

## **Social assessment – indigenous peoples**

### **Status and Conservation of the Solomon Islands' Most Threatened Endemic Terrestrial Vertebrates**

#### **University of Queensland**

##### **Indigenous Peoples in the project area**

The Marovo/ Kavachi priority region (~65000 ha of land), Western Province, includes areas of two islands where we will work: Vangunu and Gatokae. Each of these volcanic islands has a caldera with steep ridges in the south, where the last intact forest on these islands survives. These forests and adjacent reefs are managed by small communities of indigenous customary owners, who wish to protect their natural resources. Our surveys will focus on these forest remnants.

Vangunu. Zaira is a village of fewer than 200 people on the south eastern weather coast of Vangunu. Zaira community members are customary landowners of three adjacent regions known as the Dokoso, Sunqili and Tavomai Tribal Land Areas, consisting of primary forest surrounded by steep ridges of the caldera of a dormant volcano. The total area of 6000 ha combines 3500 ha of forest, and 2500 ha of marine areas and Kavachi Reef. These three areas have recently been combined into a community conservation area declared by the landowners, the 'Zaira Community Resource Management Area'. This region is being managed by the six tribal groups living in Zaira village and the nearby similarly small villages of Ninive, Tique & Mbopo, headed by village chiefs (These tribal groups on south Vangunu Island are known as Dokoso, Kale Vangunu, Suqili, Tavoamai, Kadiki and Veala). The Zaira Community Resource Management Area is used for hunting, collecting wild fruit and nuts, and providing water and building materials. Sections are traditionally closed to hunting for five years at a time under a traditional management method known as 'hope', for example the Dokoso section is currently closed to hunting, fishing and felling trees until 2015.

Gatokae. Gatokae is an island adjacent to Vangunu. Biche is a village of around 200 people on the south eastern tip of Gatokae. Biche community members are customary landowners of the newly declared Biche Conservation Area of Gatokae Island, an area of 2000 ha including primary coastal, upland and cloud forest on Mt Mariu (the dormant volcano), and Kavachi Reef and submarine volcano. As on Vangunu, natural resources of this area were also traditionally managed using the alternating taboo area 'hope' system, and the community (headed by the village chief) is now re-enforcing this protection for their forest and marine resources. As on Vangunu, people grow food using shifting agriculture near the village.

Kolombangara. The Kolombangara Uplands priority region (~30000 ha), Western Province, includes the area above 400 m elevation of the island of Kolombangara, with a dormant volcano 1779 m high. The traditional owners of Kolombangara are known as the Dughore people, and the island has a population of around 6000. The lowlands of Kolombangara have been heavily and repeatedly logged, but a 19,400 ha conservation area of largely pristine forests has been declared since 2008, and is managed by the Kolombangara Island Biodiversity Conservation Association (KIBCA), with headquarters at Ringgi (a small town on the coast of the island).

Indigenous people on Kolombangara live in ten zones around the island, which are all represented at regular KIBCA meetings. Traditionally in the Solomon Islands, people lived in the highlands, but on Kolombangara as on other islands, most villagers have lived on or near the coast since around 1910. All landowners signed the agreement to protect the area above 400m from logging and other threats.

Gizo Priority Area. The island of Ghizo and the chain of small islands surrounding it, adjacent to Kolombangara, cover a small land area (~3700 ha), but a larger (~13000 ha) area of biologically rich reef and other marine habitats are included in the priority area. The main island of Ghizo has the second largest town in the Solomon Islands (Gizo), where WWF and government offices are based. The presence of the town (therefore a relatively high human population density) and small land area mean that indigenous people depend strongly on marine resources; many of the smaller islands support fishing villages. Land ownership is varied, and temporary and permanent settlers live here, as well as customary owners. Indigenous communities on these islands have formed the Gizo Environment Livelihood Conservation Association (GELCA), which manages the GELCA Conservation Protected Area. Ghizo Island was logged (along with adjacent lowland Kolombangara) in the 1960s and less than 1km squared of primary forest remains.

Makira. Makira is a relatively remote island in Makira Ulawa Province in the eastern Solomon Islands. The East Makira Priority Area is a large area of intact forest (>150,000 ha), including a strip of lowland forest, and upland areas with steep ridges of >1000 m elevation. Within this area, the Kahua region of north east Makira has a population of around 4500 people in ~ 40 villages, mainly on or near the coast. Indigenous people on Makira have some of the lowest incomes in the Solomon Islands, and many people have no reliable source of income. As elsewhere in the Solomons, people rely on shifting agriculture, but due to population increases of >3% per year, new flat lowland areas for gardens are becoming scarcer and gardens are increasingly being constructed on sloping land, which is prone to erosion. The customary owners of the Kahua region formed the Kahua Association in 2000, aiming to promote sustainable management of the community's resources, improvement of income and quality of life, communication between communities, and protection of the environment and indigenous knowledge from exploitation.

### **Potential positive and negative impacts**

#### Positive

One major benefit of our surveys is income generation through payment of guides, landowners and trainee rangers, and buying local produce. Although villagers in each of the priority areas live traditionally by subsistence farming, hunting, and using forest and marine resources, people need income typically for medical and school expenses, as well as manufactured materials such as clothes, fuel, soap and batteries. Sources of income in remote villages are very limited (mainly selling items in local markets).

Another important benefit will be education, capacity building and training, especially for young adults and school-aged children. There is a very high participation rate in primary school in the Solomon Islands, aided by Australian government education support, and so there is a demand for secondary schooling. There are 207 junior secondary schools in the Solomon Islands. We will provide high school educational

materials related to terrestrial biodiversity. We will provide freely available wildlife identification guides for all ages, and include local tertiary student projects in survey projects

Information collected in our surveys will promote the protection of forests from industrial logging and mining. This outcome can benefit entire communities through provision of clean water, building materials for the whole village, and healthy populations of terrestrial game animals and marine life for harvesting. Cultural heritage is also conserved (kastom sites /sacred sites).

### Negative

Adverse impacts are likely to be very minor, if they occur. This is because our project would be less than two years in total, and only ~ a month of fieldwork in each site, our methods are driven by demand from communities, and are not prescriptive.

Because our surveys are relatively brief at each site and employment opportunities limited, one possible negative impact might be conflict between households or villages over who is hired. If payment and employment of local guides is not handled very carefully, disagreements could be a problem because communities are organised into hereditary groups (wantoks) and village governance is hierarchical. Outsiders have no opportunity to decide which members of the community will be hired and trained, this is decided by the chief or a council of elders.

A minor negative impact of hiring local guides may be an increase in tobacco use. Experience has shown that people often insist that guides are partly paid in tobacco.

We may conclude that any hunting of some threatened bats is unsustainable. In the longer term, prevention or regulation of hunting priority species such as the Makira flying fox could negatively affect the poorest households by reducing protein availability.

### **Consultation with affected communities**

We have consulted extensively with all of these partner communities during surveys and taxonomic work in the planning phase of this project. This includes during visits to all of these communities in 2012 and 2013, and again during recent visits to communities on Makira and discussion with the Kahua Association there in December 2012, and the Marovo Kavichi sites in January-February 2014 (including as part of the flying fox projects underway in Western Province, using counterpart funding). All of our discussions have taken place in Solomons pidgin, in addition to the local language / dialect. We have indigenous collaborators and contacts who speak English, pidgin, and local languages (e.g. SICCP staff member Veira Pulekera speaks Marovo and Vangunu languages and has translated during meetings in Western Province). In meetings to ask permission to survey bats and frogs and use the information in school educational materials, participants were free to express their views, and were therefore not dominated by project proponents or certain sections of community. In the Solomon Islands, there is a process of hierarchical discussions led by customary landowners and the local community that must be adhered to before anyone who is not an owner can work in forests (or to visit them for any purpose), even in cases of a simple observational visit to a site. Talks begin with the council of

village chiefs and often also church leaders, who then take the proposal to a meeting of the whole community where permission and terms (payments etc) are freely discussed. Relatives of community members who live outside the area but consider that they may also have a claim to the land on which the work is planned also have rights to comment. These discussions can therefore take some time.

Several of the participants in the proposed project are indigenous to the Solomon Islands and the specific sites where we propose to conduct surveys. We are working closely with the SICCP, which is a local indigenous NGO. Participants in this project have developed associations with the affected communities over many years. Communities in this project are happy for the proposed surveys to occur and have given consent, including clear terms of access, verbally (we can obtain copies in writing if needed). Our requests for permission have been given in writing as well as verbally.

### **Measures to avoid adverse impacts and provide culturally appropriate benefits**

The wish to protect areas of intact forest from logging and mining comes from grass-roots community associations representing landowners and villages in the above KBAs. Protected areas in the Solomon Islands are not imposed by government, but are driven by indigenous landowners. Our surveys involve communities in determining what is sustainable use of wildlife, through surveys and ecological research. This information is culturally appropriate: sustainable hunting appears to have been practiced traditionally by the communities of Zaira and Biche, and local people have a strong interest in it.

Our collaboration with the SICCP and inclusion of local participants who speak indigenous languages should help to avoid conflicts over hiring (e.g. Patrick, and Corzzierah in counterpart-funded work). We will provide some benefits that are targeted to children and the whole community, e.g. school materials.

### **Monitoring**

We will use community forums and questionnaires to monitor local opinion, positive and negative outcomes of the project. Consultation at community forums will be at the beginning and end of each field survey period at each community. As well as question and answer sessions, for the benefit of more reserved people in a forum, strength of opinions will be measured by a ballot for a set of core questions. This will involve placing an object in one box to indicate 'strongly agree', alternatively in another box for 'somewhat agree', and another for 'disagree'. Questions could include 'Do you think that a community protected area benefits your community?', 'How important is your customary land for the survival of species that occur only on this island?', 'How important is frog conservation?' , 'How important is bat conservation?' and 'Has this project resulted in increased conflict in the community?'

### **Grievance mechanisms**

People will be encouraged to register any grievances: 1) Directly at community forums, or 2) Through a third party contact in the SICCP, or 3) Via a comments /

grievance book that will be left with community chairman to be filled in between trips. Dispute resolution between local groups will include the local village chief or council of chiefs (the usual accepted channel). Any grievances raised with the project team or third-party contact will be communicated to the CEPF Secretariat and the Regional Implementation Team at IUCN within 14 days, together with a plan for remedial action (if any required).