

Social Assessment

Project Title: Western Province Ridges to Reef: Planning to Enhance the Conservation of Biodiversity Conservation Plan

Applicant: World Wide Fund for Nature, Solomon Islands

Because the project will implement activities in areas with Indigenous Peoples, a Social Assessment has been prepared, to demonstrate how the project will comply with CEPF's Safeguard Policy on Indigenous Peoples.

Indigenous Peoples in the project area

A total of 18 indigenous tribes are known within the proposed project area of Kolombangara Island. However, the below list will be confirmed during consultation meetings with KIBCA (Kolombangara Island Biodiversity and Conservation Association), communities, other local partners, and stakeholders within the project site. Therefore, the list below may increase or decrease after the consultation meetings. KIBCA reports that approximately 6,000 people currently reside on Kolombangara Island

1. Koloma
2. Ngava
3. Vumba
4. Qoza
5. Kona
6. Sarelata
7. Paleka
8. Kumbongava
9. Bantongo
10. Jito
11. Siporae
12. Sikipozo
13. Padezaka
14. Matakale
15. Vasiluku
16. Sirebe
17. Vuri
18. Leanabako

If funds permit, some awareness activities may also be carried out on Ghizo Island.

Over the years, people from other islands/countries have either settled on or have been relocated to Ghizo Island for a host of reasons. Identifying indigenous peoples within the project area is thus a rather complicated task.

Eleven major rural/semi-rural communities exist on Ghizo Island, excluding the town of Gizo itself. **Saeraghi, Vorivori** and **Bibolo** are descendants of the original settlers and owners of Ghizo Island. **Paeloge and Suvania/Simboro** settlers are immigrants from Simbo Island. **Titiana, New Manda, Nusabaruku** and **Babanga** are of Gilbertese (Kiribati) decent and the **Fishing Village** is of Malaita origin. The **Kogulavata** community is predominantly occupied by people from Simbo, but people from Choiseul and Malaita have also settle at Kogulavata Bay. Gizo town (spelt differently than Ghizo Island) is the most diverse community on the island as descendants of all the above mentioned people reside there, plus others.

According to the 1999 census (most recent census), the estimated resident population of Ghizo Islands is 5323. To date, Ghizo Island supports a total of 4 major ethnic groups (indigenous Ghizo Island settlers, indigenous Simbo Island settlers, Kiribati Settlers and indigenous North Malaitan settlers) and two minor ethnic groups from indigenous Choiseul Island settlers and indigenous settlers from Roviana, Western Province.

Expected project impacts on Indigenous People

Positive impacts

The initial Ridges to Reef project will focus on raising awareness and buidling capacity for the development of a Ridges to Reef conservation plan. A Ridges to Reef awareness project will enable Kolombangara Island communities to better understand how a Ridges to Reef conservation plan can assist them in conserving the biodiversity of their marine and terrestrial environments. By engaging communities in this early stage of the project, they will learn of a different conservation method, they will have ample time to express concerns and interests related to the project, and they can begin to think about how such a conservation plan may help achieve desired outcomes. As it is anticipated that communities will eventually be involved in identifying priority areas for conservation and main threats, a thorough awareness program will benefit the communities in allowing them to complete the process with miniml disputes. Overall, the Ridges to Reef project will enhance community-based resource management and benefit the people of Kolombangara in three main ways:

- 1) Marine and terrestrial ecosystem services essential for their wellbeing will be preserved
- 2) livelihoods and culture will be sustained and opportunities for livelihood development may be presented
- 3) food security will more likely increase

If resource management and conservation efforts are developed around Kolombangara Island, it is also possible that resiliency of communities and natural habitats to climate change and other environmental impacts will increase. This may further contribute to the 3 benefits listed above and also help minimize hardships associated with natural disaster events.

In a nutshell, the development of a Ridges to Reef plan for Kolombangara Island, which is what we anticipate this proposed awareness project will lead to, should result in greater protection of habitats, associated ecosystems services, livelihoods, and food security. As communities will be engaged in the current proposed awareness project, they will be presented with the opportunity to be an active partner. This may prove invaluable in gaining support for the project and in instilling a sense of ownership and pride amongst the communities in ongoing/future conservation work. If successfully developed in the future, the Ridges to Reef plan will empower local communities to protect and manage globally significant biodiversity in priority biodiversity areas underserved by current conservation efforts.

One final area where positive impacts may be seen is in the education, training, and capacity building of engaged communities, especially of the young adults and school-aged children. It will greatly benefit the communities for upcoming generations to have a greater understanding of the importance/need to conserve the natural environment along with a greater capability to successfully manage resource use.

Negative impacts

Adverse impacts are likely to be very minor, if they occur. One of the major challenges in Solomon Islands with regards to any development or resource management is the traditional resource ownership conflicts. Such conflict is at a minimum on Kolombanagra Island, thus less issues are expected than if this project was occurring elsewhere. Regardless of the nature of ongoing or proposed conservation work, there is always a possibility that neighboring communities will dispute who has the right to be involved, manage, and benefit from the project. Another issue is jealousy amongst communities who are not engaged as much as others. Again, jealousy between Kolombangara Island communities has not been a huge issue in the past and as all communities will have an opportunity to participate in this project jealousy issues should be minimal.

Free, prior and informed consultations with affected communities

Affected communities have not yet been consulted on the details of the Ridges to Reef project. However, that is what this one year awareness and outreach project will entail.

The first activity we propose to implement under this project is community consultations to raise awareness and provide the communities with an opportunity to discuss and decide if they are interested in participating.

If funds do not permit for consultations in each community, we will strategically pick the location of consultation meetings as to ensure all communities can be represented. Initial consultations will be open to those interested but the target group will be chiefs, village leaders, and/or village elders.

Village chiefs/elders will be invited to join in a 'Look and Learn' experience in Choiseul, where The Nature Conservancy assisted the Lauru people with the development of Ridges to Reef conservation plan back in 2008 and 2009. This activity would allow

Kolombangara community reps to better understand what the development of a Ridges to Reef plan will entail, what challenges may be encountered, how the development of the plan might assist in protecting and conserving marine and terrestrial biodiversity, and discuss lessons learnt. The 'Look and Learn' may be regarded as a positive example of what communities can achieve working together towards a common conservation goal.

Upon completion of initial consultations and the 'Look and Learn', letters will be collected from interested communities. Each interested community must, in writing, explain that they wish to be involved in the planning process and that there are no disputes amongst the traditional owners within the area, regarding participation. Anticipating that the future development of a Ridges to Reef conservation plan may lead to the establishment of protected areas, the letters will also confirm whether or not all traditional owners support the creation of a protected area within the area they lay claim to and whether or not the proposal is free from tenure dispute.

A second round of consultations will be made to discuss any interests or concerns and to share what was learnt on the 'Look and Learn'. At this time, community assessments will be made to better determine how committed and serious the community is about being engaged in the project and whether there are any cultural or political factors that may affect the success or failure of future Ridges to Reef work.

Measures to avoid adverse impacts and provide culturally appropriate benefits

Traditional land/resource ownership conflicts and disputes area possibility, as mentioned above. . Such disputes can be the result of various factors, including:

1. There has not been any proper dialogue between the various tribes interested in the resources;
2. A proper explanation of proposed resource use/development has not been communicated;
3. No formal agreements regarding Ownership or the Terms and Conditions of resource use exist; and/or
4. There has not been any proper identification of the true resource owner.

As such conflict is expected to be minimal, this awareness and outreach project should greatly reduce any conflicts that might arise. As discussed, village Chiefs and Elders will be gathered as to give all communities an opportunity to express their interests and concerns. The education and awareness program for each community, will detail the objectives, goals, and benefits of the project, emphasizing that every community will be contributing to one single plan for Kolombangara Island. By illustrating how the various communities will be working together to achieve the overall goal of protecting the natural environment, particularly areas of high biodiversity, we will hopefully reduce the likelihood of resource ownership conflicts. We will relay the idea that each community stands to benefit in the same way. From past experiences, the inclusion of all interested parties and an effective education and awareness program have been sufficient for limiting resource ownership conflicts.

Monitoring of safeguard implementation

The first couple months of this project will be very crucial and important. During this time we will be carrying out the above mentioned measures for reducing disputes and negative impacts. To ensure all communities are represented in meetings, participant names and place of residence will be recorded. We will conduct as many meetings as required, until all community concerns have been dealt with and relieved. Similarly, names of participants will be recorded for the education and awareness program. We will encourage one member from every household to attend in an attempt to minimize uncertainties and misunderstandings within the community pertaining to the project.

Grievance mechanism

People will be encouraged to register any grievances:

- 1) Directly at community meetings and consultations;
- 2) Through a KIBCA (Kolombangara Island Biodiversity Conservation Association) representative; or
- 3) Through a Provincial Government representative.

If any grievances are brought forward, WWF will communicate each grievance to CEPF and to the Regional Implementation Team at IUCN within 7 days of receiving knowledge of the grievance.

* KIBCA, or Kolombangara Island Biodiversity Conservation Association, was formed by the Indigenous landholders of Kolombangara Island to represents their interests in conservation.

KIBCA was formed on 10 December 2008 at a meeting of leaders, elders and chiefs of Kolombangara villages, communities and tribes. KIBCA was registered on May 2009 under the Charitable Trust Act as a non-government or community-based organisation. KIBCA's office is at Ringgi, Kolombangara Island.

KIBCA'S overall objective is to protect Kolombangara Islands' rich marine and forest biodiversity and to educate, promote and encourage sustainable management of natural resources through viable economic and social ventures for our communities.

KIBCA manages the area of Kolombangara above 400m above sea level as a 19,400 ha conservation reserve.