



RAISING COMMUNITY VOICES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND GOVERNANCE

Youth Advocates for Integrity Demand Improvement of Key Environmental Issues in Solomon Islands

March 2023



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ABOUT NDI

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Map of Youth Advocates for Integrity project locations

FOREWORD

Solomon Islands, like other Pacific Island countries, is bearing the brunt of climate change, whose effects are compounded by environmental issues and the exploitation of natural resources. Findings from a national public opinion research conducted by NDI in 2021 show that Solomon Islanders are increasingly concerned about these aspects and demand more inclusive and effective governance.¹ To help address these issues, with support from USAID, NDI launched a program to assist young activists in developing the skills to advocate on behalf of their communities and the environment in Solomon Islands in 2021.

The program created and supported a network of young advocates interested in strengthening independent monitoring of public policy implementation in the natural resources management, climate change, and environment protection sectors. It has also leveraged their sense of agency in spurring change and has helped them develop strong working relationships with government officials, local organizations and traditional leaders to foster a more transparent, effective and inclusive government that improves the well-being of citizens in Solomon Islands. Finally, the participants built skills and evidence-based advocacy plans that respond to community interests and prioritized the safe inclusion of all community groups.

Twenty-five emerging youth leaders from Guadalcanal, Honiara, Isabel, Malaita, Temotu and the Western Province were selected through a competitive process to attend a two-phased program.

The first phase included a three-month course on Inclusive Monitoring and Advocacy for Transparency and Accountability, delivered by a team of local and international facilitators. Upon successful completion of the course, NDI invited alumni to design locally-led initiatives.

Working individually or in teams, the activists, known as “Youth Advocates for Integrity,” consulted with experts and affected individuals to better understand community issues such as improper sanitation, logging, waste management, the accessibility of natural disaster protection services for people with disabilities, and the over-harvesting of marine resources. Using data collection and analysis skills learned through the program, the participants conducted qualitative assessments using community surveys, key informant interviews, group discussions, community dialogues, document review, and direct observation. The grant period for these initiatives took place from May to October 2022, with all research projects conducted within this time frame.

At the conclusion of the program, NDI brought together alumni and stakeholders to share key takeaways, lessons learned, and recommendations at a capstone event organized in Honiara. The event further elevated participants' profiles as primary resources on ethical natural resources management and environmental governance.

Ancuta Hansen

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¹ National Democratic Institute, *Solomon Islands' Road to Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic* (August 10, 2021), <https://www.ndi.org/publications/solomon-islands-road-recovery-covid-19-pandemic>.

CHAPTER 1

Marine Resource Management



Monitoring Policy Implementation of the Over-Harvesting of Fish and Coral Stone

by Obrent Oti Maekera and Anisha Kadles Michael

Marine resources are commonly used as a source of sustainability for livelihood and for consumption. However, the current practices of fishing have put pressure on Solomon Islands' marine resources, leading to what is called overexploitation and depletion. To better understand the sources of these pressures, and what can be done to address them, the authors assess the implementation of current policies related to the over-harvesting of coral stone and fish around Gizo, the capital of the Western Province. The study took place in the communities of Nsusabaruku, Lireh, Saeraghi and Vori Vori. Gizo is unique and has diversity both on land and sea, which brings out the beauty of the Western Province of Solomon Islands, but more study needs to be carried out within coastal communities to build good public awareness and knowledge on how to manage marine resources in a sustainable way.

Key Findings

At the national and provincial levels, there are considerable challenges preventing the monitoring of fishing grounds. This lack of monitoring is due to several reasons. The first is that the geography of Solomon Islands makes it difficult to monitor all of the fishing grounds, which is made worse by the lack of manpower to monitor all areas. The farther away an area is, the more expensive it is to monitor. There is also an insufficient budget to carry out the yearly plans related to policy implementation at the national and provincial levels. The review of the Western Province regulations on fisheries is also on hold because of COVID-19-related restrictions and financial issues. As of October 2022, the funds necessary to complete the review of the regulations were not yet delivered. However, transitional guidance was already in place at the time of writing.²

While there is some awareness of how to prevent over-fishing, more work needs to be done to engage fisherfolk in protecting marine resources. For example, the majority of the surveyed community members heard of or have known locals who are involved in harvesting coral stone from the surrounding islands for development purposes.

METHODOLOGY

- Interviews with Gizo provincial fisheries officers and NGOs
- Surveys, community dialogue, and direct observation
- Community public awareness campaign
- Literature review

² Interview with an official from the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources in Honiara.

However, according to interviews with local provincial fisheries representatives, not much has been done in monitoring such activity. Similarly, although there is a current campaign to encourage fisherfolk to not harvest undersized fish from the ocean—such as a billboard in the Gizo market explaining the acceptable size of each fish species for sale—the lack of monitoring means that there is no way to check that the guidance is being followed.



Participants in a community awareness meeting

Recommendations

National Government:

- Allocate sufficient funds to ensure work on policy implementation monitoring is carried out adequately.
- Publish all policies and regulations that are not yet publicly available as soon as possible, to contribute to an informed discussion about the provisions that need to be revised.
- Conduct a comprehensive review of all legislative documents to align provisions and avoid legislation gaps.



Fish size guidance posted at the Gizo market

Provincial Government:

- Recruit more officers and carry out more monitoring regarding this issue.
- Educate the fisherfolk and people in local communities on how to manage coral stones.

Fisherfolk in Western Province:

- Be mindful of the size of the fish in their catch and their fishing practices to ensure that they are in line with the legal restrictions.



Nsugaraku, one of the villages affected by rising sea levels

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Assessing Over-Harvesting of Fish and Marine Invertebrates

by Andrew Taylor Awa

This brief explores the current state of over-fishing in Su'uri'i, located in southern Malaita Province. The author identifies the scale of the problem at hand through the voices of Su'uri'i community members and proposes sustainable solutions that rely on the knowledge and leadership of fisherfolk. Encouragingly, there are signs of improvement noted during the course of this research. In meetings with the Malaita Fishery Office and WorldFish Office Auki, officials stated that they put the issue of over-fishing in Su'uri'i on the agenda for their 2023 program.

Key Findings

Over-fishing is affecting people's livelihoods in Su'uri'i. Most interviewees stated that they are experiencing a vast reduction in their catch per day compared to 10 years ago. As a result of the scarcity of fish stock, most interviewees said that they now have to spend longer hours at sea, pedal their canoes farther into the ocean, and sometimes use prohibited substances to catch sufficient fish for family consumption and to make an income. As the community grows, its financial needs and expectations increase and diversify –income from fishing must help pay for housing, goods, and tuition.

Existing legal frameworks are not being implemented effectively. The relevant statutory laws that regulate fishing in Solomon Islands include the 2015 Fisheries Management Act.³ While the national legislation and international conventions protecting marine resources are strong, they need to be implemented more effectively in order to truly protect these vital resources.

One example of a more effective implementation strategy is the creation of community-led initiatives, which provincial and national governments can support. Constructing fish aggregating devices (FADs)⁴ and community-based marine-managed areas⁵ can provide a way forward to address over-fishing in the Su'uri'i community and other villages around the country.

METHODOLOGY

- Interviews
- Surveys
- Document review of existing legal frameworks
- Firsthand observations as a fisherman

³ Solomon Islands, "Fisheries Management Act 2015," http://www.paclii.org/cgi-bin/sinodisp/sb/legis/num_act/fma2015193/fma2015193.html?stem=&synonyms=&query=Fishery%20Management%20act.

⁴ FADs are structures often made of natural materials to attract fish. They can help reduce the cost of fishing by reducing the amount of time fisherfolk have to spend at sea collecting a catch.

⁵ This method involves working closely with fisherfolk to implement more sustainable fishing techniques, often by combining technological advances and research innovations with intergenerational traditions. For a detailed example, see Nithin Coca, "In Solomon Islands, marine protection must put livelihoods front and center," Devex (March 4, 2021), <https://devex.shorthandstories.com/in-solomon-islands-marine-protection-must-put-livelihoods-front-and-center/index.html>.

Young people can be strong advocates in fishing communities. Young people living in Su'uri'i and other coastal communities can join youth advocacy programs like the Youth Advocates for Integrity program. This way, they can effectively advocate for government intervention in addressing the issue of over-fishing and raise community awareness about the risks of over-fishing with respect to supporting human life and the marine ecosystem.



Fishermen posing with the day's catch

Recommendations

Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources:

- Work collaboratively with the Malaita Provincial Government and WorldFish officers in Auki.
- Provide funds for the community-based marine management initiative and the deployment of FADs in Su'uri'i and other neighboring communities.

Provincial and National Governments:

- Allocate a budget for fishery awareness programs through the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources. This should include funding for visual campaigns and liaison efforts with community elders to discuss the risk of over-fishing in Su'uri'i and other neighboring communities.
- Allocate a budget for fishery officers in Auki to conduct awareness programs regarding the community-based marine-managed area in Su'uri'i and neighboring communities, including in the villages of Cuthill, Matangasi, Weilulu and Pululaha.

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TESTIMONIALS



Anisha Kadles Michael

Western Province

Our islands, the places where we grew up, made memories, and buried our ancestors are slowly disappearing as sea levels rise. Also, the size of the fish sold at my hometown market has reduced significantly in the recent years, due to over-harvesting. It hits me rock-hard that our marine resources and our islands are at stake.

Through this project, I learned that there's so much work we need to do to educate our communities on sustainable fishing practices, management and conservation of natural resources.

Andrew Taylor Awa

Malaita Province

A few weeks ago I went fishing, paddling my outrigger canoe. In five hours, I caught just six small fish...I realized that we need better fishing practices to control over-fishing.

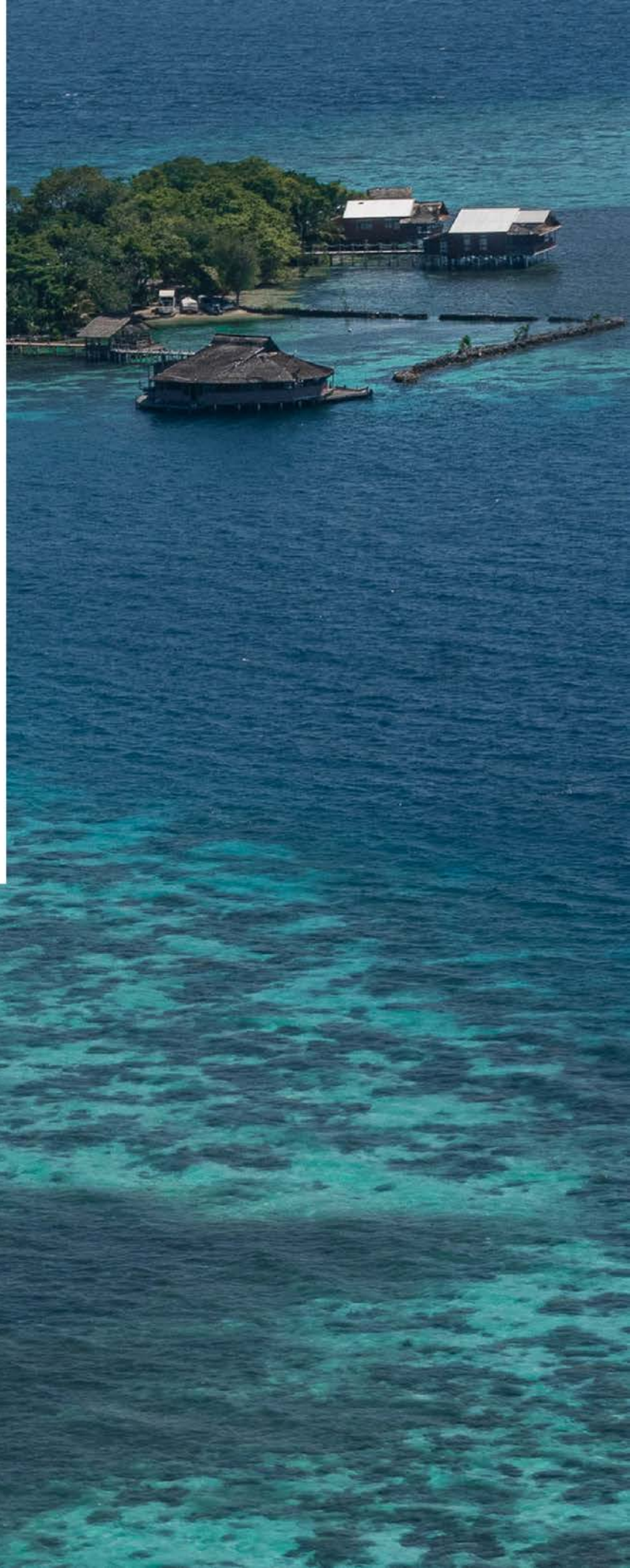
Through my monitoring project, I discovered that demand for seafood supersedes the rate at which the marine ecosystem can regenerate. Population growth in rural areas also contributes to depleting marine resources at an alarming rate.

Therefore, rural communities need to adopt more sustainable fishing practices, which are showing good results in my province.



CHAPTER 2

Climate Change and Natural Disaster Response



Accessibility and Climate Change: The Inclusion of People with Disabilities in Public Emergency Response to Climate Change and Natural Disaster Events

by Ellena Kelly

Climate change has impacted the lives of the people in the Solomon Islands in many ways, and there is an increased awareness that people have different needs during emergencies. Disabled people, in particular, have very specific needs. However, they are often left aside when planning or implementing policies to respond to emergency situations. This brief encourages a more inclusive approach to designing and implementing policies by analyzing access to public services for people with disabilities in the aftermath of natural disasters in Guadalcanal Province. The main findings of this monitoring project show that emergency response infrastructure remains a challenge for people with disabilities. Political leaders and government institutions should develop solutions for the country to overcome such problems.

Key Findings

Improvements are needed to make emergency shelters accessible and to provide support to relocate people with mobility issues to safe locations during emergencies.

One of the most important demands of people with disabilities interviewed for this project is for accessible evacuation centers. One building used as a shelter was fairly accessible, but it lacked basic facilities such as toilets and washrooms—therefore it was not functional for people with limited mobility, who were unable to travel outside of the building to seek sanitation facilities. In other instances, the terrain and infrastructure in the province present additional obstacles for people with disabilities seeking safe shelter during emergency situations. For instance, a woman in crutches explained in an interview that she stayed at home during one disaster because it is not possible for her to navigate the terrain. Therefore, when other people were trying their best to prepare and find shelter, she just sat and watched without moving.

She felt disempowered because she couldn't do anything to protect herself and her belongings. In coastal areas, people generally live in houses on stilts with many stairs to climb, which means that people with limited mobility cannot leave their homes without assistance.

METHODOLOGY

- Document review
- Direct observation of emergency infrastructure and housing of people with disabilities
- Interviews and surveys of two target groups: disabled people (13 respondents) and other stakeholders (5 respondents)



House on stilts, posing difficulties for people with mobility issues during emergencies

People with disabilities need more targeted outreach to prepare them for natural disasters.

The survey results show that people with disabilities have a good understanding of climate change and its effects, based on knowledge that is shared through community awareness initiatives. However, in their view, there is a lack of tailored public information for people with disabilities. Thus, there is a need for more awareness and training on how people with disabilities should prepare for these situations. At the same time, the government and NGO officers interviewed for this project also acknowledged that they face challenges in including people with disabilities in their projects, both in the planning and in the implementation phases.

Recommendations

National Government:

- Build accessible climate change emergency centers in all Solomon Islands provinces.
- Involve people with disabilities in all climate change meetings or consultations, so that they can share their experiences, challenges and suggestions for improvement, including in meetings with development partners.

- Form a technical working group through the Disability Office to ensure that people with disabilities are able to contribute to the National Communication on Climate Change.
- Provide information, signals, or signs about climate change in a way that people with various disabilities can understand, in collaboration with NGOs and other stakeholders.

People with Disabilities:

- Develop partnerships and working group agreements with other stakeholders to ensure broad support for measures to meet the needs of people with disabilities.
- Strengthen information sharing and learning among key stakeholders, and develop a strategic disability framework so that interested stakeholders can provide support for people with disabilities and meet their specific needs.
- Establish a focal point of a national disability rights organization to strengthen the participation of people with disabilities in decisions made by the National Disaster Management Office and the Disability Office. The focal point can also advocate for sufficient human resources in the Disability Office. This way, these offices can better focus on protecting the rights of people with disabilities by ensuring that appropriate services are provided for them during or after any climate change crisis.

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Ellena Kelly

Guadalcanal Province

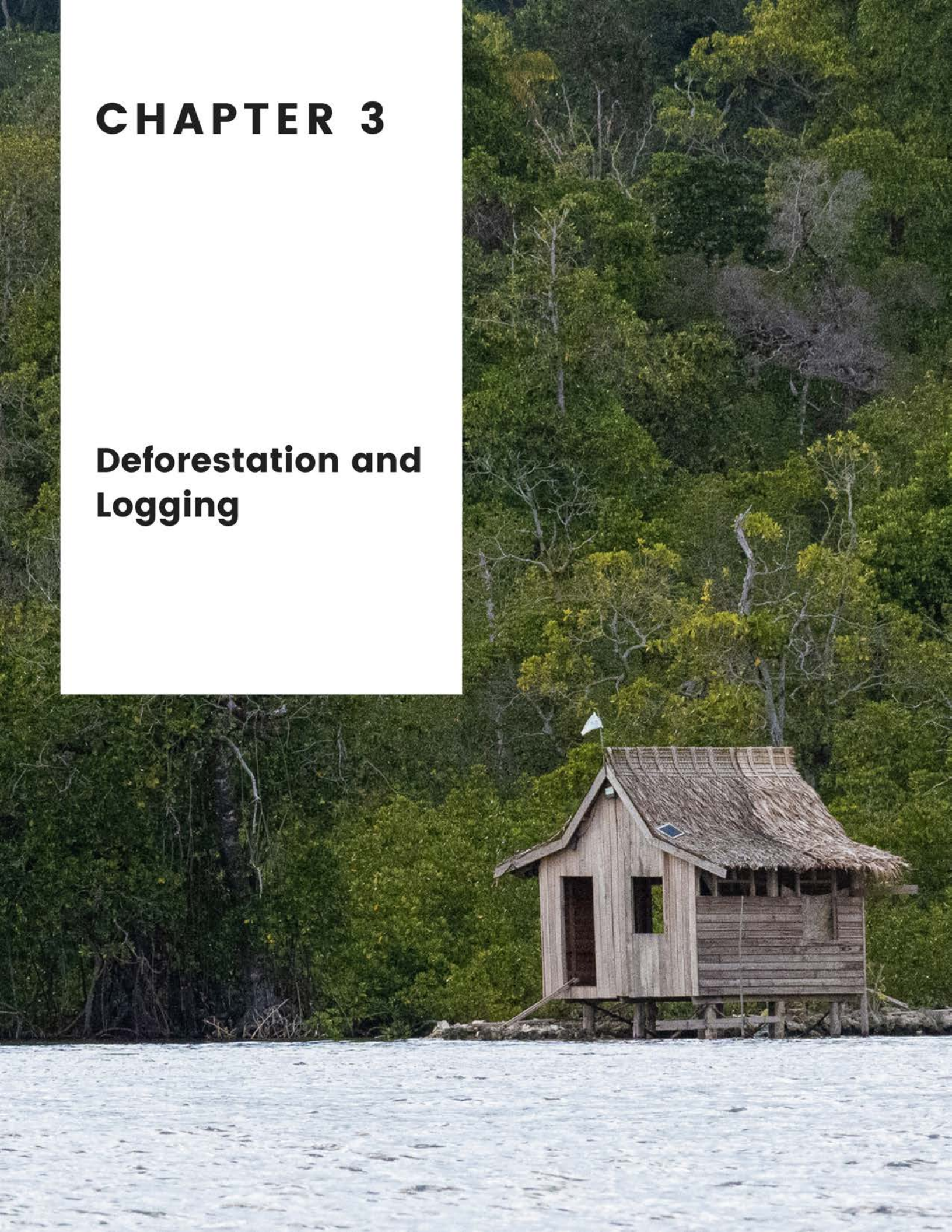
As a person with a disability myself, I have experienced a lot of challenges when accessing public services and infrastructure in the Solomon Islands.

Through the Youth Advocates for Integrity program, I was able to collect the views and opinions of people with disabilities and share them with public service providers and non-governmental organizations, so that they can provide more inclusive natural disaster shelters and evacuation plans.

I will continue to advocate and push for my community's voice to be heard until no one is left behind.

CHAPTER 3

Deforestation and Logging



Mangrove Ecosystem Deforestation: Monitoring and Assessing the Effectiveness of Public Policies

by Clement Junior Donga, Lency Vidma and Bridget Nicole Vaqalo

Mangroves are important to the marine ecosystem, not only because they provide a habitat for sea organisms, but also because they play a vital part in providing food, shelter, and a means of living for communities in Solomon Islands. In this brief, the authors explore the fragility of mangrove ecosystems in Saua Village (Lau Lagoon) in northern Malaita Province and Baolo Village in Isabel Province by assessing government policies and civil society efforts to prevent deforestation.

The absence of a policy at the national level suggests that the government does not properly prioritize the mangrove ecosystem, despite provisions incorporated in other national environmental policy and strategic plans.⁶ The lack of a clear, specific, national policy to protect mangroves, paired with the lack of education strategies at the local level, make it more difficult to prevent the destruction of this key natural resource.

Key Findings

Solomon Islands does not have a national, up-to-date policy specifically related to mangroves. At present, the mangrove ecosystem does not have a comprehensive national policy that specifically covers the protection and management of mangroves, as well as a sustainable strategy to conserve this resource moving forward.⁷ Despite the many benefits of mangroves, including the ways in which they safeguard the coastline from the effects of climate change and provide a source of food and breeding grounds for marine life, there is little policy prioritization of this crucial resource. Though various regulations related to mangroves exist under other environmental policies as separate provisions and sections, these regulations are out of date. For example, the National Environmental Management Strategy (1993) defines what mangroves are and offers possible solutions to use them sustainably.

However, in 2019, the Solomon Islands Government national government issued the *State of Environment* report, which shows that there was a decline of mangrove forests by at least 27 percent between 1970-2000, in spite of existing policies. Instead, most activities to protect the mangroves have been initiated by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and aid donors, not the government.⁸ Thus, the existing policies should be reviewed and amended to make them more effective.

METHODOLOGY

- 19 residents (Saua) and 26 residents (Baolo) randomly selected for a survey
- Interviews with the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology and other officials
- Document review

⁶ Interview with an official from the Ministry of Environmental, Climate Change and Meteorology.

⁷ J.A. Albert and A.J. Schwarz, *Mangrove management in Solomon Islands: Case studies from Malaita Province*, CGIAR Research Program on Aquatic Agricultural Systems Policy Brief (2013), <https://library.sprep.org/sites/default/files/mangrove-management-malaita.pdf>.

⁸ For example, there was a plan from the World Bank to provide funding via Constituency Wards to provide a direct community-based approach to address mangrove deforestation, rather than going through the authorities.

The lack of data related to mangroves makes it difficult to evaluate the scale of the issue. It is difficult to find records on the size of mangrove areas in the country. Officially, about more than 47,000 square hectares of land are covered by mangroves around the country, but it is difficult to verify whether this data is properly recorded. Proper tracking of the mangrove ecosystem remains an issue due to the absence of policy mentioned above, as well as the duplication of responsibilities by different government entities. At the national level, two ministries duplicate their roles to protect the mangroves: the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Natural Disaster and Meteorology, as well as the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources. claim responsibility for mangroves.

Communities affected by deforestation are not receiving the knowledge or government support they need to protect the mangroves. The survey results indicate that there is a low rate of understanding about mangrove protection policies. More than 90 percent of the participants in Saua and Baolo did not know about any government policies on mangrove protection. While Saua survey participants reported that officers from the Ministry of Environment visited the village to discuss the effects of climate change and the importance of the mangrove ecosystem, the research team could not find evidence of any specific interventions carried out afterward by the government. In the meantime, respondents from Saua reported that they expect some support and innovative replanting solutions from the authorities to help protect the mangroves. While they wait, community members have continued to replant mangroves by themselves, based on the evidence of climate change and their traditional knowledge.



Deforestation in Saua

As the survey results show, respondents also believe that the performance of the government ministries should be improved. This will require a lot of effort to monitor policies to overcome existing problems. For respondents in Baolo, the people reported needing a lot of engagement and support from government ministries, non-government organizations and others to build up awareness and training on mangrove deforestation and conservation. This community needs to adopt ways of sustainable management in which they can take care of their mangrove ecosystem and ensure that they are doing the right things in terms of protecting their mangroves from depletion for future generations.

Recommendations

National Government:

- Develop national, tailored policies and legislation that will guide, protect, manage and utilize the mangrove ecosystem. The Environment and Conservation Division at the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology can pressure the national government to do this.
- Consolidate the responsibility for the protection of mangrove ecosystems under a single government ministry, so that the responsibilities to protect, manage and utilize it can be managed more effectively.
- Identify additional and longer-term sources of finance to support mangrove protection, particularly through engagement with the private sector and the development of longer-term business models.
- Increase the performance of officials in management, research, conservation, and the protection of mangrove ecosystems, in collaboration with NGOs.

- Support the work of project developers and stakeholders, both from the public and private sectors, to ensure they understand the key factors that determine a successful mangrove project or initiative.
- Initiate plans to conduct resource valuations specifically for mangrove ecosystems, as well as proper monitoring, in collaboration with NGOs. This can be incorporated into national legislation.
- Provide detailed information to the public on opportunities to develop and combine new and innovative techniques to conserve mangrove ecosystems.
- Engage and empower community members through community-based approaches that focus on mangrove protection
- Encourage community-level mangrove rehabilitation programs, in addition to government involvement in community-based programs to replant mangrove trees.

Saua and Baolo Community Members:

- Continue mangrove tree replanting.
- Initiate community plans led by community leaders for mangrove protection.
- Initiate basic rules in the community to avoid the cutting of mangrove trees, and to use mangroves in a sustainable way.
- Engage youths, women, and elders in awareness programs, especially during certain holiday gatherings, to increase knowledge about mangrove conservation.
- Encourage the community building of seawalls to help in their replanting of mangrove trees.

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Deforestation and Forest Degradation: Promoting Sustainable Forest Use and Management by Identifying Key Drivers and Effects

by Mary Tehekeni

Deforestation and forest degradation⁹ have affected the lives of many people in the Solomon Islands, especially the rural communities, and also the natural environment. Deforestation in the Solomon Islands is caused by poor land use practices, such as heavy industrial logging, which is influenced by economic interests and corrupt dealings. Though there are other contributing causes of forest loss, this brief focuses on the negative impacts of logging practices at the Apunepara forest in Small Malaita (Malaita Province), based on a case study of the activities of the Malaysian logging company One Link Limited.¹⁰ At this current, unsustainable level of forest harvesting, Solomon Islands forests will be exhausted quickly. Therefore, there must be immediate and effective mitigation measures and programs in place to control deforestation and forest degradation, including supporting current efforts by Apunepara community members to restore and conserve their forest. For their part, the Apunepara participants call for immediate support in implementing mitigation strategies at the local and national level.

Key Findings

International logging companies do not comply with regulations to protect forests from degradation. From 2017 to 2019, the Malaysian logging company *One Link Limited* extracted wood in the Apunepara forest. *One Link Limited*, like most other international logging companies in Solomon Islands, had operated under a local logging license. However, personal interviews with landowners revealed that *One Link Limited* operated illegally in Apunepara, as there was no proper consultation with the landowners before operations began. This research also revealed that the logging company had not done an Environmental Impact Assessment and had not obtained development consent from the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology. In other words, the company did not comply with the legal requirements.

The company also did not comply with the formal agreement, in that it overexploited the allocated land, and cut trees beyond it in areas that were supposed to be off-limits. The company also did not pay their dues to the land owners. As a result of conflicts with the local community, *One Link Limited* left the forest suddenly in 2019.¹¹

METHODOLOGY

- Community seminar
- Document review
- Direct observation of deforested land in Apunepara forest
- Survey questionnaires
- In-person interviews

⁹ Forest degradation occurs when a forest loses its ability to function as an ecosystem. For details, see Matthew G. Betts et al., "Forest Degradation Drives Widespread Avian Habitat and Population Decline," *Nature Ecology & Evolution* 6 (2022), <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41559-022-01737-8>.

¹⁰ These other factors include agricultural farming, human settlements, infrastructure developments, and population growth.

¹¹ The reason for its departure stems from increased disagreement from landowners. For details, see the box on Paul Tahu, page 23.

Large-scale commercial logging is the main driver of forest loss and degradation. Through field observation, the author observed that the tree felling techniques used by the *One Link Limited* logging company were both non-selective and unsustainable. Nearly all trees and other plants within the vicinity of the logging road (approximately more than 200 meters wide on both sides) were cut down. Many valuable trees (like *vasa* and *akwa*) were left abandoned to rot in the forest due to the company's sudden withdrawal.

During the assessment, the majority of the participants explained that the removal of forest resources threatened the survival of many species, and negatively impacted the quality of the forest's water, air, soil and ability to regulate the local climate. Specifically, soil, sawdust, and fuel waste were observed in streams, rivers and the mangrove system, which led to the contamination of the ecosystem. Deforestation of wildlife habitats has forced some animals to migrate, while plants and other animals that could not survive in the new conditions (especially in contaminated areas) were discovered to have died. Though small-scale agriculture and other land-use practices also contribute to forest loss, the impacts posed by these are much less serious as compared to logging.



Abandoned logs in Apunepara



Aftermath of logging

The impact of deforestation goes beyond environmental degradation—in Apunepara forest, livelihoods have become unsustainable and social conflicts have increased over time. Participants said that the decline in plant and animal species has affected their livelihoods through the shortage of useful forest resources, such as building materials for housing, wooden canoes, firewood and bush remedies. Many pools created from dredging gravel for road access were also left uncovered and became a heavy breeding ground for mosquitoes, which resulted in increased cases of malaria and dengue in the surrounding communities.

Fuel and oil from heavy machinery, sawdust, and excess soil from clearing the landscape have contaminated the land, mangrove and water sources. The removal of trees from the landscapes by logging has also caused the massive erosion of topsoil and lowered its fertility, which has led to more food insecurity and hunger. A woman from Waitoto village said that the population of freshwater shrimp and eels in nearby streams had greatly declined during the logging operation. The removal of trees also increased the vulnerability of the community to disasters such as coastal flooding and landslides. Finally, the Apunepara participants reported that the logging operation also triggered conflict and disunity amongst sub-tribes and individual tribal members due to the company's corrupt dealings with certain individuals and the unfair sharing of logging payments.

Recommendations

National Government:

- Establish and effectively implement the Forestry Act provisions on replanting of trees at the end of logging projects.
- Strictly monitor the provision of logging licenses to companies through the relevant government ministry.
- Provide financial assistance and trainings to the Apunepara forest community to facilitate reforestation, an environmental conservation program and other environmental protection programs.
- Support initiatives to raise public awareness and create opportunities to inclusively monitor all logging projects, to prevent deforestation and forest degradation.

Non-Governmental Organizations:

- Support the Apunepara community's efforts to undertake reforestation projects.
- Support public awareness-raising initiatives and the inclusive monitoring of all logging projects to prevent deforestation and forest degradation.

Apunepara Tribal Community and Other Rural Communities:

- Establish community policies and rules that safeguard forest resources, such as the use of agroforestry practices.
- Conduct advocacy for the sustainable use and management of the Apunepara forest.
- Refuse to consent to the implementation of heavy industrial practices such as large-scale commercial logging and large-scale agriculture in the forest.





A YOUNG LEADER AND THE LOGGING COMPANY

How Paul Tahu's advocacy campaign led to a fresh start for Apunepara

Paul Tahu is a leader and an active member of the Apunepara tribe who fights against corruption and encourages environmentally sustainable programs in his community. In late 2018, Paul launched a formal complaint against the *One Link Limited* company and an individual claiming to be a rightful landowner, as he suspected them of being involved in corrupt dealings to cut down trees without proper consent. This led to a local court hearing with the alleged landowner, with the court ruling in Paul's favour. This case triggered the withdrawal of the logging company in 2019.

To minimise the impact of logging in Apunepara and to strengthen the sustainable management of forest resources, Paul and his fellow tribal members established the Apunepara Haamwaora Natural Resources Association (AHNRA), which aims to create avenues for the sustainable management and use of natural resources.

Through this association, the Apunepara tribe is working towards launching an environmental conservation site around the hills and mangroves of the forest, as well as developing sustainable agriculture practices and community livelihood projects.

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Logging-Generated Water Pollution on Downstream Communities

by Bartholomew Wanega and Loate Maetala

Logging is the second biggest economic industry in the Solomon Islands, and it affects many communities around the country. This brief sheds light on a specific issue: how water pollution from logging activities affects downstream communities. The authors conducted their study in the villages of Horohotu and New Birao, both of which are located in Guadalcanal Province. Water pollution is not the only issue related to the exploitation of natural resources; however, it is a pressing matter. There are ways to address these issues and challenges with the contributions made in this report. The authors hope the attempts at connecting the national government and local communities will be an example for people to be confident in protecting their rights to safe water sources in downstream communities.

Key Findings

Legislation to protect natural resources is either outdated or has gaps in design. The legislation meant to protect natural resources, specifically water resources, from the damage caused by logging activities is not addressing the current, complex challenges posed by the industry. There are public policies, but there is no procedure in implementing them. Furthermore, there is no guidance given to rural communities, particularly the landowners who are approached by logging companies who want to harvest wood on their land. Interviewees also stated that the Environment Act is not clear when it comes to protecting water from pollution, and since its passage in 1998, the number of fines levied against offenders has remained the same. Similarly, the Forest Resource and Utilization Act does not penalize guilty parties for polluting water through logging activities.

Policy implementation is weak due to lack of monitoring and the lack of coordination and clear lines of responsibility among government ministries. Monitoring and evaluation is a key challenge. The Ministry of Environment has an important role in addressing any environmental damage due to logging. But due to the lack of human resources within the ministry, it has not been able to carry out this critical function effectively.

METHODOLOGY

- Key informant interviews
- Household perceptions survey
- Focus group discussions with government representatives, community members and civil society organization (CSOs)
- Literature review

Bartholomew Wanega and Loate Maetala

A similar issue identified during the key informant interviews with stakeholders was the lack of coordination among government authorities involved in regulating and monitoring the logging industry. There are no specific legal provisions regarding which ministries have direct responsibility to supervise the use of natural resources and regulate logging activities. An interviewee stated that all the line ministries work within their own areas of concern—for instance, the Ministry of Mines, Energy and Rural Electrification deals with water resources, but any penalty related to water resources falls under the Water Resources Division. The ministries take action only in their areas of concern, which makes it easier for logging companies to avoid complying with the laws. As a result, this non-compliance then affects downstream communities.

Relationships between the government and local communities are weak. The studied communities do not have strong links to the government. The government has not given people from rural areas access to the right information about the impact of logging operations on natural resources.

As a result, many communities and people in the country are not getting good information, especially those living in Horohotu and New Birao. They are not aware of the policy about natural resources and the logging industry in Solomon Islands. A key challenge is that residents of these two communities do not know how to seek advice and assistance when there are issues related to logging, due to a lack of communication between the government and communities. From the survey, 33 participants from Horohotu and 9 participants from New Birao said they did not understand the process to obtain government licenses for extractive industries. Thirteen people said they were unsure of the process to acquire a license to cut down trees or undertake other kinds of extractive projects. Only two people from Horohotu confirmed that they knew the processes in the logging industry. This has caused misunderstandings and hard feelings towards the government and other stakeholders who uphold the law and protect the people and natural resources.



Forest in Guadalcanal Province

Recommendations

National Government:

- Increase penalty fees to address issues caused by the companies that operate against the law. For example, any log cut illegally (starting at 6 meters) must be evaluated and the offending company should pay. Officers of the Ministry of Forestry and Research and provincial officers should be given responsibility to assess and penalize wrongdoing.
- Implement strict measures to ensure that monitoring and evaluation is done, and fines are enforced for violations of the law. The Ministry of Forestry and Research can take on this responsibility.
- Shift to small and medium-scale milling operations that cause less destruction to water sources and other natural resources.
- Promote the sustainable management of natural resources, such as using a carbon stock exchange.
- Raise awareness for landowners and logging community residents about the government resources available to them, so they know how to seek help when issues arise.
- Explain to tribes and communities how they can benefit from conserving their forests, water resources, and other resources, all while financially benefiting from this action, rather than resorting to logging.

Logging Communities (specifically Landowners and Residents):

- Participate in public policies that seek to address the issues that come with logging activities.
- Continue to practice the everyday management of natural resources. For example, communities can create a protection area of 50 meters from water sources, not cut trees upstream, work with upstream communities to stop the pollution of water sources, and educate the younger generation to advocate for the protection of their natural resources.
- Draft and sign a written agreement between the landowners and settlers within the communities to ensure that all natural resources are used sustainably and that the whole community can benefit from their use.

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Vilu, Guadalcanal Province

The Impact of Logging Pollution on the Environment

by Zitinah Milcy

Logging is one of the main sources of income for Solomon Islands. However, it has caused adverse impacts on the environment. This brief considers the environmental impacts of logging in the village of Baolo, located in Isabel Province. In this village, the impact of logging, particularly pollution, is a considerable concern for the community. Based on evidence reviewed as part of this study, the impact of logging on the local environment has been disastrous and must be addressed immediately. However, without appropriate political, economic and social remedies to curtail the current issue of logging in the Baolo community, mitigation measures may not succeed.

Key Findings

Existing legislation related to logging should be updated to fill gaps in protections and penalties. The Environmental Act of 1998 and the Environmental Regulation of 2008 set legal provisions about logging activities. However, these two pieces of legislation do not specifically acknowledge or explain how to address the impact that logging causes to the environment. Also, these frameworks do not specify regulations for how loggers must dispose of their rubbish, such as old machines, waste oil, tires and chains. The responsible authorities should review and strengthen these acts and regulations to be more specific.

Where protections exist, they are not being implemented effectively. Poor monitoring of logging activities in Solomon Islands is one of the main factors creating pollution. First, different levels of government do not have sufficient funds to conduct effective monitoring of this issue. The remoteness of the islands makes it difficult for the responsible authorities to monitor logging activities, particularly due to the lack of transportation and human resources. As a result, they often neglect distant islands.

As an interviewee reported, “a team from the environment department visited one of the logging sites in Isabel Province; however, the team did not carry out their job well and did not do the right thing, because as soon as they arrived the loggers brought them food and money.” Therefore, it is very important to ensure teams are adequately diverse and represent a range of stakeholder interests, both in the government and out, to protect against potential corruption. Furthermore, the most important thing to make monitoring effective is to allocate an adequate and reliable source of funding from the government.

METHODOLOGY

- Desk review of legal framework and manuscripts from government websites
- Interviews and public consultation with key community elders, youths, and women
- Meetings with resource owners or landowners

There is a lack of funding to implement safeguards against the impacts of logging.

Generally, the environmental impacts of logging are enabled by the government, which does not prioritize funding for these issues. There is no specific budget for addressing the impacts and pollution from logging companies, at either the national or provincial level. The current government system is inadequately supported by limited funding and thus is often ineffective. For example, the lack of budget is why Environmental Impact Assessments are not carried out before projects begin. This is due to the fact that the environmental impacts are not recognized as a priority issue. Therefore, grants are not provided to address logging-related pollution—sometimes funding meant for this purpose is even diverted to other sectors of development. With such practices, there is no consistent financing or resourcing established to achieve long-term goals related to the management of the logging industry. The government also needs to increase funding for expertise, technical assistance, capacity building and training. Significantly, inclusion of concerned citizens of Solomon Islands in decision-making processes is necessary.

Corruption diverts resources away from environmental protection and worsens the impact of logging.

Solomon Islands is seen as a country with a high level of corruption. Corruption is one of the main issues faced in many organizations, government ministries and departments. Logging companies are able to achieve their political agenda by influencing government officials, which makes it difficult for community leaders to fight for environmental protections.

According to one interviewee, some logging companies have built influential relationships with politicians and government officials, and have used those relationships to influence policies and legislation.

There is a need to increase education among landowners and logging community members.

Landowners and community members often work closely with the logging companies. However, due to the fact that they are not well educated, they are often not aware of environmental laws, regulations and the logging code of conduct. Therefore, it makes it difficult for them to identify illegal activities by logging companies. A high illiteracy level and a lack of education amongst the general public is an issue that hinders the communities' understanding of the legal framework, which in turn makes it more difficult for them to take action against pollution. Therefore, education is very important for the communities to gain more knowledge on how to handle such issues. By carrying out awareness campaigns in the communities, they may be able to learn communication strategies to better advocate for the prevention of logging-related pollution. However, awareness alone will not solve every issue, because a lack of technical support—such as educational materials—and financial support at the local level usually hinders peoples' abilities to advocate for themselves.

Recommendations

National Government:

- Allocate a budget to monitor logging activities. For example, a higher budget could be used to create a team to carry out regular monitoring of logging activities in certain areas (such as two or three times a year).
 - Review pertinent legislation and amend as needed to help address the negative impacts of logging, such as pollution.
- Provide key information to communities to increase their knowledge and understanding about logging issues. More awareness-raising activities should be carried out in communities so that people know how to identify and respond to illegal logging activities.
 - Increase transparency and accountability measures to prevent corruption. For example, information regarding logging activities, such as monitoring reports and other relevant information, should be made available to the public.

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Lush tropical forest, Western Province

Evaluating and Monitoring the Post-Logging Impact on Vuala Camp and Jopa Bi Camp

by Lina Dorovolomo and Linnaeus Abraham Qusa Sirikolo

Logging has existed in Solomon Islands for more than 30 years. Over time, the negative impacts have been considerable, even as the industry has been an important source of government revenue. This brief examines these negative effects in two logging camps—Vuala Camp (Qiliqipa village) and Jopa Bi Camp (near Sasamunga village), both located in Choiseul Province. The current legal situation creates gaps that logging companies can exploit, particularly in terms of using loopholes in contracts to their advantage. In the end, it is quite difficult for communities to maximize the benefits from logging in this system. To determine a way forward, further research is needed to understand the full scope of how logging contracts can worsen the impact of logging activities throughout the country.

Key Findings

There is no regulation that requires and enforces the implementation of supplementary agreements in logging contracts. Through an examination of contracts signed in both camps, the authors found that the use of supplementary agreements is entirely dependent on the chief and trustees of the people who own the land. Supplementary agreements are important because they summarize the benefits landowners will receive from leasing their land to the logging companies, including royalties and the provision of free goods and services. Though the authors received contradictory guidance on the requirement of supplementary agreements from different government stakeholders, it appears as though that even if they are mandatory to include, there is no guidance on how they should be monitored to ensure compliance.¹²

Many community members are not aware of logging contracts made in their homes or surrounding areas. According to interviews with community members, 40 percent of the rural population did not know core details about company agreements with landowners and logging operations. While 60 percent of the interviewees stated that they were aware of and knew that an agreement exists, this data was gathered in a general meeting that was chaired by the chief, which casts doubt on the accuracy of their responses.

METHODOLOGY

- Review of contracts signed between landowners and the logging company before, during and after implementation

¹² Solomon Islands Government and Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environmental Programme, *Helping communities with best practice for logging in the Solomon Islands*, https://solomonislands-data.sprep.org/system/files/Logging_Code_E-VERSION_FINAL.compressed.pdf.

The fact that those who reported knowing about the agreement did not have an in-depth awareness of the agreement—rather, they had a basic awareness of what is happening in their surroundings—reinforces this. Some community members stated that they were not aware of the proposed logging operation negotiation meeting at all. For them, they were surprised to see the logging equipment suddenly arriving on the logging sites. This lack of awareness, paired with a lack of transparency around how the financial gains from logging projects were distributed in communities, raises serious concerns.



Michael Vaghi (Project Assistant) interviewing a tribe member

Women and young people are often excluded from meetings about logging contracts, and are not allowed to participate in decision making. Tradition and culture is very influential, particularly in Choiseul Province. Choiseul Province is a patrilineal society, which puts both women and young people in a disadvantaged position for decision making. Women interviewees reported that they were dependent on the decisions made by men, and were only allowed to attend meetings to cook meals rather than joining the discussion as participants. In a survey, 80 percent of women stated that they wished to take part in decision making, as they are affected by the decisions made by the men to allow logging in their communities.

Young people also reported feeling left out of the process. However, with education and growing awareness, this norm is shifting.

Recommendations

Provincial Government:

- Provide training for landowners in finance management and bookkeeping. This should be compulsory and incorporated into a provincial policy guiding logging operations.
- Develop legislation specifically to help landowners when entering into logging agreements, such as implementing a process to monitor compliance with supplementary agreements.
- Ensure that lessons learned from the negative impact of the logging industry applies to new extractive industries. For example, mining is the current focus of the government. However, before any mining occurs, strict policies need to be in place to ensure the protection of landowners and local communities.

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CHAPTER 4

Sanitation and Waste Management



Community Sanitation Monitoring and Campaign Report

by Cameron Masakolo and Dolrish Leimah

In any society where there is rapid population growth, the need for sanitation should be an important priority. For many years, the proper disposal of sewage has been disregarded by community leaders and elders, which has led to people using nearby rivers, coastal areas and bushes as toilet facilities. This practice has affected public health and hygiene, since everyone depends on the river for washing and swimming. As the population of Karaka village (Vella Island) and Ughele village (Rendova Island) has increased over time, sanitation has become a significant issue in these Western Province communities. This brief will review the current situation and propose solutions.

Poor sanitation can result in diseases that affect the incomes and well-being of people. It has also affected the environment that the people are depending on for their livelihood. However, there are signs that communities want to address this issue—following the sanitation campaign component of this project, village residents said they are eager to create proper toilet facilities in their homes.

Key Findings

Most of the households surveyed in this study reported that they did not have access to proper sanitation facilities. Almost 90 percent of the people in Karaka lack toilet facilities. The other 10 percent are made up of teachers, nurses, and students, who reported having proper toilet facilities. Similarly, in Ughele, most people live without any proper sanitation facilities. As in Karaka, most of the houses in Ughele that have toilet facilities are school staff houses. It has now become the norm for the village to not invest in building new toilets, since everyone has been using the sea to dispose of human waste. Besides the sea, some people who live near the mangrove forest have been disposing of human waste for their entire life in the mangroves. Because of these practices, fish from the sea and mangrove resources such as mud shells, mud crabs and fruit are no longer safe for consumption.

There is a lack of support from local bodies and the national government. This has been the main stumbling block in developing the villages, and rural areas in general. Though members of parliament have promised to build sanitation facilities in the study villages, they have thus far failed to fulfill their promises.

METHODOLOGY

- Round table discussion with community elders, tribal chiefs and Member of the Provincial Assembly (MPA)
- Survey of 20 households from each community, with both men and women participating

Vulnerable groups are especially affected by the lack of toilets. The younger generation, elderly people and those with disabilities are especially affected by the lack of toilet facilities, with interviewees expressing an awareness that these groups are more vulnerable to this problem. For example, one key issue resulting from the lack of proper sanitation in both villages is the spread of disease. Survey respondents reported that two of the main health-related issues seen in the villages are scabies and hookworm. Interviewees mentioned that these diseases are likely to be caused by improper drainage and the dumping of human waste in the bush and sea. Over the past few years, these bacterial diseases have infected a high number of children.

Recommendations

National Government:

- Provide funding to increase access to sanitation facilities, especially in remote villages.
- Encourage and educate the public on how to properly dispose of human waste through hygiene awareness campaigns.
- Provide support to address the ongoing health impacts of poor sanitation practices in the Western Province.

Local Communities:

- Conduct local fundraising campaigns and other community-led initiatives to support sanitation projects, such as the building of new toilets.



Water source on Rendova island



Community awareness meeting



Roundtable participants in Karaka

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Addressing Environmental Abuse: Proper Toilet Sanitation Campaign for Tithiro

by Kenneth Havilegu

Water pollution in Tithiro (Isabel Province) has reached a critical point. There has been a massive increase in the population of Tithiro over the years, which has worsened the damage caused by using the local stream as both the main source of water and as a place to dispose of human waste. This practice has become an increasingly dangerous risk to public health. Thus, this brief investigates the ongoing environmental abuse and pollution of water streams in Tithiro. Although there has been some health awareness carried out in the community, these initiatives tend to be rushed and sporadic, usually in response to health emergencies and disease outbreaks. Such measures should instead be implemented more consistently, as part of a long-term public education and disease prevention strategy. Thus, public information and continuous community engagement are key to long-term behavioral change in sanitation practices. To achieve this, health authorities need to enter into a long-term collaboration with the Tithiro community.

Key Findings

Very few households surveyed in this study reported having a toilet. Only 10 percent of the community households reported having proper toilets, while 90 percent of the households are without proper toilets. As a result, households without toilets have used the streams to discharge waste. The consequences of this are serious. A 2014-2015 report from the Buala Provincial Hospital found that Tithiro had recorded the highest number in diarrhea cases within the ward. If the lack of proper sanitation facilities remains unsolved, diseases such as diarrhea and dysentery will continue to plague the community, alongside other human waste-related infections like E-coli, Trachoma and conjunctivitis, all of which will primarily target children under 5.

Though participants report that the water supply is maintained each year, issues persist. The respondents confirmed that the Tithiro water supply service has continued to provide fresh drinking water to the community. This is because the water source is located a far distance away from the community and all the water supply pipelines are all upgraded with new ones every year. Compared to other communities, this has led a strong water supply system in Tithiro.

METHODOLOGY

- Desk review of relevant literature
- Community survey and consultations
- Direct observation

However, 65 respondents (about 80 percent) suggest that the health of residents in Tithiro is very low because of the lack of toilets, even though the village has a good water supply system. The respondents also suggested that the water supply also suffers from quality issues. Sometimes, during rainy seasons, they reported experiencing flooding, which raised their suspicion that the increased use of the bush for waste disposal might affect the water source during periods of heavy rainfall.

There is a lack of implementation of health policies at the local level. Many of the respondents (70 percent) reported that there is no local environmental waste management policy. The same number of respondents reported that their community has also failed to comply with the national and provincial environmental policies and regulations, as there is no proper legal framework to track their compliance. According to them, it has become a common attitude and practice to use water sources to discharge their waste. A majority of the participants (75 percent) confirmed that they were not aware of any health policy ever existing in the community.



Stream in Tithiro



The Sana waterfall

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Health authorities need to take a more proactive role in meeting the needs of Tithiro community members. Health authorities seem to be reluctant to address the improper sanitation and environmental issues in Tithiro, as reported by participants. According to the survey results, health workers do not provide adequate health services to the community.

For example, 75 percent of the surveyed population confirmed that health workers provide ad hoc health awareness sessions and other trainings in the community, rather than sustained outreach initiatives. The remaining respondents said they had never experienced any type of outreach, even of an ad hoc nature. Finally, respondents reported that sometimes these community outreach initiatives are conducted during disease outbreaks to raise awareness about protection measures, and end once the outbreak is over.

Recommendations

Provincial Government:

- Closely monitor and regulate the health of the Tithiro community through the proper health authorities.
- Review and amend existing ordinances related to environmental management, especially in terms of sanitation practices. Ensuring compliance among residents is particularly important.
- Install flush toilets in Tithiro.
- Conduct regular advocacy on the benefits of protecting environmental resources to raise awareness in the community.
- Allocate funding to develop the area, potentially by restoring the Sana waterfall as an area for eco-tourism. This would provide incentive to stop using the water sources as toilet facilities.

Waste Disposal and Management in East Guadalcanal Province

by Dovená Barai

Lack of proper disposal and waste management of rubbish has significant health, socio-economic and environmental impacts throughout Solomon Islands. The focus of this project is Sukiki village in Guadalcanal Province. The aim of this brief is to raise awareness on the issue of rubbish disposal and solid waste management, especially related to plastic and metal, among young people and children. Waste management should be practiced sustainably in individual homes, the community, the province and the nation as a whole. However, many rural communities in Solomon Islands do not have proper waste disposal and management plans or guidelines. However, it is not too late to educate people in the community on the impact and importance of proper disposal and waste management. It is everybody's responsibility to work together to properly dispose of and manage waste.

Key Findings

Solid waste comes from many sources in Sukiki. Building materials are the highest source of waste produced by individual households. Increasingly, people in the community are building concrete houses and, in the process, they produce waste derived from clearing the land, demolishing old buildings, and constructing new ones. The second is domestic waste, generated through household activities like cooking, cleaning, and so on. This is followed by commercial waste produced by schools, markets, shops and offices. Lastly, agricultural waste, such as weeds, plant husks and animal waste, are also common.

The lack of knowledge about how to manage waste is the main driver of poor waste disposal in Sukiki. The majority of survey respondents lack the knowledge and understanding of how to dispose of and manage waste. Many of those interviewed also do not have an understanding of the types and sources of waste they produce every day, such as the types of containers they use to collect waste, how long it takes for them to dispose of waste and where they dispose of their household waste.

METHODOLOGY

- 25 community surveys
- Community outreach through a clean-up campaign



Sign indicating that trash disposal is forbidden in this area in Sukiki

While some awareness-raising measures are underway, more work remains to be done. In previous years, the community in Sukiki had conducted some awareness-raising efforts through a health committee, which had led community cleaning days. However, in the time before this study began, the work of the committee had been discontinued. After this project, leaders in Sukiki committed to restarting the committee, which will now be called the "Sukiki Waste Management Committee." This committee will work closely with the Church Health Committee to keep Sukiki clean and to coordinate any future waste management advocacy programs that might be implemented in the village. Such consistent advocacy is needed, because some respondents to the survey stated that they did not properly dispose of trash even when they knew the proper methods.

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Recommendations

Sukiki Waste Management Committee:

- Work together with the Church Health Committee.
- Continue organizing a weekly clean-up day for trash in the village.
- Coordinate with the responsible ministries within the provincial government and with NGOs to raise more awareness on this issue.

Provincial Government:

- Coordinate with the responsible ministries within the national government and with NGOs to raise more awareness about proper disposal and waste management.
- Build an ecological dump site for the disposal of trash in Sukiki.
- Establish rules and fines for the improper disposal of waste.



Volunteers for community clean-up

Assessment Report on Solid Waste Management in the Vura Housing Estate

by George Maelagi

Solid waste management has been a focus of debate in Honiara for over three decades. The waste management situation in Vura Housing Estate (VHE), like all other residential suburbs in Honiara, is an illustration of the issues that many communities around the country are facing—the formerly clean city has been struggling to manage waste disposal. The focus of this report is to identify current issues of waste management and to propose solutions. Fortunately, there are signs of progress. For example, the private sector, in close collaboration with the City Council, the Environment Division of the Ministry Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology and communities in Honiara, is currently implementing a waste recycling program. Export companies buy empty beverage cans from residents and collectors in communities such as VHE, and ship them to Australia to recycling companies for processing. It is therefore crucial that all stakeholders examine current waste management strategies.

Key Findings

Waterways cutting through VHE are filled with rubbish of various kinds, which has downstream effects on the pollution of the ocean. The drains and waterways that run through the three communities are almost always filled with solid waste such as paper, textiles, vegetation, soft and hard plastic, rubber and leather, metal, glass and plastic bags. During heavy downpours, the drain gets blocked and water overflows onto the road, taking with it debris that affects the flow of traffic and pedestrian accessibility. This debris then ends up in the sea, particularly by getting washed up on the beach. The natural waterway and the concrete drains are in good condition and capable of accommodating large volumes of water during the rainy season. However, residents living along the waterways dump their waste into drains because they do not have trash bins, which affects the ability of the waterways to function properly.

The difficulty of procuring and maintaining garbage trucks makes it difficult for the city to collect household trash. The Honiara City Council Waste Management Department is mandated to ensure the removal of trash from residential areas. However, for decades, the Department has been confronted with considerable challenges in delivering effective and timely services for city residents.

METHODOLOGY

- 24 households randomly selected from the estate (out of over 100 households)
- Interviews with key stakeholders involved in solid waste management
- Direct observation of waterways and drainage networks

Sometimes, the waste bins along the roadside do not get collected for a period as long as three to six weeks. Honiara City Council trash compacting truck maintenance also causes considerable delays. When the trucks break down, repairs can take several months, especially for Japanese trucks that need to have special parts imported to complete maintenance.

Household trash management practices need improvement. About half of the residents of VHE (45 percent) are aware of waste management issues in their respective communities and express concerns regarding this situation. However, interviewed youth said they do not have awareness of waste management practices in their communities, and have limited knowledge on how to properly dispose of household waste. There is also a lack of waste management awareness-raising initiatives in schools and for the general public. This is concerning because the lack of education targeting children on how to manage household waste will lead to a continuation of the issue into the future. The survey also showed that 35 percent of surveyed households in VHE do not have secure rubbish bins. While most participants keep their household waste at home in secured bags and other containers, others keep their waste in plastic bags, which can lead to the scattering of trash if bags break.

There is a need for better regulation of business waste disposal, especially for those operating out of residential areas. The exponential increase of retail trade along the streets of Honiara in the last 10 years is also a significant concern. Many of these businesses use the roadside bins, which are intended for the public, to dispose of their trash.

There are also some small businesses, such as mechanical workshops, that function in residential areas. In the absence of strong regulations and law enforcement, polluting substances, such as dirty oil, old rusted car engines and tires, are dumped around the residential areas. In the VHE residential zones, there is almost every form of waste affecting these areas.

Solomon Islands must expand on current good practices, including the example set by its neighbors. There are a few initiatives that aim to address this growing issue, including private sector recycling initiatives and campaigns conducted by the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology, in collaboration with development partners. Much more needs to be done, though, to address the problem effectively. The general public needs to re-examine how it manages its household trash. The public also needs to push the government to continue to improve its waste management systems. Finally, examples from neighboring states can be examined to draft more effective waste management legislation. Countries such as Singapore, Mauritius, and, closer to home, the Republic of Vanuatu, provide good examples. Given the enormity of the situation, it is a necessity to ban highly polluting products and materials in the country.

Recommendations

Honiara City Council and National Government:

- Increase the level of public awareness in schools and in public places like markets, through posters, digital campaigns (like videos) and billboards.
- Encourage voluntary neighborhood trash clean-up events regularly in VHE.
- Encourage and provide concessions and incentives for the private sector to explore and invest in recyclable solid waste practices.
- Establish neighborhood watch groups to ensure litter in residential areas is cleaned up regularly and collected at a designated point.
- Enact and pass legislation to ban all types and forms of single-use products in Solomon Islands.
- Review and amend existing legislation to more effectively address environmental issues in the country, particularly related to waste management.

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Garbage collection in Honiara



Trash in the Vura Housing Estate waterways



Interview at a recycling site in Honiara

Ocean Waves Initiative: Single-Use Plastic Data Collection and Awareness Program Report

by Jeremy Baea

Solomon Islands faces many environmental challenges, such as the lack of proper waste management systems and the over-harvesting of coastal marine resources. This study will focus on one issue in particular, by evaluating the efforts of the provincial government to ban single-use plastics in Western Province, specifically in the Gizo market. This brief explores the status of this process in Gizo. Even if challenges remain, the successful organization of clean-up drives in the ocean and around Gizo shows that there is a willingness to improve the environment. The success of the school awareness program in particular can be used as a model for advocacy in the future.

Key Findings

Though the new policy has achieved some success in limiting single-use plastic due to political investment, some types of plastic persist in the market. The main types of plastic waste in the market are plastic straws, small plastic bags and Styrofoam takeaway packages. When speaking with local vendors and market authorities, the main issue vendors face is being able to access alternatives to plastic products. They explained that paper straws, paper packaging for takeaways and cloth bags are expensive, and difficult to find even when a vendor can afford them. If a local supply of non-plastic products was available, all market vendors and authorities would be more capable of completely banning all plastic products from the market area. However, though there is room for improvement, the engagement of stakeholders in the provincial government, civil society organizations and the private sector has helped ensure the success of the policy to date.

Market vendors broadly support the ban on single-use plastic, and have noticed positive changes. There was overwhelming support for limiting single-use plastics in the market. All agreed that since the introduction of the policy, shoppers have found alternatives to plastic. The biggest change was seen in the increased sale of coconut weave baskets, which also creates new economic opportunities. However, market vendors argue that although coconut baskets are a good alternative to plastic bags, the high level of demand may have an adverse effect on the supply of coconuts. The only real sustainable solution will be the introduction of reusable cloth bags, particularly by making them more accessible to vendors and shoppers.

METHODOLOGY

- 20 questionnaires distributed to market vendors
- Awareness programs conducted in two local high schools



Trash on the beach in Gizo



Awareness session conducted by the project team at a local school

More work remains to be done to explain why such policies are needed to vendors. In the survey, 70 percent of the respondents did not really understand why single-use plastic needs to be limited, meaning that only 30 percent of the respondents had a clear understanding about why plastic is bad for the environment. Even more importantly, although vendors were happy to comply with rules and regulations, they reported that they always go for the easier and cheaper options, such as the continued use of plastic types described above. As they often have no alternatives for packaging to sell their products, it is quite difficult for them to stop using plastic without support.

Recommendations

Young People in Gizo:

- Participate in established government youth mechanisms to engage with decision makers and advocate for informed laws and policies to address environmental issues in Western Province.
- Establish good plastic waste practices in all primary and high schools, such as by creating practical programs to raise awareness.
- Connect and work with local and international NGOs to find opportunities related to learning how to properly manage plastic waste, and also to encourage any and all plastic recycling initiatives.

For a complete copy of this report, please contact the author: jeremybaea@gmail.com.



Aerial view of rubbish on Gizo beach

TESTIMONIALS

George Maelagi

Honiara

My community, Vura, in the country's capital, was once clean, but now it is littered with waste that affects people, water sources and the environment.

The Youth Advocates for Integrity project has given me an experience of a lifetime. I had the opportunity to give back to my community by monitoring the issue of waste management and consulting with community members on ways to address it. The skills that I learned through this project have made me a young leader and an effective advocate for change on issues that are affecting my community and the country as a whole.



Dolrish Leimah

Western Province

I believe natural resources are crucial to humanity's survival and must be protected for the future. Fully equipped with the skills and knowledge I gained from the Youth Advocates for Integrity program, I will advocate for the maintenance of a healthy environment and sustainable resources in the Solomon Islands.

This training exposed me to different methods and techniques of dealing with the negative consequences of human activities, while also helping to address the environmental challenges facing the Solomon Islands today.



Jeremy Baea

Western Province

I am well aware that my future and the future of my friends, family and the Solomon Islands depends on our natural resources.

I am passionate about gaining greater knowledge of natural resource management, and discovering greater opportunities to do more constructive work with coastal communities in the fight to preserve and manage our marine and land resources.

It is not just my role, but also my duty to help educate and inspire more of us to act.



CALL TO ACTION

Solomon Islands are at the forefront of unprecedented environmental challenges. Population growth, pressure on natural resources and governance challenges accelerate the dramatic effects of global climate change.

Local communities are the ones hit the hardest by these issues, and there is a need for more public awareness and training to protect our land and oceans from over-harvesting and to keep our waters clean.

Our studies show that there is a growing acknowledgement of the link between the state of the environment and people's health and livelihoods, but more needs to be done to educate the public on sustainable fishing, logging and waste management practices.

The legal framework and policies need to be reviewed to better understand implementation gaps. While our initial findings show that the overall legal framework is strong, its provisions could be further developed to adequately respond to the complex issues posed by natural resources management, environmental issues and climate change.

Emergency shelters and other natural disaster infrastructure must be accessible to everyone, including people with disabilities. Furthermore, adequate resourcing and staffing are needed for effective monitoring and law enforcement.

We believe that collaboration between national and provincial governments, local communities and development partners is key to gaining an understanding of every stakeholder group's views and priorities, and consequently building trust in managing the country's resources.

Independent monitoring by a strong civil society would amplify the demand to make available information that is in the public interest, and would foster a culture of government integrity, transparency and accountability.

CALL TO ACTION

Change starts with us. It is everybody's responsibility to be mindful and take action. It is the only way to save our forests, our waterways, our marine life and, ultimately, our islands. Young people, in particular, can play a vital role as caretakers in supporting environmental protection and natural resource management initiatives in Solomon Islands.

We call on the government, communities, civic activists and development partners to take urgent action to improve environmental, resource management and climate change governance in Solomon Islands.

Doing so would provide a critical pathway to advancing the country's aspiration for good governance, sustainable development and lasting peace. Save our land, save our coral reefs, save our fish! Let's give back to our homeland and the ocean by managing our natural resources more responsibly.

The Youth Advocates for Integrity, 2022



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