

SOLOMON ISLANDS

Involvement of local people in management of a proposed World Heritage Site at East Rennell, Solomon Islands.

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Introduction. At East Rennell management of the proposed World Heritage site involves only one resident community. These are the local (or indigenous) East Rennellese people. The proposed World Heritage area includes reef and sea, land, forests and Lake Tegano which is the largest body of enclosed water in the insular Pacific.

The Human / Environment Relationship. There are four villages beside the lake and one road into the area. East Rennell has an area of 370 square kilometres and includes Lake Tegano which has an area of 155 square kilometres. The area is largely undisturbed by human impact. All the land, marine reefs and Lake Tegano are under custom ownership. The local people, numbering around 500 are Polynesian and live within the proposed World Heritage area. The people lead a largely subsistence life style with garden produce from shifting cultivation, lake and sea fish and they occasionally hunt for birds and bats. The area is in a very natural state with the most significant environmental change being the construction and opening of a road to the lake in 1995.

Political Governance Context. The Solomon Islands are a parliamentary democracy and gained independence from Britain in 1978. There are three levels of government; national, provincial and local or area council. The Ministry of Forests, Environment and Conservation actively encourages conservation and management initiatives by the local people because they are the resource owners. Also the Ministry is understaffed and it is not possible for it to assist with every proposed conservation area.

Involvement of Stakeholders. The local East Rennell people are concerned about the management of the proposed World Heritage area. There is very little outside influence affecting East Rennell as business licenses are issued by the Province who can stop inappropriate activities and the Paramount Chief, who can refuse access.

The major value of Lake Tegano for the East Rennell people is for food. It is also important for bathing, washing clothes and for transport. Other uses that are developing in importance are ecotourism eg. visits to see breeding birds on the islands and the scenic beauty of the lake.

There are a number of different interest groups that can be identified;

- 1 resource owners with subsistence life styles,
- 2 resource owners who wish to harvest and export resources,
- 3 women,

4 youth,
5 elders,
6 national, provincial and local government, and
7 national and international organisations such as the Solomon Island Development Trust (SIDT) and the World Heritage/ Ecotourism Project which is part of the New Zealand Bilateral Aid Programme.

Local Management Structure. The Tegano Management and Conservation Committee (TMCC) has the role of establishing the rights of resource owners and users to harvest natural resources and in screening small business applications to see if they are sustainable and meet with World Heritage principles.

Problems involving land or reef ownership are referred to the Council of Chiefs and Paramount Chief to be resolved. The Council of Chiefs has one voted representative from each of the 16 clans.

The TMCC are local resource owners who are voted onto the committee. It also has two women from the Women's Coordination Group. This group has two elected representatives from each village . The establishment of the Women's Coordination Group has been facilitated by the World Heritage/ Ecotourism Programme to bring the women together. Women's groups that are already existing are usually aligned to one of the two religions and there was no group that was accessible to all women. Similarly, the TMCC arose through discussions with local people about management structures for protected areas. For the men, there was no organisation that was open to all men from East Rennell.

Local Participation in Management. Currently management is determined by the Chiefs, the Paramount Chief and the Provincial Government. This has evolved from customary management with Provincial Government being added to it and this has not involved the wider community.

The resource management plan that is being developed is based on a picture of the lake, the surrounding forest, the villages and gardens, the cliffs and fringing reefs. This is to symbolise "the ideal environment" and it is hoped that the management groups will all sign under the picture. There will be an accompanying written resource management plan that gives details for management. All the community will have the opportunity to contribute to the development of the resource management plan. This will be facilitated first by visits from the environmental drama group to raise issues and will be followed by discussions. Ideas for management will be collated and incorporated into the draft plan which will be circulated for comment. A final resource management plan will be written in English and Rennellese.

The Ministry of Forests, Environment and Conservation will be responsible for reviews of the plan and they will assist with advice on implementation. The local people will implement the resource management plan which will not differ greatly from current management practices. The monitoring ideally, will also be done by local people but this has not been developed yet. This is a priority for the programme as it is difficult to measure the effectiveness of management techniques if there is no baseline information.

There are some conflicts over resource use : nets have been introduced to fish for *Tilapia* and there are reports that fish size and quantity have decreased. There is also a need for caution in

the harvesting of coconut crabs. Wild foods such as birds are commonly part of the diet. They are now being taken in greater numbers than before as some village people have firearms. In the past, birds were caught using snares and slings. These issues seem to be quite clear to the local people.

Crucial factors for local community involvement and sound resource management.

Consultation occurred to see what mechanisms the local people thought would be best for resource management. It was accepted that national and provincial laws and guidelines would be observed but that more local controls would be needed.

Communication between World Heritage staff and East Rennell people is difficult and various methods are employed to reach as many people as possible. They are; village meetings, radio contact and the East Rennell Newsletter.

There have been a number of requests for specific technical advice on management issues. A Government Officer or someone from outside the area is preferred to present the information because they are not a stakeholder. Legal counsel has not been required so far but it is possible that the Provincial Government may wish to draft environmental ordinances and a legal adviser would be needed to assist with this.

Enforcement is very effective against outsiders who take natural resources. The local people, Provincial Government Officials and the Paramount Chief have been very strong on any violations. Enforcement is more difficult with locals who have rights to harvest resources on their land but customary law and continuing environmental education should help with this. Customary law prevents people from harvesting resources outside their clan's land.

There is a some financial support available to TMCC, WCG, and CoC for transport of members to meetings. There are other organisations working in the area and efforts are made to keep informed regarding their programmes. Gender issues and concerns are addressed at village level by holding separate meetings for men and women and by giving support to the WCG. This allows women to raise issues that can be discussed more widely at the TMCC.

There are plans for development of an East Rennell Resource Centre which would serve to coordinate conservation and monitoring activities, resource management and house information on Rennellese culture.

Conservation and Development. Within the World Heritage Programme there is a small business component. This supports small scale businesses that are environmentally friendly and sustainable. The local people (ie the TMCC, WCG and CoC) have selected which businesses are appropriate and who should receive assistance. A wide range of small business operations were proposed but only those that fitted the World Heritage Programme criteria, could receive assistance.

These are; beekeeping, ecotourism, marketing of local weaving and carving, sea fishing, poultry, vegetable and some furniture production. There is no direct funding given but assistance in the form of training and materials.

Two business proposals that have been rejected are export of eels and reef fish because they were unsustainable. A Small Business Development Officer is living at East Rennell and is

giving support and advice as the small businesses are being established. Cultural practices are the greatest threat to the success of the small businesses.

RESULTS - Main costs and benefits to the area from local people's involvement.

Current management of the East Rennell proposed World Heritage area is successfully maintaining the ecosystem and is preserving the current biodiversity. There has been no need for restoration work although more environmental education is needed to protect the lake islands and some animal species that now have commercial value eg. coconut crabs.

Main costs and benefits for the people from involvement in management. The choice of the East Rennell community to support World Heritage has increased the material benefits to the area. It has increased East Rennell's profile within the Solomon's and in the international community. The people will benefit from other New Zealand Bilateral Aid Programmes including them. The main result for the Ministry of Forests, Environment and Conservation is the development of a community-driven conservation area where they provide guidance and advice.

Key Process Steps.

1. Identify existing power structure at national, provincial and local levels.
2. Consult with leaders at these levels to obtain permission and support to work with the local people.
3. Consult with local community leaders ie. village, church, women's and youth group, leaders. Ask for advice on the best ways to work with the wider community.
4. Give support as needed to establish new committees. Provide follow-up so that meetings occur and minutes are taken. Provide financial support so members can attend meetings.
5. To clarify roles and avoid confusion, help write constitutions as needed.
6. Work with the community to establish the roles of the groups involved so that the groups are accepted and can be effective.

Negotiation Procedures. In dealing with local people, it is essential that the correct protocols are observed in negotiations. When dealing with national, provincial and local government, notice of meetings should be given in writing and a report of the meeting should be written-up and circulated. One of the common criticisms when dealing with negotiations on different levels is that there is a "lack of consultation". By circulating notices of upcoming meetings and reports, this should help overcome this.

Local Commitment. For the people of the Solomon Islands, written agreements or contracts are not part of the culture. For long term commitment to a programme, it would be more effective to arrange an annual meeting for the stakeholder groups to reaffirm their support. At the meeting the goals of the programme could be restated, progress reports given from the various committees and a request made that their support continues.