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Supporting community-based resource management in Solomon Islands: The role of provincial governments



How can provincial governments support communities in looking after their fisheries?

Marine resources

Rural communities in Solomon Islands rely heavily on coastal fisheries for food and income. However, coral reefs, mangroves and seagrass are degrading in many areas because of overharvesting, pollution and unsustainable land-use activities such as logging. The degradation of coastal fisheries has big implications for the food security and livelihoods of rural communities. The national government recognizes the importance of coastal fisheries and aims to ensure that 50 percent of coastal areas are sustainably managed by 2020.

Relevant legislation in Solomon Islands enabling provincial governments to support community-based resource management:

- The *Constitution of Solomon Islands* (1978) recognizes the customary rights of communities over natural resources.
- The *Provincial Government Bill* (1997) devolves the authority to regulate coastal fisheries to provincial governments.
- The *Fisheries Act* (2015) reaffirms that provincial governments are responsible for coastal fisheries.
- The *Forest Resources and Timber Utilization Act* (1978), the *Environment Act* (1998), the *Environmental Health Act* (1999) and the *Protected Areas Act* (2010) provide a legal framework to prevent environmental destruction.

Other relevant policy documents:

- The *Solomon Islands National Development Strategy* (2016–2035) highlights the importance of coastal fisheries for food security and the need to avoid over-fishing.
- The *Solomon Islands National Plan of Action for the Coral Triangle Initiative* identifies community-based resource management as the national strategy to ensure food security and sustainable development.
- The *Revised Solomon Islands Code of Logging Practice* (2002) aims to prevent unnecessary forest degradation and minimize the downstream impacts of logging.
- The *Solomon Islands National Biodiversity Strategic Action Plan* recognizes the importance of marine and coastal resources for poverty alleviation.
- The *Pacific Islands Forum Leaders New Song for Coastal Fisheries* policy (2015) calls on provincial governments to provide substantial support to community-based fisheries management.

Community-based resource management

The Solomon Islands Government has identified community-based resource management as the national strategy to manage coastal fisheries. It means that communities and resource-owners look after their natural resources wisely to ensure food and income, now and in the future. Community-based resource management builds on the customary tenure, ecological knowledge and the traditional management practices of rural communities. This is nothing new; communities throughout the country have safeguarded their fisheries since time immemorial. But traditional leadership structures, tenure systems, social norms, consumption patterns and expectations of life are increasingly challenged by modernization. Communities, therefore, sometimes need support to revive resource stewardship or to respond to new developments.

Communities can create simple rules to improve coastal fisheries:

- Set a minimum size: by prohibiting the catching of small fish, sea cucumber (*bêche-de-mer*), crabs or shells so that they can grow to a more valuable size and reproduce.
- Ban the use of destructive fishing methods, such as night diving or using magnet nets.
- Ban fishing in a specific area for a certain period so that stocks can recover.
- Ban fishing during the breeding season or at spawning sites.
- Create a permanent marine protected area so that fish, crabs and shells can grow and reproduce in these no-take areas and overflow into neighboring fishing areas.

What can provincial governments do?

Provincial governments play an important role in supporting community-based resource management. National government agencies, such as the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources (MFMR) and the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology (MECDM), lack the resources and capacity to reach out to all rural communities in the provinces. Provincial governments are nearer to communities and can implement simple and cost-effective activities that support community-based resource management. Provincial ward members can take a number of steps to support communities in their ward to improve their fisheries.

Steps	Actions to consider
1. Identify problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to the concerns of men, women and youth • Keep track of new developments • Inform government agencies and other stakeholders about problems
2. Find solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share information on fisheries management • Learn from the experiences of other communities • Build on what people are already doing • Support customary rules and leadership
3. Agree on rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support resource-owners and village leaders to set simple rules • Organize and facilitate community meetings to discuss these rules • Ensure that the voices of women and youth are heard • Establish a committee or community-based organization • Explain the rules to everybody
4. Enforce rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check whether people obey the rules • Hold people, companies and government agencies accountable • Report violations to the police on behalf of the community • Lead by example
5. Sustain community action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate with government agencies and other stakeholders to improve public services • Manage expectations: resource management is a goal in itself • Allocate funds for small-scale, sustainable activities that improve health, food security and incomes • Coordinate with church, women and youth groups to integrate resource management into community activities • Ensure that new developments do not destroy the resources on which people depend • Assess if the actions are working, adapt if necessary and celebrate successes!

For more information, contact the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources (CBRM unit): #286043; the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology (environment and conservation division): #23032; or WorldFish: #25080.

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