

Preparing and Implementing a Management Plan for Megapodes on Tongoa, Vanuatu

BirdLife International

CEPF Hotspot: East Melanesian Islands

Social Assessment, to demonstrate how the project will comply with CEPFs Safeguard Policy on Indigenous Peoples

CEPF proposals may be required to demonstrate that they fulfil the requirements of the World Bank's current social safeguard policies, particularly the Indigenous Peoples Policy (OP 4.10) and the Involuntary Resettlement Policy (OP 4.12). This social assessment accompanies project 65966 to demonstrate that in preparing the proposal provisions have been made for evaluating the potential impacts on indigenous communities in line with CEPF's Indigenous Peoples Planning Framework.

1. Identify Indigenous Peoples in the project area

OP 4.10 uses the term Indigenous Peoples to refer to a distinct, vulnerable, social and cultural group possessing the following characteristics in varying degrees: (i) self-identification as members of a distinct indigenous cultural group and recognition of this identity by others; (ii) collective attachment to geographically distinct habitats or ancestral territories in the project area and to the natural resources in these habitats and territories; (iii) customary cultural, social, economic, or political institutions that are separate from those of the dominant society and culture; and (iv) an indigenous language, often different from the official language of the country or region. Other terms used in different countries to refer to these groups include "indigenous ethnic minorities," "aboriginals," "hill tribes," "minority nationalities," "scheduled tribes," and "tribal groups" (OP 4.10, para 4).

This project will be undertaken on land owned by the community based at Kurumambe, the northern corner of the island of Tongoa, in the Shepherd Islands, part of the Shefa province in Vanuatu. Members of the community speak Bislama, some English and Nakamamaanga – the local language (one of two spoken on Tongoa).

The community do not consider themselves as distinct, culturally, from other communities on Tongoa, their cultural, social, economic and political institutions are not distinct from other cultures communities or society on Tongoa, the chief of the community currently lives, and is assimilated into, life in Port Vila the headquarters of the Shefa Province and capital of Vanuatu.

The community rely on gardening and wild forest harvesting for much of their resources – although their access to both eggs from the Megapode colony and chicks from the Shearwater (Koroliku) colony on the adjacent island of Laika (also owned by the community) means that they have considerably more access to natural resources than other communities on the island.

There is a non-sealed 4wd road that connects the villages on the island of Tongoa with each other, the island market, the shops and the local airport. The only electricity on the island is provided in the form of a generator and/or any solar panels. This will need to be considered when reviewing the findings from camera traps, etc.

2. Assess expected project impacts (both positive and negative) on them

This project falls under CEPF's investment priority 3 for the East Melanesian Islands – to safeguard priority globally threatened species by addressing major threats and information gaps. The proposal aims to develop a management plan to establish the sustainable harvesting of the Globally threatened (Vulnerable) Vanuatu Megapode eggs. Discussions with the community in October 2014 indicated that there were concerns that the megapode numbers were declining (the community had noted that the extent of slope with actively occupied burrows was declining), a tabu had been put in place but was not well-observed. This proposal aims to establish a less restrictive tabu that might, therefore, be observed more readily and to better understand the status of the megapode population that uses the colony. It will highlight the importance of Traditional Ecological Knowledge about the species and identify subject areas the TEK requires further information to be effective at the current time. The project will utilise some modern technologies (eg cameras) to enable communities to get a better understanding of the birds activities is seen as a way to merge the TEK with Scientific Ecological Knowledge in a fashion that was relevant to the community. Obtaining the evidence to enable the community to improve their TEK is seen as the most productive way of persuading the community to incorporate the findings into their future plans for the site.

The Tabu, currently in place, provides a means of controlling the extent that the community will harvest the megapode eggs. There are a number of variations that will be proposed to the community. These include

1. A full 100% moratorium on egg-harvesting, until at some point in the future it is considered that the population has increased sufficiently to be able to withstand some subsequent harvesting. This, in many ways, is the basis of the current tabu, although it is unclear what will constitute an increased, harvestable, population.
2. A full 100% moratorium for a fraction of the year – eg a 3 month moratorium. 3 months is generally the minimum time required as this enables some eggs to hatch successfully within the period of the moratorium. It has an additional advantage in that any harvest at the end of the moratorium will be particularly successful.
3. A full 100% moratorium across a fraction of the colony. Some burrows are declared 'off-limits' to harvesting – while other burrows remain available.

Variations on these themes (such as 25% of the burrows in a 3 month moratorium – with the tabu areas moved around every 3 months, such that all burrows are subject to a 3 month moratorium at least once per year). Previous conversations indicate that individual burrows at Tongoa are not owned, or are assigned to, individual people – a contrast with the situation on Simba, in the Solomon Islands.

The project anticipates that staff from VEAN, VESS and BirdLife will visit the community on 5 occasions through a 12 month period. Part of the workplan during the visits will be to monitor burrows, maintain cameras and collect information from community members on any harvesting undertaken. The project team will rent accommodation in the community, if it is available. Either a member of the community, or a committee, will be tasked with keeping a weekly record of the number and age of eggs harvested during the year (obtaining information from members of other communities if necessary). The project will employ other members of the community as field staff on a day to day basis to help with data collection, etc.

The immediate negative impact on the community is that some or all of the resource will be unavailable to the community either temporarily or permanently. It is likely that the tabu will initially be more restrictive, in order to build up the megapode population, so that the number of eggs available for harvest will be increased at some stage in the future. This will not only reduce the food resource available to the community in the short term, but might also cause increased friction with other communities who also harvest eggs, unofficially, from the site.

Benefits in the long term are that future sustainable harvesting of the burrows will ensure that there a food resource from the megapode colony will be available into the future. It is considered unlikely that the colony will provide sufficient eggs to develop a commercial harvest – rather, the eggs will supplement and add variety to the diet of the local community, thereby promoting food security. This will ensure that the community will have ready access to a protein source even in times of extreme events.

3. Describe how free, prior and informed consultations have been carried out with affected communities during design of the project (i.e. prior to submission of the full proposal)

Representatives from VEAN and BirdLife visited Kurumambe village, along with representatives of Live and Learn (Vanuatu) in October 2014. Discussions with the community revealed that a) the shearwaters on Laika were harvested but that the population continued to increase and expand in range within the island and b) that megapode eggs were harvested, but that the megapode numbers were considered to be declining as there were, no longer, any active burrows on one side of the stream. The community had imposed a traditional ‘tabu’ but that this was only partially successful. Alternative options were discussed, ranging from a full moratorium on egg collecting through to short-term moratoriums for a sample of the burrows. It was concluded that the contrast in community responses to trends in bird numbers indicates that the megapode population is currently in decline and is more immediately in need of conservation action than the shearwater population.

9 months later a representative from the community, Isaiah Seresere, attended a workshop, organised by VEAN and BirdLife International, to learn how to apply for a small grant within the CEPF programme. The range of activities planned exceeded what was feasible within a small grant and so BirdLife were asked to lead on proposing a Letter of Interest in partnership with the community, with VEAN and with representatives of VESS (who were also present at the workshop). The subsequent application was based primarily on the VESS/community application with a bit of extra technological gadgetry.

4. Outline measures to avoid adverse impacts and provide culturally appropriate benefits

External project staff and consultants will work alongside local partners who will provide informal training about local customs and expectations to ensure all project activities are carried out in a sensitive and culturally appropriate way.

Discussions about the form of the tabu, the coverage, the length of, and the method of policing will be introduced by the project team, will be discussed between the relevant persons on Tongoa and people with experience of the Ambrym moratorium, and then the final decisions will be made by the local community. Whichever option is chosen will be accepted by the project team, and data

collection modified accordingly. The tabu, and any means of enforcement, will be controlled by the community. Any grievances, from individuals within the community, can be conveyed back through the community structure and/or through conversations with VEAN staff on the occasions that they are present on the island.

5. Explain how these measures will be monitored

An open dialogue will be maintained prior to and throughout project implementation to ensure culturally-appropriate protocols are followed at all times during fieldwork. Clearly the only way that the management plan will work is if the community are 100% supportive of it. Therefore the work that we will undertake will use local community representatives to help with the data collection, and will use the community to help monitor the images from the cameras.

6. Detail a grievance mechanism

As in all community situations in Vanuatu, and elsewhere in the Pacific, all individuals within a community have the opportunity to raise concerns regarding any grievances through the local community meetings. If the community supports the grievance and changes the process, then the project team will assess how efficiently it can work in the changed situation and whether it will need to modify activities.

Clearly a tabu will only be successfully upheld if it is supported by most/all of the communities that are affected. The data collection and interpretation will be undertaken, as much as possible, within the community so that the findings are clearly understood. It is anticipated that the findings become an integral part of the Ecological Knowledge that the community maintain regarding the sustainable management of their megapode colony.

The project team from BirdLife International have a strong record of working in remote Pacific island communities and, through proper observance of cultural norms in Vanuatu, expect all grievances to be averted, or at worst, dealt with openly in consultation with local village elders and representatives. In addition the representatives of VEAN have many years' experience of working within local community groups and recognise situations where they can influence, and situations where they leave the community to influence changes in circumstances.

In addition to raising concerns through community meetings, the community members in Kurumambe village will be provided with the contact numbers of the project team, as well as the CEPF Regional Implementation Team (RIT)'s National Coordinator for Vanuatu, with whom they can raise concerns directly. Any grievances raised will be communicated to CEPF and the RIT within 15 days, together with a proposed plan of action for responding to them.