

Spreading community-based resource management: Testing the “lite-touch” approach in Solomon Islands

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Abstract

In Solomon Islands, community-based resource management (CBRM) is the main strategy for managing coastal fisheries. Although hundreds of communities have implemented CBRM already, the majority of Solomon Islands communities have not, and it is not realistic for partner organisations such as non-governmental organisations and government agencies to spread the concept of CBRM by engaging communities individually. More efficient and cost effective approaches, such as the “lite-touch” that uses relatively few, infrequent visits and appreciative facilitation methods, are required to build on community strengths and capacities. In this article we describe how the lite-touch approach was used to support the Mararo community to successfully implement CBRM, and to act as a “core” community to inspire and guide surrounding communities to follow suit. A community resource person or “champion” was supported to lead activities in Mararo; this person maintained momentum within the community, even in the absence of a partner organisation. Training workshops designed to accelerate CBRM spread were also provided to the community, and these increased community confidence to be better CBRM advocates in their visits to adjacent villages. The approach helped build community ownership of and pride in their own CBRM programme. In this test case we found the lite-touch approach worked well, in part because this community was well-organised, with relatively few apparent conflicts over resources. We found that the use of the community’s informal networks was effective for spreading CBRM information, and helped to overcome challenges of geographic isolation and high costs of logistics. Mararo went on to register itself as a community-based organisation, which means it is eligible for small grants and shows signs of being self-sustained. Our findings highlight that rural communities, in certain contexts, are able to support themselves and nearby communities in implementing CBRM activities to achieve their community visions, with relatively little support from external CBRM partners.

Introduction

People from developing coastal nations across the Pacific have depended on marine resources for food and livelihoods for many centuries. As populations grow and become increasingly connected to global markets, more pressure is applied to these coastal resources. In many cases, coastal resource decline and environmental degradation is placing livelihoods and food security at risk (Bell et al. 2009). The challenge of managing coastal marine resources has captured the attention of governments, inter-governmental agencies, and environmental groups throughout the region (e.g. as illustrated in relatively recent initiatives such as Coral Triangle Initiative Secretariat 2009; Pacific Community 2015).

To address coastal resource decline, a dominant response in practice (Govan et al. 2009; Jupiter et al. 2014) and a proposed solution in policy

(Melanesian Spearhead Group 2014; Pacific Community 2015) has been to encourage and support coastal communities to establish community-based resource management (CBRM). The popularity of CBRM can be attributed to the recognition that: 1) those using the resources should be part of decisions to manage the resources (Johannes et al. 2000); 2) there are strong local and customary foundations in the Pacific on which to build contemporary management measures (Hviding and Ruddle 1991; Johannes 1982); and 3) centralised governments (national fisheries agencies) have been challenged to manage small-scale and rurally operating fisheries (Ruddle 1998; World Bank 2004). Much work describes the potential of CBRM and what CBRM has achieved in specific cases (see reviews by Cohen et al. 2014; Govan et al. 2009; Jupiter et al. 2014), and the particular strategies and models that have been employed for establishing CBRM (e.g. Govan et al. 2008; WorldFish 2013). A common

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element of most of these CBRM approaches is that they aim to integrate scientific information and modern principles with traditional and local knowledge and management systems.

In Solomon Islands, CBRM is recognised by the government as the principal resource management strategy (Cohen et al. 2015; MECDM/MFMR 2009; MFMR 2010). CBRM is implemented with the support of a variety non-governmental organisations (NGOs), research agencies and government ministries (Cohen et al. 2012; Govan et al. 2009). To date, it is estimated that 350 communities have carried out some sort of CBRM in Solomon Islands (Govan et al. 2015). Despite the intention of CBRM as a largely bottom-up, and community driven process, the different approaches proposed and employed by these partners tend towards relatively intensive and long-term engagements with communities. Consequently, using the current intense CBRM model of engagement with communities is slow, expensive and unlikely to ever reach the approximately 4,000 coastal communities in Solomon Islands. Resources and capacity limit the spread of CBRM across the relatively vast and remote geography of Solomon Islands.

Both government and NGO sectors have recognised the need to identify and test more cost-effective approaches that can promote and enhance the spread of CBRM (Govan et al. 2011; Orirana et al. 2015). Govan and colleagues (2011) proposed an approach to CBRM that is less resource demanding, but still provides sufficient support to communities so that they are able to: 1) identify a resource issue on which they wish to take action; 2) implement sustainable and effective CBRM in their own community; and 3) act as a source of information

and inspiration for other communities to implement CBRM (see also Govan 2013). The aim of this so called “lite-touch” approach (WorldFish 2013) is to establish “core” sites (referred to by others as seed sites or learning sites) that can serve as examples and inspiration for neighbouring communities (Govan et al. 2011; Orirana et al. 2015). In this model, Govan and colleagues (2011) also describe the use of provincial centres and other central points to disseminate information en masse to communities (Fig. 1); however, in this paper we focus only on the role of core communities in facilitating the spread of CBRM.

The objective of this paper is to test the effectiveness of this lite-touch approach in Mararo village, a remote village in the eastern region of Malaita where people are highly reliant on coastal resources.

The lite-touch approach

The lite-touch approach involves a collaborative process between a CBRM partner (e.g. NGO, government or research agency) and communities to design, customise and implement CBRM. This approach is similar to other models, but requires much less intense or frequent engagements than in more mainstream models (WorldFish 2013). The lite-touch approach is viewed as helpful in situations where CBRM partners have only rare opportunities to visit a particular community, and as a means to promote local ownership of the CBRM process and outcomes. This approach is hypothesised to improve the cost effectiveness in delivering support to communities and promote community ownership (rather than dependence on partners) of CBRM. The lite-touch approach enables communities to implement some steps in the CBRM process independently and to move forward in developing their management plans

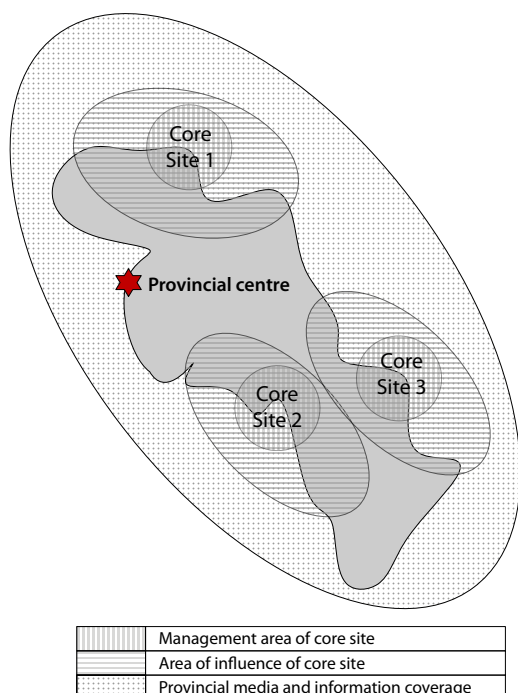


Figure 1. Proposed nested model of community-based resource management spread within a province (in Solomon Islands) through core communities. Vertical lines represent core sites and horizontal lines represent the area influenced by the core sites. The dotted area represents national media or provincial information dissemination, the aspect of information spread that we do not discuss in this paper (reproduced from Govan et al. 2011:54).

with only minimal guidance from a CBRM partner. In most cases, a local volunteer takes the lead in community activities, and is formally assigned the role of “community champion”. A community champion — also referred to as a “local resource person” — is an innovative, active, resourceful individual who is determined to carry out community activities through her/his own initiative. Figure 2 outlines the sequence of trips and activities when using the lite-touch approach to CBRM.

Govan et al. (2011) proposed a range of criteria to determine the suitability of the lite-touch approach for a particular situation. First, the approach is suggested to be best suited to a small, well-organised community with an intact governance structure that is respected by community members (e.g. relatively undisputed marine tenure arrangements, and respected local leadership). Second, the community must have expressed its motivation to address any concerns over natural resources and there is evidence of a need to address these concerns. Third, the site should be feasible for support agencies to

access. Fourth, for communities to be effective as a core site they should be broadly representative of the physical, ecological or social situation in adjacent communities (to which CBRM might diffuse). Although it is recognised that “every community is different”, for this model to be effective there must be some generalisable lessons that can apply to adjacent communities. Fifth, the community should also be within “reach” geographically, and through social or economic relations, with surrounding communities that also display some of these criteria, and to which it is hoped that CBRM might diffuse. In addition, our experience suggests that a prior history of natural resource management or development projects is also important, because in many areas, projects have fostered “project dependencies” or raised unrealistic community expectations; in these contexts, it will be difficult for the lite-touch approach to gain traction given such a prior history.

It is suggested in CBRM guidance (WorldFish 2013) that if a community meets the criteria described above, it will likely be successful in CBRM. Of

Scoping (before first visit)

- find out relevant information available (talk to key people and draw on local knowledge)
- build understanding of what is known about resource status, nature of fisheries, leadership arrangements
- find out if any related activities have been done previously in the community
- compile all available information with your team

Scoping and awareness (visit #1)

- first community meeting to explain and agree on the purpose and extent of your role in the CBRM process
- discussions with community leaders and resource owners to better understand concerns, strengths and goals of management
- identify what additional information they require and what specific activities might be able to be offered
- provide information and awareness on marine resource management from other places in Solomon Islands

Subsequent activities may include

- arrange exchange visits to nearby communities practicing CBRM
- source and provide targeted information
- provide support to writing a management plan
- ensure the community is linked in to SILMMA so that it can be aware of opportunities for capacity building

SILMMA= Solomon Islands Locally Managed Marine Area; CBRM = community-based resource management

Figure 2. Sequence of activities proposed when using the “lite-touch” approach to CBRM in Solomon Islands; scoping and awareness during the first visit to the core site; and subsequent activities related to outreach. From: WorldFish 2013:42

course, many of these criteria are highly subjective and situations within communities are dynamic. Nonetheless, these criteria provide useful points for reflection and some guidance regarding the decisions or strategies to engage. A community's likelihood of success depends on how it prioritises CBRM relative to other interests and issues within the community (WorldFish 2013). This also includes the degree of motivation and enthusiasm expressed by community champions, the severity of resource decline, and the need to address these issues.

Methods

Mararo is a small community comprising 10 households situated in east 'Are'are on the weather coast of Malaita (Fig. 3). There are no roads connecting the region to the provincial capital of Auki, and so it is accessible only by sea; it is an eight-hour journey in an open boat with a 40 hp outboard motor.

In the past, people in Mararo respected rules and tabus set by chiefs and resource owners. As the population of the village and surrounding areas grew and became modernised, people's beliefs and values have changed. Traditional management began to weaken as people no longer respect those rules. The demand for consumption and income has increased, leading to overharvesting of marine resources. Additionally, the people of Mararo feel that their community's knowledge about the importance of resource management is limited, which results in poor management and continued declines of marine resources. Realising that their traditional

management practices have begun to disappear, the community decided to look for other ways to sustain their resources.

In 2012, a community-nominated spokesperson contacted ministries and NGOs in Auki and Honiara to request assistance with resource management. With the support of government ministries, this request was taken up by WorldFish¹ as part of an Asian Development Bank Coral Triangle Initiative-funded project. Based on the information on hand, we determined that Mararo met some of the criteria for the lite-touch approach.

Figure 4 describes our engagement with the Mararo community. Data were collected during each visit, with the first visit in 2012. We used focus group discussions (FGD), semi-structured interviews and informal storytelling to collect data. The FGDs and semi-structured interviews were conducted mainly in Solomon Islands Pidgin and 'Are'are (the local language). FGDs were conducted separately with women, men, male youth and female youth at different spots in the village, and at different times during the day (depending on peoples' availability and preference). People who attended the FGDs were mainly residents of Mararo village; but on occasion some interested persons from nearby villages also attended. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with chiefs, village elders and other volunteers, who wanted to share their insights about the CBRM programme in Mararo. We also include in this paper information provided by the community champion in his updates to the WorldFish office in Auki. Data

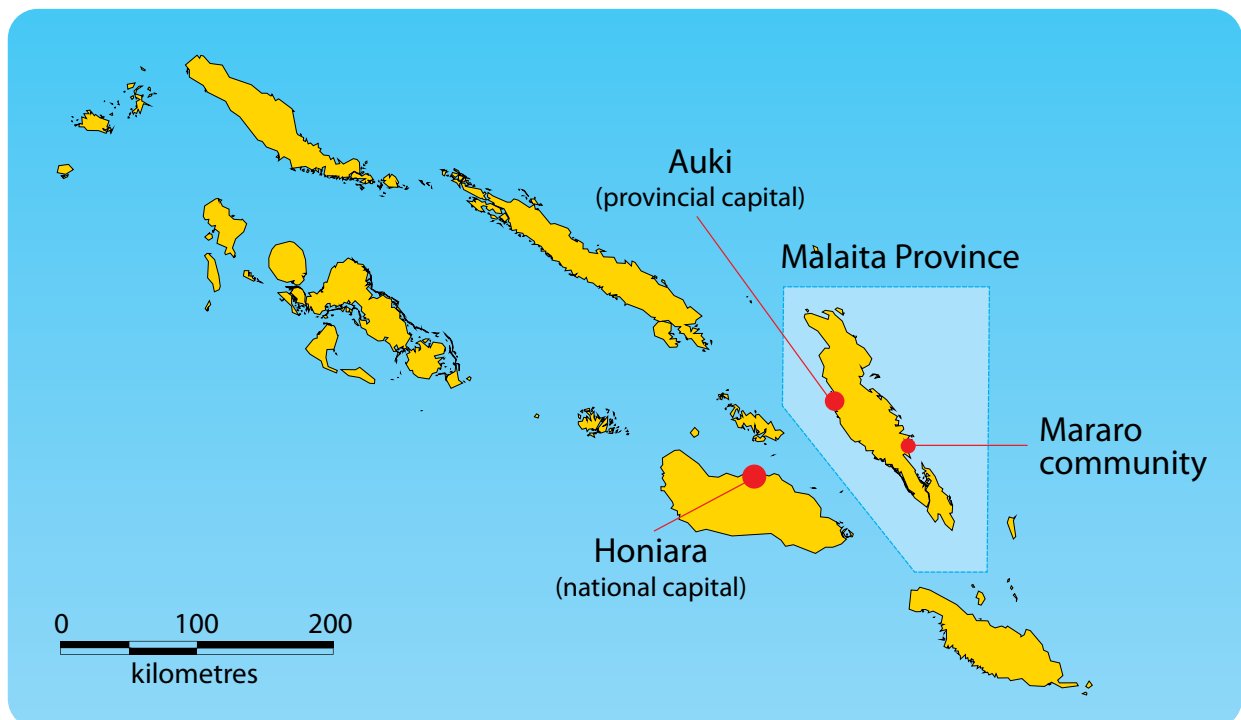


Figure 3. Location of the Mararo community, Malaita Province, Solomon Islands where the lite-touch approach to diffusion was tested.

were supplemented with our own observations, and these were recorded mainly by hand in notebooks, some of which were included in an internal report that was written after every field visit.

Lessons from implementing the lite-touch approach

The lite-touch approach has been proposed as a more efficient and cost-effective way to establish and spread CBRM, with the potential to promote local ownership (rather than project dependency) of the process and outcomes. Most research on CBRM has come from intense and resource-heavy engagements between partner organisations and communities. By contrast, we share our insights from testing a lite-touch approach. First, we reflect on whether the

lite-touch approach is adequate to establish CBRM. Second we reflect on the potential and limitations of using community champions to maintain momentum of CBRM implementation. Finally, we identify lessons about how, and in which contexts, CBRM might spread from a core community to surrounding villages. We acknowledge that our generalisable lessons may be limited, given that they draw only on experiences with one community. For this reason, we reflect on our experiences and findings alongside those of other researchers working on CBRM with other communities in Solomon Islands and within the Pacific Islands region more broadly. For this case we are also able to draw on an independent evaluation that was undertaken after the completion of our engagement (Govan et al. 2015).

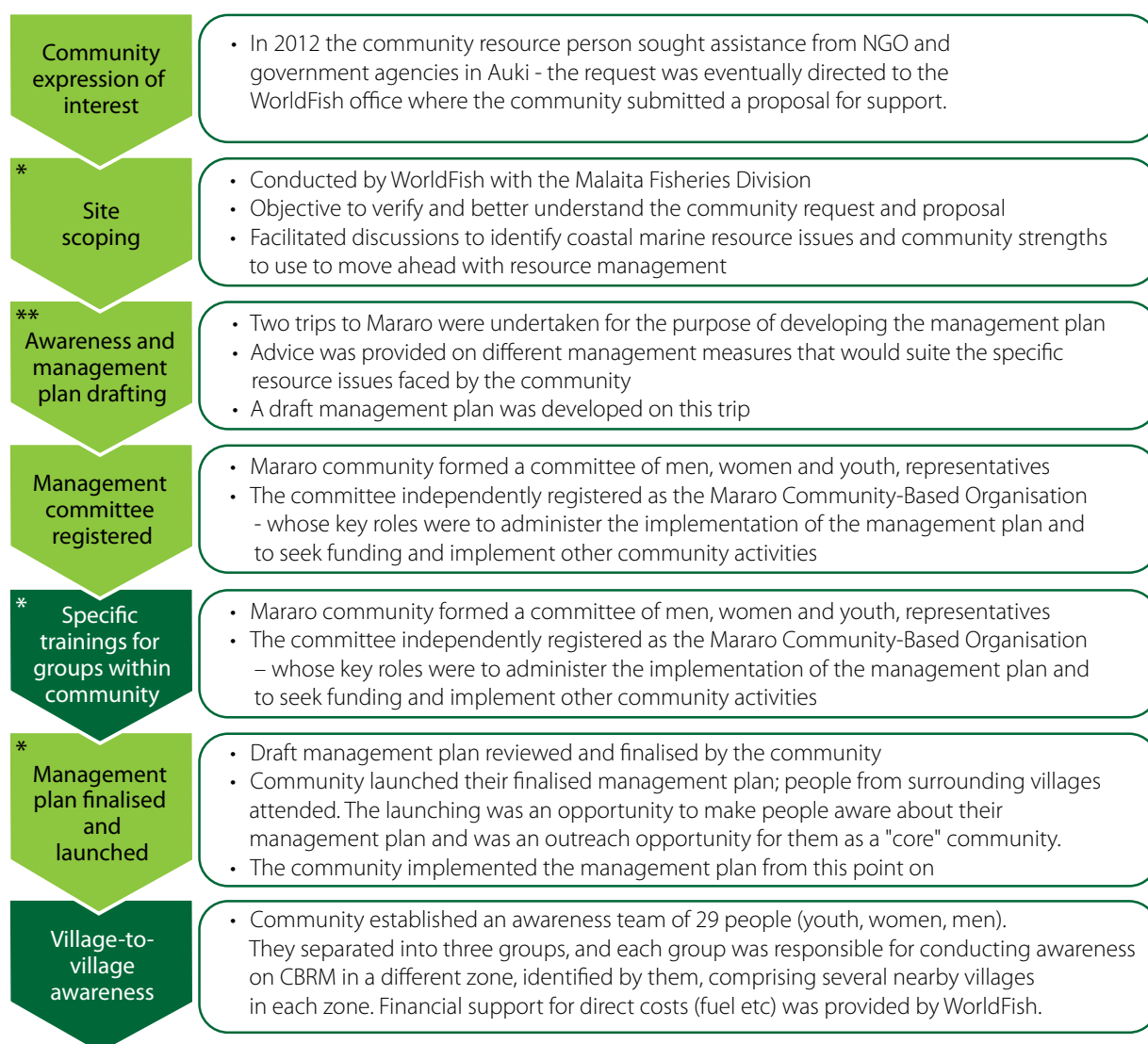


Figure 4. A timeline of key moments in the establishment of community-based resource management (CBRM) in Mararo Village, Solomon Islands (indicated by light green arrows), and of key activities designed to facilitate CBRM spread from Mararo to surrounding communities (indicated by dark green arrows). The five visits that WorldFish made to the community are indicated by *.

Conditions suitable for the lite-touch approach

Community size, heterogeneity, and the presence and efficacy of local or customary governance influence the success a community might experience in taking up CBRM. More specifically, Govan et al. (2011) suggest that the success of the lite-touch approach will depend mainly on how organised a community is in terms of self-governance. The community in Mararo navigated the management process with relative ease compared with others that WorldFish has supported (unpublished data). Discussions with community members, and our observations of community meetings, suggested that clan chiefs and elected community chiefs were relatively strong and effective leaders in Mararo. Community members told us that everyone in the village was kin by descent or intermarriage; the community reflected that these close social ties made it easy for them to negotiate issues and arrangements relating to resource management. This is not always the case, however, and in some instances failure to navigate these negotiations means that progress towards CBRM stalls or ceases completely. Further, there were only three resource-owning tribes within the community (Daokalia et al. 2015). Many experiences with CBRM in Solomon Islands reiterate the critical importance of consulting with resource owners and respecting customary rights so as to avoid disagreements when implementing management. Nonetheless, the effort of external agencies to clarify these systems of rights, can in itself, catalyse contention (McDougall 2005). In the case of Mararo no rights disputes arose. This was perhaps in part because, rather than making explicit efforts to clarify rights, our efforts sought to ensure that the land owners were present and involved in the discussions to plan management arrangements. In many Solomon Islands situations, the idea of a “community” is a more recent construct, and in reality social units are formed between people according to clan and religious denomination. It is common that not all members of a community are considered to be legitimate rights-holders or decision-makers for one particular area, and that rights-holders may reside in different communities. Because rights are associated with clans, for this reason, Govan et al. (2015) suggested that in some cases there should be a transition in terminology from “community-based management”, to “tribal management” or “clan management”.

The community was registered as the “Mararo community-based organisation” (MCBO), under the Charitable Act of the “Company Haus”, on 19 November 2013. The MCBO’s responsibilities included implementing the community’s management plan. Since its registration, the MCBO has created new linkages and partnerships with NGOs, government ministries and other organisations,

such as the Solomon Islands Locally Managed Marine Area network and the Solomon Islands Community Conservation Partnership. Further, the MCBO has secured a CBRM grant under the Coral Triangle Initiative national work programme from the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology, and secured funds from the Global Environment Facility small grants programme under the United Nations Development Programme. The management committee felt that being registered as a CBO was a critical element of its success in implementing the management plan. The potential value for communities in pursuing CBO recognition has long been recognised (Alexander et al. 2011).

In sum, the lite-touch approach realised some successes with this small, well-organised community. However, with larger communities, where there are more tribes and where tenure is contested, the lite-touch approach might not gain traction. For example, Govan et al. (2015) found that villages that have a larger number of tribes than Mararo or where tribal land owners are spread across several different villages found it difficult to move forward through the CBRM process. And in the case of Mararo, the community champion successfully led his tribe, but was less successful in leading or including the voices of other tribes (Govan et al. 2015). It has yet to be determined whether the lite-touch approach will be successful in larger communities, even if those communities are well-organised and can maintain sufficient common understanding to continue implementing. This will be an interesting area for future research.

The facilitation process and the role of community champions

The sustainability and continuity of CBRM is a major concern given that in many cases CBRM ceases to continue when donors are no longer present and investing. It is, therefore, essential that communities are invested in and feel ownership over the CBRM process (Douthwaite et al. 2015; Govan et al. 2011). This has important implications for the processes used to facilitate CBRM. In 2012, in an attempt to reduce the reliance and emphasis on our role as a driving partner, we adjusted our engagement approaches, and invested more in building our capacity as facilitators of appreciative and strength-based approaches that recognise and build on existing community capacities (WorldFish 2013). We reinforce community strengths and capacities as the foundation on which to build so that the community is empowered and feels a greater sense of ownership of the CBRM programme and management plan (Douthwaite et al. 2015).

We suggest that this contributed to the strong sense of ownership and pride the Mararo community

took in the process, and their achievements. For example, people reflected in FGDs that: “WorldFish no kam weitem eniting, everi risosis long hia nao so WorldFish kam fo bildim kapasiti blo iumi fo openem wei fo iumi.” (translation: “WorldFish did not come with anything, we have all the resources, WorldFish came to build our capacity to open a way for us.”). The MCBO chair and community chief stated that “Mararo being new in doing resource management we see this as a step forward in building our capacity and also our hopes to continue with the programme.” It is clear from these examples that communities need to take ownership in order to sustain management.

In total, we conducted five trips to Mararo to conduct the “subsequent” activities as shown in Figure 2 (WorldFish 2013). In these trips we provided support with: 1) writing the management plan; 2) delivering the requested training sessions to build the capacity of youth, women, men and the management committee; and 3) working with each of these groups to design and deliver management messages for the purpose of their extension activities to communities in the region. While our initial interpretation was that the lite-touch approach might take only two or three trips, we think that five trips are necessary to facilitate with implementing CBRM even where there is strong local support from the community champion.

Community champions or resource persons play an important role in the process of establishing and maintaining CBRM (Abernethy et al. 2014). Mararo has an active and culturally knowledgeable community champion who, throughout the process, played an important role as the programme coordinator and as a trusted contact point between the community and WorldFish. As stated in the “Guiding Principles for Best Practice of Community Based Management” (Alexander et al. 2011), effective communication between the community and the partner organisation is important to build trust and create a shared understanding of objectives and process. In Mararo, the community champion took the lead in planning and implementing activities at the village level; a role that in more intense engagements might be played by NGO staff. Govan et al. (2015) state that the activities of local champions or resource persons are in most cases more appropriate (or contextualised) than those of NGOs. We think that in this case, having a local individual taking the lead, led to trust and community ownership of the CBRM process. However, the deeper and independent exploration conducted by Govan and colleagues (2015) found that there were tensions and dissatisfaction among some people residing in and near Mararo. These people belonged to a different clan or were not primary rights-holders and had been

excluded (to differing degrees) from decision-making around CBRM; simultaneously, they recognised the legitimacy of primary rights-holders to make those decisions and were willing to abide with these, at least for the time being.

Having a community champion meant that the management process could continue without the physical presence of an external partner in the community. This allowed the community to work at its own pace, and the pressures that NGO visits place on a community were avoided. The success of the champion or resource person, however, depends greatly on his/her commitment, among other factors. Even the simplest aspects of communication or facilitation, if not carried out properly (e.g. passing on messages to the broader community), can halt community progress towards CBRM (Cohen et al. 2014). Our previous experience has shown, however, that the use of a community champion charged with the responsibility of being a contact point, does not guarantee that communication will be effective. Working through community champions is cost effective but requires much more input by the community (Orirana et al. 2015). The effect may be that pressure and reliance might rest on one particular community member. For example, a Mararo community member felt that: “The management committee is not active [enough]; they rely very much on [the community champion or resource person] for everything, nothing will happen when [he] is out from the village.” Govan et al. (2015) reflected that through design or default, the community champion had fostered dependency on himself for progress.

There may also be perverse effects from working with one community champion. NGOs should critically assess how this could potentially play out, as an example, sometimes local leaders “capture” the benefits of projects or natural resources for themselves or their kin, which may accentuate existing power imbalances in the community (Cohen and Steenbergen 2015). In the case of Mararo, we found that the leaders and community champions (or resource people) were highly “community minded”, and ensured that their access to knowledge and opportunities helped the entire community, and that this was likely due to their close kin ties. As stated by the community champion in Mararo, only those who “understand better how NGOs and government ministries work, and also have a heart for development of their community, can work effectively as a community resource person” (Orirana et al. 2015:14). Whether a community champion or resource person will be effective at organising and implementing activities depends very much on their personal motivations and characteristics, the type of role they are required (by the community and NGO) to play,

and the physical and social characteristics of the community they represent.

CBRM spread from a core site

One of the main strategies employed in Solomon Islands to spread CBRM has been “look-and-learn” trips, where representatives from communities that are not currently implementing management visit a community that is successfully implementing CBRM. In most cases these trips are funded and supported logistically by a CBRM partner. Research that sought to understand CBRM diffusion found that these look-and-learn trips were influential on the uptake of CBRM (Abernethy et al. 2014). However, the role and rate of success (i.e. translation from “seeing” management, to “doing” management) of look-and-learn trips has yet to be determined.

Govan et al. (2011) proposed creating the “core” site as a source of learning and inspiration for other communities. To facilitate this type of learning, the core community should be empowered, not only to conduct their own management, but also to share lessons (Govan et al. 2011; Schwarz et al. 2014). With this in mind, we also invested in building the capacity of the Mararo community through various specific training sessions to increase their knowledge of resource management and to make them more effective communicators. For example, we trained youth in marine resource monitoring. They first used this knowledge to monitor their own managed area and later used it as a basis for crafting messages they wished to share with youth from other communities. At their request, women were trained to act as spokespersons on resource management in their own community and other neighbouring communities. People in the community became more knowledgeable about CBRM, which broadened the information they could share with surrounding communities. In preparation for their visits to other communities, all of these different groups practiced sharing their messages among themselves to ensure they were delivered in ways appropriate to the local context. Subsequently, we provided funds for fuel, boat hire and food for the trip that delivered one-day training sessions in each of the 14 nearby villages. In addition to the more organised “awareness raising sessions”, CBRM ideas are also likely to spread via relatives and informal social exchanges. In follow up interviews in Mararo, Govan et al. (2015) found that community members had been proud to share their success with and new knowledge about resource management.

Follow up research was conducted by Govan et al. (2015) in the 14 villages in east Are’are that had received awareness presentations from women, men or youth representatives from Mararo. This research found that two of these villages had since established their own community-based

organisations, and had initiated CBRM (Govan et al. 2015). A community leader from one of the two communities explained that they had decided to move ahead with CBRM because, “I want my community to be like Mararo in managing our resources”. Mararo is now viewed as the “expert” community in marine resource management in east Are’are, and students from nearby high schools come to Mararo to seek information for their science research on marine resource management. One representative from a nearby community expressed that “Mararo is like a star now” in terms of their knowledge and success with CBRM. Meaning Mararo community is now a CBRM expert and other communities can learn from it.

Despite these successes, 12 of the 14 communities had not progressed from increased awareness and access to information towards implementing CBRM. This may reflect that communities did not feel the need or urgency to implement new forms of management. However, if they were enticed by the idea of CBRM, there may have been a variety of reasons that CBRM did not progress. Further, the community champion and representatives from Mararo had the skills and influence to lead management among their tribe and in their area, but perhaps these capabilities were not enough to support communities through the next stage of implementation elsewhere. Members from some of these 12 communities reported that they did not know how to take the next step towards designing and implementing CBRM (Govan et al. 2015). It may be that a further lite-touch by the Mararo Community Based Organisation may be sufficient to progress CBRM. However, it is also likely that these communities have circumstances that mean implementing CBRM is not a priority or faces obstacles not encountered in Mararo.

Conclusion

A significant body of research explores how to sustainably manage natural resources across the Pacific (Govan et al. 2009; Jupiter et al. 2015). Towards this cause, CBRM has become a common approach supported by NGOs and governments throughout the region. Yet, despite localised successes, it has become clear that there is not yet a cost-effective approach to implementing and spreading CBRM, particularly in diverse and remote contexts. This paper tested the effectiveness of the lite-touch approach in Solomon Islands, which aimed at accelerating the spread of CBRM with minimal external inputs.

Our experiences in Mararo demonstrate that the lite-touch approach can lead to the implementation of CBRM with minimal support from a partner organisation. The success of this case can be credited largely to the community and the community

champion. Mararo was effective as a core site in terms of providing an example and sharing experiences that surrounding communities could benefit from. The message about CBRM appeared to resonate with other villages, and led to CBRM establishment in two additional cases. Yet, it is also clear that other villages were less able to implement CBRM. Ultimately, our results suggest that in some communities, if coastal resource decline is a concern, some additional impetus or support from an external partner may be necessary to facilitate implementation of CBRM. Govan et al (2015) recommended that in moving forward, more partners should place greater emphasis on dynamics around customary ownership and how associated rights influence who can “speak for the land”. It is these people that should be involved in discussions and planning. This encourages more explicit acknowledgement of what constitutes community-based management and clan-based management.

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