Province

For nearly 20 years, The Nature Conservancy has worked with local and national partners on community-based resource management in Solomon Islands. In 2012, at the request of landowners and the Isabel Provincial Government, The Nature Conservancy worked with stakeholders to develop a “Ridges to Reefs” conservation plan for Isabel Province. Participants combined scientific and local knowledge to identify features within customarily owned lands and seas of high conservation value to communities. These features represent important biological and cultural resources that would benefit from protection or management, such as freshwater sources, cultural heritage sites, turtle nesting beaches and fish spawning aggregation areas. Combined with scientific data sets and other information such as proposed mining tenement sites, it also highlights the current and urgent threats in Isabel Province from mining.

The planning process was part of the six-country regional Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security.⁸ The need for the process to be driven by local stakeholders and to involve women was especially critical in Isabel Province, which has matrilineal land tenure. Matrilineal land tenure means that land ownership is passed through the female line. However, while women are recognized culturally as the land owners, in reality they have often been excluded from decision-making and the benefits arising from development, such as logging, and more recently, mining.

In order to increase the participation of women in conservation and development planning, The Nature Conservancy is building a strong partnership with the Anglican women’s network the Mothers Union in Isabel Province. As more than 97 percent of people in Isabel Province are Anglican, the Mothers Union is a strong local partner with connections in every community in Isabel. For the Ridges to Reefs initiative, representatives of the Mothers Union were supported by The Nature Conservancy with funds and information materials to communicate the planning process, assist women in attending the planning meetings and help women contribute. In August 2012, the Isabel Ridges to Reefs Conservation Plan was finalized.



The Nature Conservancy, in partnership with the Mothers Union, then facilitated the Isabel Ridges to Reefs Train the Trainers workshop. Around 40 participants gathered in Buala, the capital of Isabel Province, to acquire the skills to raise awareness about the issues raised in the plan with the communities across Isabel Province.

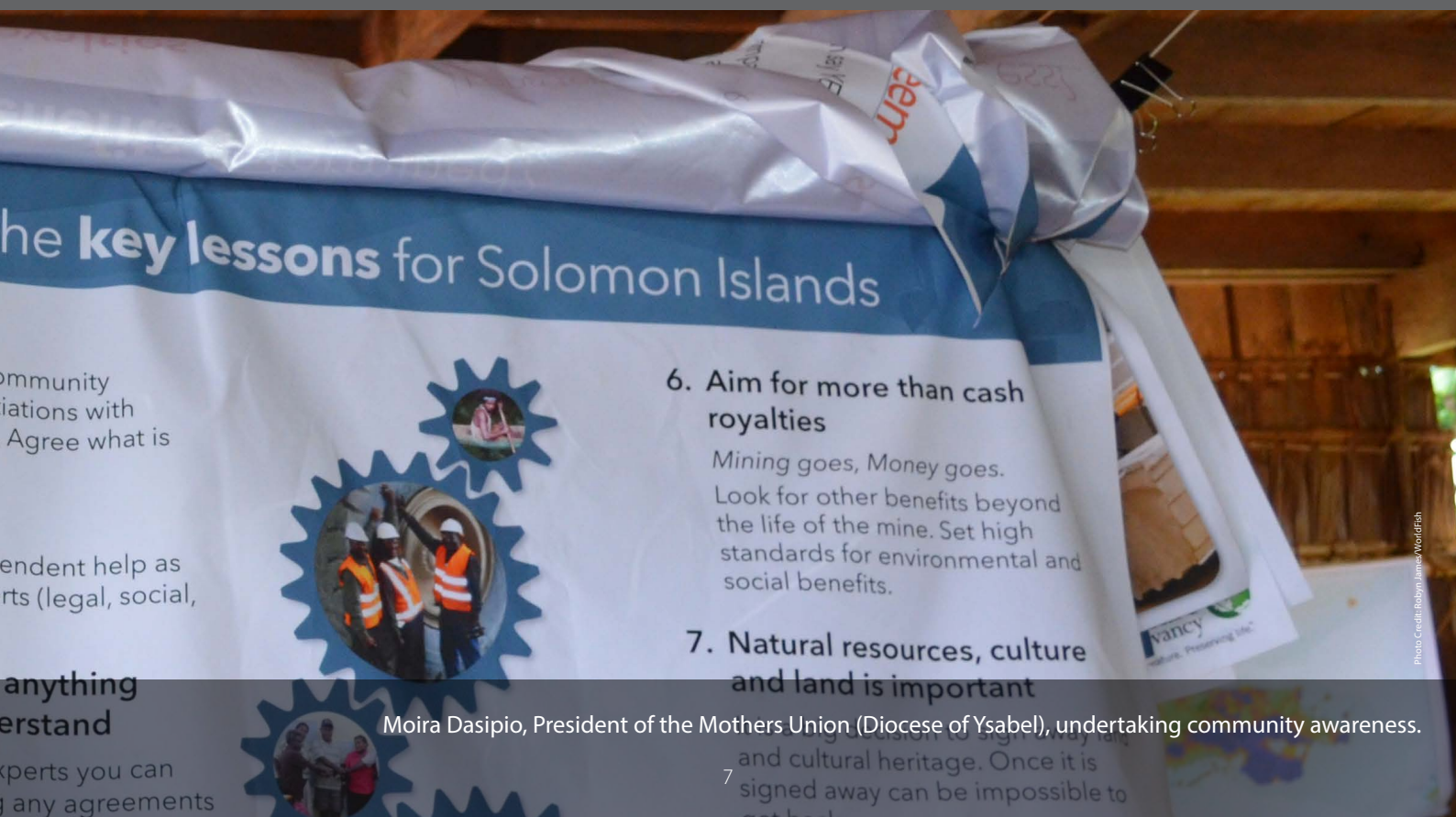
After the workshop, a group of community facilitators (men and women) began rolling out the Isabel Ridges to Reefs plan. The Mothers Union focused on key messages about the importance of a well-managed environment for a healthy community (Figure 1). This raised awareness and created interest in community-based conservation and sustainable natural resource management.

By mid-2014, following the Mothers Union awareness campaign, The Nature Conservancy had received more than 30 written requests from communities for assistance in establishing conservation areas on their customary lands. These requests can only be made when all chiefs declare that the land is free from disputes. The Nature Conservancy, with the Mothers Union and the Isabel Provincial Government, is now assisting these communities to develop management plans for these areas so that the protected areas can be legally registered and recognized under national legislation.

Mothers Union President Moira Dasipio's efforts in supporting the women of Isabel to build this enthusiasm and confidence have been recognized at the regional level through a Women's Leadership Award as part of the Coral Triangle Initiative. She notes, "We are no longer merely women in the kitchen. We are stepping up to speak for our nation as a whole and our own future generations to come."



Figure 1. Awareness poster. Facilitators highlighted the importance of the "healthy environment for healthy community" message. ©Glenn Althor, Robyn James and Nate Peterson.



Moira Dasipio, President of the Mothers Union (Diocese of Ysabel), undertaking community awareness.

Experience from development work around the world shows that by using inclusive approaches, development partners can help people to achieve their long-term goals, as well as reduce the disparities between men and women in opportunities and life choices. If underlying gender roles and norms are better understood, then community initiatives can be tailored to the needs and goals of both women and men.

The work of the Mothers Union in Solomon Islands, in partnership with The Nature Conservancy, successfully utilized gender-sensitive approaches and particular local strengths to gain wider involvement and participation among women. These included the following:

- **Support by strong male champions.** The Archbishop of Isabel, the Premier of Isabel Provincial Government and the Paramount Chief of Isabel, for example, have all been very supportive of the Mothers Union. They have encouraged women to get involved in planning and decision-making to promote better management of Isabel's natural resources.
- **Strong female champions.** The president of the Mothers Union in Isabel is also a strong leader and worked very hard to ensure that women have participated in all stages of the natural resource management planning processes.
- **Involvement of both men and women.** Each group conducting awareness on the Ridges to Reefs plan deliberately contained a mix of both men and women.
- **Utilization of a well-respected, existing local network.** Not only is the Mothers Union already established across the province, but it is also supported by a widespread local organization—the Anglican Church.
- **Building the capacity of women.** The Ridges to Reefs awareness process has resulted in women gaining confidence to speak up about issues that will affect them and their family's future.
- **Public, global recognition of women and their work.** Moira Dasipio's work, for example, was recognized with a Coral Triangle leadership award and has increased the credibility of the Mothers Union's work with the government and the community.

Based on experience in communities and consultations with partners such as environmental education NGO Live and Learn⁹, WorldFish and The Nature Conservancy have identified other locally appropriate solutions to guide organizations working with Solomon Islands communities in community-based natural resource management.

Provide targeted communications materials. Communities have a range of effective communication channels, but these may differ for men and women. Experience has shown that useful strategies to reach both men and women include the following:

- Work directly with local community men's and women's groups to develop communication materials that suit the context.
- Design awareness materials differently for women and men depending on their information requests (e.g. use pictures instead of words in areas with high female illiteracy).
- Utilize and empower strong, educated women in the community to be the trainers for other women in the community.

Support access to information. Men and women have different opportunities to access information. Men who have more freedom and time to travel or to attend workshops and meetings don't always effectively share information with other men when they return to the community. However, when women and men have the opportunity to access information directly, they can share through their channels of communication with others and with children in the household. Useful strategies to address these issues include the following:

- Arrange specific activities at times and locations that are suitable so that both men and women have improved access to information.
- Provide opportunities for men and women to learn together and share experiences.
- If representing an organization from outside of the community, talk with leaders of both men's and women's groups early and come to a clear understanding of agreed communication channels.
- Provide opportunities for different groups within the community to share experiences with each other.
- Carry out activities for men and women within the community simultaneously, but if necessary, separately. Ensure the processes are transparent between the groups.

Provide opportunities for leadership. Women are often excluded from decision-making processes, even when the decisions being made aim to address their needs.¹⁰ To avoid exclusion of women in decision making, use the following strategies:

- Conduct a participatory gender analysis to help guide facilitators and to increase community self-awareness about impacts of different management interventions on men, women and youth in the community.
- Establish partnerships with women's groups and church groups to develop programs that women can lead and that are aligned with their existing programs so as not to add an extra burden.
- Seek out male champions who are supportive of the involvement of women and youth in marine resource management.

RESULTS

Solomon Islands government agencies, NGOs and community groups are seeking to understand what a “gender-equitable approach to resource management” means in practice. These practical experiences of how partners can work with communities to effect more equitable participation of men and women in ways that are developed through a participatory process provide lessons on which we can build.

In the communities where WorldFish and The Nature Conservancy work, we have seen that by taking the time to understand the perspectives of both women and men at the start of engagement, we can better tailor our programs and see better outcomes for both women and men. The need to design activities for men and women, separately and together, has been reinforced through participatory planning with communities.

The learning from experiences described in the first story has been influential in determining the approach of the WorldFish-led AAS program in Solomon Islands. This is reflected in the emerging research plan on gender-transformative approaches in Solomon Islands, in the short-term plans to

- build an understanding of how social and gender norms influence development outcomes in aquatic agricultural systems to provide the basis for designing gender-transformative approaches in research in development;
- strengthen the capacity of AAS staff and research and development partners to effectively adopt and integrate gender-transformative approaches;
- strengthen gender coalitions working at the national level to facilitate learning and scaling out of successful approaches.

The early success stories from Kia also illustrate the value of sharing learning. Knowledge sharing and learning build capacity both in partner staff and in the communities with whom we work. During the past six years, facilitators’ guides have been produced for Solomon Islands that address gender-inclusive natural resource management.¹¹ Such guides acknowledge the importance of men and women participating in community management to promote improved sharing of benefits, better compliance with rules, and locally accepted, more consistent management.

By sharing these preliminary lessons from experience, WorldFish aims to stimulate discussion about innovative gender-equitable approaches in natural resource management in Solomon Islands. This is consistent with the 2009 Solomon Islands Government Policy on Gender Equality and Women’s Development, which aims to improve the economic status of women through access to and sharing of productive resources, and to promote equal participation of women and men in decision-making and leadership.

As organizations like WorldFish and The Nature Conservancy build on their learning, community initiatives and planning processes can be increasingly tailored to help both women and men unlock their potential to contribute to and benefit from development.

- ¹ Evans L, Cherrett N and Pems D. 2011. Assessing the impact of fisheries co-management interventions in developing countries: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Environmental Management* 92:1938–49.
- ² “Community is used here in the broadest sense of a functional social unit; at different times and in different cultures, the most relevant social unit in connection with local (marine) resource management may be a group of villages, a single village, a clan, a family, or a chief or other influential individual in the community” (Johannes 2002).
- ³ Kronen M and Vunisea A. 2007. Women never hunt – but fish: Highlighting equality for women in policy formulation and strategic planning in the coastal fisheries sector in Pacific Island countries. *SPC Women in Fisheries Bulletin* 17.
- ⁴ Maetala R. 2009. Gender issues in fisheries: A look into gender issues in Solomon Islands fisheries. A report prepared for the NZAID Fisheries Review 2009.
- ⁵ Solomon Islands Government. 2009. Basic tables and census description.
- ⁶ Vunisea A. 2008. The “culture of silence” and fisheries management. *SPC Women in Fisheries Information Bulletin* 18:42–43.
- ⁷ Weiant P and Aswani S. 2006. Early effects of a community-based marine protected area on the food security of participating households. *SPC Traditional Marine Resource Management and Knowledge Information Bulletin* 19.
- ⁸ Funded by Packard, Asian Development Bank and the Australian Government.
- ⁹ We would like to acknowledge advice and comments on the text from Live and Learn staff in Honiara.
- ¹⁰ Live and Learn. 2010. Women and men working together in natural resource management: A facilitator’s guide to gender inclusive natural resource management. <http://www.livelearn.org/resources/women-and-men-working-together-natural-resource-management>
- ¹¹ Govan H, Aalbersberg W, Tawake A and Parks J. 2008. Locally-managed marine areas: A guide to supporting community-based adaptive management. The Locally Managed Marine Area Network. [www.lmمانetwork.org/files/lmماغuide.pdf](http://www.lmmanetwork.org/files/lmماغuide.pdf);
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About the CGIAR Research Program on Aquatic Agricultural Systems

Approximately 500 million people in Africa, Asia and the Pacific depend on aquatic agricultural systems for their livelihoods; 138 million of these people live in poverty. Occurring along the world's floodplains, deltas and coasts, these systems provide multiple opportunities for growing food and generating income. However, factors like population growth, environmental degradation and climate change are affecting these systems, threatening the livelihoods and well-being of millions of people.

The CGIAR Research Program on Aquatic Agricultural Systems (AAS) seeks to reduce poverty and improve food security for many small-scale fishers and farmers depending on aquatic agriculture systems by partnering with local, national and international partners to achieve large-scale development impact.

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