



# SUCCESS STORY

## It Takes a Village

### Communities work to establish one of the first legally registered MPAs in Solomon Islands



Tastre Ataria, Nuatali Veniiy and Jeffrey Kalamana are community leaders in the Ghizo Environmental Livelihood Conservation Association, which is creating a legally registered MPA in Solomon Islands.

Photo: USAID CTSP / Tory Read

*“Our traditional system was based on respect, and people are not respecting it. The reefs are not really maintained. We need a law.”*

—Nuatali Veniiy, Vice-Chair, GELCA

The long and winding road that leads to one of the first legally recognized Marine Protected Area (MPA) in the Solomon Islands is reaching its destination. The Solomon Islands government and USAID’s Coral Triangle Support Partnership (CTSP) have built on years of work on many fronts, culminating with local communities aiming to register a set of five key reefs around Ghizo Island.

On Ghizo Island, government and communities are working together to set up protected areas and to prepare for the impacts of climate change. The preparatory community level work for the MPA—organized by WWF—included training on local empowerment, sustainable livelihoods, and marine and coastal resource management. Two Gizo communities, guided by WorldFish, WWF and the Western Provincial Government, also tested the Local Early Action Plan (LEAP) Climate Change Adaptation toolkit. Through this dual planning process, more people in the community became aware that looking after marine resources is an important activity for their future and that climate change adaptation and marine conservation go hand-in-hand.

This local-level work connects to national-level efforts for Solomon Islands’ commitments to the Coral Triangle Initiative on Corals, Fisheries and Food Security (CTI-CFF). The national government worked with local stakeholders to develop the landmark Protected Areas Act, establishing a legal framework for creating Marine Protected Areas at the local level. This opened the door for Ghizo communities to be some of the first to demonstrate how to use the law.

For centuries, communities in the Solomons have relied on a customary tenure system to protect reefs and fisheries, using temporary closures declared by the chiefs and elders, but in many places this system is eroding. “The community is overpopulated, and some individuals take too much when they go out on the reef,” said Tastre Ataria, the chairman of the Ghizo Environmental Livelihood Conservation Association (GELCA), a new community-based organization that represents the communities working to establish their own protected area under the new law. Vice-Chair Nuatali Veniiy added that the traditional system was “based on respect, and people are not respecting it. The reefs are not really maintained. We need a law.” Community leaders agree that they need enforceable legal protection for reefs and they are now well on the way to success.

WWF’s development of an MPA tool kit for communities is a key part of this process. The toolkit includes copies of the Protected Area Act, a template for an MPA management plan, copies of the required forms, guidance on MPA mapping and an overview of the registration process. “The tool kit is to help communities throughout the Solomons register their locally managed marine areas for a longer term sustainable future,” said WWF Country Manager Shannon Seeto. *WWF, The Nature Conservancy, Conservation International and WorldFish are implementing partners of CTSP and the USCTI Support Program in the Solomon Islands.*



# SUCCESS STORY

## Taking Care of Her Reefs

### Local heroine spreads the word about Marine Protected Areas



Nuatalii Veniyy is a key player in community conservation on Ghizo Island in the Solomon Islands.

Photo: USAID CTSP / Tory Read

*“The reef is always in my heart. Everywhere I go I try to educate people, including my family, about protecting the reef. We all live together, and we must work together to preserve our resources for the future.”*

— Nuatalii Veniyy, Vice-Chair, GELCA

Saying that Nuatalii Veniyy is passionate about marine conservation is like saying fish protein plays a role in the diet of the Solomon Islanders—it’s a vast understatement. She’s a true believer in the paramount importance of the reefs and the life they support. Like her mother before her, Nuatalii, from Pusinau Village on Ghizo Island, is responsible under customary tenure for the reef near her family’s land. She takes this responsibility

very seriously and is keen to create one of the first Marine Protected Areas (MPA) in the Solomon Islands with support from USAID’s Coral Triangle Support Partnership (CTSP) under the Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security (CTI-CFF) and its National Coordinating Committee.

Traditionally, customary tenure in the Solomons has included stewardship of the land and marine resources. Temporary fishing closures declared by chiefs and elders were respected, and the reefs were managed for optimal fish production. After Nuatalii took over from her mother in 1999, however, she recognized that things were changing along the coast. The sustainable management practiced by her mother and ancestors, based on a deep knowledge of and love for the reefs, was less effective. “Customary tenure is based on respect”, she said, “and young people need to learn more about and respect our marine resources.”

Nuatalii benefited from a series of CTSP-sponsored coastal management activities and workshops, learning everything she could about climate change and integrated coastal management. She and her two sons, both fishermen, use this new information and do their best to guard the reef against sea cucumber poachers, while looking for a more permanent solution.

Nuatalii and others from local communities went on a CTSP field trip to a long-established marine conservation area on Arnavon Island in the western Solomons, and she was convinced that protected area status for the reefs on Ghizo was the answer she had been seeking for long-term protection. She has been working for it ever since. Nuatalii became a leader in the formation of the Ghizo Environmental Livelihood Conservation Association (GELCA), for which she now acts as vice-chairperson. This community-based association provides the local people with legal status under the new national Protected Areas Act to create a marine protected area for her community. She now has the tools to help inform and guide her community to sustainably manage their fisheries and marine resources.

For Nuatalii, reefs are a sea paradise. Her eyes light up and emotion tinges her voice when she talks about her reefs, and her determination and energy shine through as she shares this love with everyone around her. Nuatalii’s actions are directly contributing towards her country’s implementation of their Coral Triangle Initiative National Plan of Action.

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# SUCCESS STORY

## CTI Regional Exchange in Honiara

### Solomon Islands hosts meeting on Coral Triangle MPA System



Artisanal fishermen outside of the Hotspot proposed MPA stand to benefit from the Regional Exchange’s work to create a regional system.

Photo: USAID CTSP / Tory Read

*“To be part of this initiative is an important step for Solomon Islands and our partner CTI countries. MPAs are our marine bank houses where we can protect habitat and related marine resources from over-harvesting.”*

– Rosalie Masu, Deputy Director, Ministry of Fisheries

The 4<sup>th</sup> Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security (CTI-CFF) Regional Exchange on Marine Protected Areas (MPA) took place in Honiara, Solomon Islands in 2013 to further progress towards establishing a regional system of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in the Coral Triangle region. The Coral Triangle MPA System will

be the first coordinated network of managed MPAs in the Asia-Pacific region and will be composed of MPAs nominated by each country that meet agreed standards of management effectiveness. MPA networks or systems are needed to co-manage resources, like turtles, fish and other pelagic resources that travel across boundaries.

Representatives from each CTI-CFF country joined delegates from the Solomon Islands Ministries of Environment and Fisheries, participating NGOs, and members of USAID’s regional Coral Triangle Initiative Support Program for the multi-day workshop and dialog focused on defining the criteria for effective management of marine protected areas to be included in the regional MPA system. The 35 participants discussed a common Management Effectiveness Protocol proposed for adoption by all six Coral Triangle countries. The meeting finalized the regional MPA System framework and selection criteria for ‘flagship’ and other types of national MPAs to be nominated by

Coral Triangle countries for inclusion in the regional system. Participants also discussed priority actions for joint collaboration on the CTI-CFF regional MPA system.

“To be part of this initiative is an important step for Solomon Islands and our partner CTI countries,” said Rosalie Masu, a deputy director in the Ministry of Fisheries. “MPAs are our marine banks where we can invest in a sustainable future by protecting habitat and related marine resources from over-harvesting.”

Regional Exchanges are opportunities for the interested parties and technical experts from the six Coral Triangle countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Solomon Islands, and Timor-Leste) and partners to compare experiences and challenges, agree on regional priorities, and continue building a coordinated management structure for the nascent regional system. “The exchanges are opportunities for shared learning that support story- and information-sharing between the countries,” said Agnetha Vave-Karamui, Chief Conservation Officer for the Ministry of the Environment in the Solomon Islands.

The cooperation of the member countries promotes higher standards and compliance for marine conservation and creates a network of protected areas that is stronger and more effective than its individual parts. With 85% of reefs in the Coral Triangle threatened by human activities, according to the 2012 report *Reefs at Risk Revisited in the Coral Triangle*,\*\* development of the CT Marine Protected Area System is more vital to the health of the oceans, the reefs and the fisheries than ever. *WWF, The Nature Conservancy, Conservation International and WorldFish are implementing partners of CTSP and the USCTI Support Program in the Solomon Islands.*

\*\*(<http://www.coraltriangleinitiative.org/library/reefs-risk-revisited-coral-triangle>)



## SUCCESS STORY

### A Driving Force

#### Committed leader at environment ministry makes things happen in Solomons



Agnetha Vave-Karamui, Chief Conservation Officer for the Ministry of the Environment, heads the CTI-CFF National Coordinating Committee of the Solomon Islands.

Photo: USAID CTSP / Tory Read

*“Conservation should be led by government. It’s the only way for it to be sustainable.”*

—Agnetha Vave-Karamui, Chief Conservation Officer, Ministry of the Environment

The success of a new program often comes down to a capable and committed leader. The drive to enable Marine Protected Areas in the Solomon Islands certainly benefits greatly from the leadership of Agnetha Vave-Karamui. Agnetha is the Chief Conservation Officer for the Ministry of the Environment and national coordinator of the committee created to fulfill the country’s requirements of the Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security (CTI-CFF). Agnetha and Lysa Wini, who serves as USAID’s Coral Triangle Support Partnership (CTSP) national liaison officer to the country’s National Coordinating Committee (NCC), receive praise repeatedly from NGOs, government workers, and technical advisers. “Agnetha and Lysa have held the whole thing together,” said Anne-Maree Schwarz, the country program leader for WorldFish Center. “That’s the bottom line.”

Agnetha, whose grandfather was a ship’s captain and boat builder, is from Marovo Lagoon in Western Province. She has the sea in her blood. While completing her graduate degree in Environmental Sciences at University of the South Pacific in Fiji, many of her electives were courses in marine resources. After a stint as an advocacy officer for a local NGO, she joined the Ministry of the Environment. She attended the first CTI-CFF working group meeting in 2008, and a year later she took a lead role in the Solomon Islands CTI-CFF National Coordinating Committee.

The Solomon Islands NCC consists of more than 20 members, including representatives of the Attorney General’s and Permanent Secretary’s offices, seven different ministries, conservation NGOs, the University of the South Pacific, and the Solomon Islands College for Higher Education. Its monthly meetings, organized by a core team led by Agnetha and Lysa, bring together these mixed stakeholders to provide a forum to share lessons, plan together, make decisions, and maximize the impact of resources available for coastal and marine management. As Agnetha, whose vision for marine conservation in the Solomons is optimistic and compelling, says, “Misunderstandings and wrong messages (between key parties) are the only thing hindering progress,” and the work of the NCC helps mitigate both problems.

In the 20-30% of her time not devoted to CTI-CFF and marine resource management, Agnetha and her staff of 12 are responsible for administering the new Protected Areas Act, passed with CTSP support, and the Wildlife Protection and Management Act. To manage all this, she has learned to make systems work more quickly and to delegate. She is a consistent champion of sustainable marine management, always on the go, always moving ahead. “Conservation should be led by government,” she said. “It’s the only way for it to be sustainable.”

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# SUCCESS STORY

## A Law, A Plan, A Team

### National framework for marine conservation established in Solomon Islands



The national coastal and marine conservation structure will protect the livelihood of this artisanal fisherman in Saeraghi on Ghizo Island, where Solomon Islanders are creating a Marine Protected Area.

Photo: USAID CTSP / Tory Read

*“(The NCC) is a huge success in promoting communication between everyone involved in marine conservation.”*

– Shannon Seeto, WWF Solomon Islands Marine Program Manager

There ought to be a law. That’s what Solomon Islanders said when they started to get serious about modern marine conservation. They saw the need for a legal framework that defines and supports protected areas as well as a governmental structure to regulate them. The 2010 Protected Areas Act, which gives legal protection to communities who register protected areas and commit to using various traditional and modern conservation measures, was already in the works when USAID’s Coral Triangle

Support Partnership (CTSP) supplied essential support to the Ministry of the Environment to get the law passed. CTSP funded the legal work required to write the act and supported government officials who shepherded the legislation to approval.

Solomon Islanders formed a National Coordinating Committee (NCC), also supported by CTSP, to help achieve their national and regional commitment to the Coral Triangle Initiative for Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security (CTI-CFF), including development and passage of this Law and addressing other integrated coastal issues such as adaptation to climate change. NGO participants, government officials, and outside observers agree that the NCC has radically altered the way conservation issues are handled in Solomon Islands. The NCC serves as a forum for intra-government dialogue by bringing the Ministries of Finance, Planning and Foreign Affairs (among others) into the mix and

encourages better communication and collaboration among NGOs and government. Shannon Seeto, Marine Program Manager for Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF), called the committee “a huge success in promoting communication between everyone involved in marine conservation.” As Bianca Priest, an Australian volunteer working with the NCC, observed, “Conservation is really about relationships.” The new relationships formed through the NCC bode well for marine resources in the Solomons.

The Solomon Islands government also created and committed to a National Plan of Action as part of their participation in the CTI-CFF. The Plan has supplied a framework for resource management planning and a set of goals to work towards. It “has gained enough traction to remain a guiding document for the country,” said Anne-Maree Schwarz of WorldFish in Honiara. “Other donors recognize it and are now stepping forward to fund parts of it.”

With a law, a structure, and a plan for national coordination in place, communities, government and NGOs can now work together to establish protected marine conservation areas across the country and address other threats to their coastal ecosystems.

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## Happy Fish

### Mobile app brings cutting-edge data gathering to Solomon Islands



Patrick Ketete, surveyor for the Ministry of Fisheries, interviews a vendor at the Honiara main market as part of the Happy Fish Happy People mobile app project. Ketete's work helps refine the data fields for the new mobile fisheries app.

Photo: USAID CTSP / Tory Read

*"The mobile app is amazing. I can't wait to use it."*

— Patrick Ketete, Fisheries Surveyor

Good fisheries management requires good data. The administrators at the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources in Solomon Islands felt constrained in their work by the lack of information on the current use of inshore fisheries around the country. Ben Buga, marketing director and chief fisheries officer at the Ministry of Fisheries, summed it up: "For resource management programs and to support the fishing communities, we need accurate data on production, species, origin, how, when and by whom the fish are being caught." Leaders from the Ministry of Fisheries explained this need at a CTI Regional Business Forum in 2012, and USAID's Coral Triangle Support Partnership (CTSP) stepped up to help the Ministry meet this challenge.

The Ministry of Fisheries, with support from CTSP, tasked Ben with making an information-gathering plan, and hiring and training eight people to work as market surveyors. Dr. Robert Pomeroy from the University of Connecticut Sea Grant Program and Dr. Kevin Rhodes, a professor of marine biology at the University of Hawaii at Hilo, were also brought in with the help of CTSP consortium members WWF and Conservation International to develop surveys that close information gaps, to supervise and train market surveyors and to assist Buga in managing the program. Training in how to administer surveys was conducted in the main market at Honiara, the capital of Guadalcanal Island.

Similar surveys have been done in many places, and the weakness of all of them has been the use of paper forms to record the interviews. Paper can be damaged or lost, the information must be transcribed manually to computers, all creating the potential for mistakes and delays in use of the data. To clear this hurdle, CTSP worked with the NGO Ecotrust to develop a mobile application that enables surveyors to capture and input data on-site. The mobile app, called *Happy Fish*, will allow accurate recording and instantaneous wireless transmission of survey information to a database programmed to analyze the data and generate useful reports for managers, on demand. This exciting program is an example for other Coral Triangle and Pacific countries on how to use technology to support local economies and food security for inshore fisheries.

Patrick Ketete is part of the surveying team, one of four recent graduates in Environmental Studies being trained to identify the fish and to interview the vendors and fishermen. "The mobile app is amazing," he said. "I can tell already it is user-friendly. It's very, very powerful. Very reliable. It makes our work easier." A co-worker, Shaun Konaga, enthusiastically supported his words, adding that the mobile app streamlines the survey process. Better yet, Solomon Islands Telekom is donating wireless data transfer through a public-private partnership with the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources, facilitated by CTSP.

The program aligns with the Solomon Islands National Plan of Action under the Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security (CTI-CFF) and is making good fisheries management easier. *WWF, The Nature Conservancy, Conservation International and WorldFish* are implementing partners of CTSP and the *USCTI Support Program in the Solomon Islands*.