

# Engaging and hearing the voice of community-based fisheries civil society organisations: The Second Community-Based Fisheries Dialogue

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## What is the Community-Based Fisheries Dialogue?

In August 2020, the First Regional Fisheries Ministers Meeting (RFMM1) endorsed a regional mechanism aimed at enhancing the engagement of civil society organisations (CSOs) and other non-state actors (NSAs) (*Statement of Outcomes from the First Regional Fisheries Ministers Meeting*, paragraph 16)<sup>1</sup> to give effect to the Pacific Island Forum Leaders' decision made in September 2016 concerning coastal fisheries (*Forty-seventh Pacific Islands Forum Communiqué*, paragraph 10).<sup>2</sup> The new mechanism entails convening a two-day dialogue on community-based fisheries (CBF) within the Regional Technical Meeting on Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture (RTMCFA). The dialogue, known as the Community-Based Fisheries Dialogue (CBFD), serves a primary objective: providing CSOs and other NSAs a regional platform to provide advice on key needs and issues associated with coastal fisheries resources across the Pacific Island region. This is done through the RTMCFA to the Heads of Fisheries to assist with informing regional Fisheries Ministers and Pacific Leaders about priority issues associated with the sustainable access and use of coastal fisheries resources. The CBFD also serves as an avenue for CSOs and NSAs to exchange experiences and lessons from community-based initiatives to strengthen efforts to maintain productive and healthy ecosystems and their associated fisheries resources, which are critical to the wellbeing of over 10,000 coastal communities in the Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs) (Smith and Lalavanua 2020; Govan and Lalavanua, 2022).

## The First Community-Based Fisheries Dialogue

The First Community-Based Fisheries Dialogue (CBFD1) focused on two agenda items. The first centred on establishing an appropriate administrative foundation for future CBFDs through consideration of a CBFD Terms of Reference (ToR). The Pacific Community (SPC) 14<sup>th</sup> Heads of Fisheries meeting (HoF14)<sup>3</sup> considered and endorsed the agreed ToR, which includes the appointment of a Community-Based Fisheries Dialogue Convenor and Vice-Convenor to work with the SPC Division of Fisheries Aquaculture and Marine Ecosystems (FAME) and the

CBFD Advisory Group (CBFD-AG) in organising logistics for future CBFDs and the facilitation of CBFDs. The discussion then focused on the contributions of CSOs and NSAs to the implementation of the *Pacific Framework for Action on Scaling up Community-based Fisheries Management: 2021–2025*<sup>4</sup> (Smith and Lalavanua 2021).



The Pacific Framework for Action on Scaling up Community-based Fisheries Management: 2021–2025

## The Second Community-Based Fisheries Dialogue

This article aims to share the key standing agenda items and outcomes of the Second Community-Based Fisheries Dialogue (CBFD2). It also provides recommendations for improving and enhancing future CBFD sessions from the perspective of the CBFD2 Convenor.

CBFD2 was convened on 13 October 2022 at the SPC Headquarters in Noumea, New Caledonia as a meeting within the 5<sup>th</sup> SPC Regional Technical Meeting on Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture (RTMCFA5). It was chaired by an independent Convenor selected by CSOs and NSAs. The dialogue was attended by at least 24 representatives (some attended in-person and others online) from CSO and NSA groups actively engaged in community-based fisheries in the Pacific. Representatives from government agencies and other partners attended the CBFD as observers. The Convenor and other delegates from Samoa, Fiji and Tuvalu unfortunately could not get on the scheduled flight from Nadi to Noumea as they did not have the required health insurance strictly enforced by the airline. Therefore, the dialogue was chaired virtually by the Convenor from the SPC conference room in Suva, Fiji.

<sup>1</sup> <https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/gpdzd>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/2016-Forum-Communiqué-Pohnpei-FSM-8-10-Sept.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/xqqjn>

<sup>4</sup> <https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/yr5yv>

### Session 1: Engaging the voices of CSOs and NSAs

In this plenary session, “Engaging the Voices of CSOs and NSAs”, participants brainstormed and identified several important community-based fisheries issues common across the region. In brief, the main issues raised by participants were:

- a Lack of engagement of the private sector.
- b Lack of national selection processes for CBFD.
- c Funding is needed for a national-level selection process.
- d There has been a rapid expansion of community-based fisheries management (CBFM) efforts throughout the region, but no equivalent expansion of financial and technical resources (funding and capacity) to support CBFM actions at the community level.
- e Need for better co-management around coastal fisheries monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) incorporating traditional management systems.
- f How the CBFD platform can help raise awareness of coastal fisheries management.
- g Small communities struggle to adopt and/or adapt to government-led CBF initiatives.
- h Communities need to be better informed of the potential impacts of deep-sea mining on coastal fisheries.
- i Incorporating traditional/local knowledge into coastal fisheries management.
- j More behavioural change campaigns supporting CBFM.
- k Recognising local leadership in CBFM
- l Document existing examples of effective CBFM.
- m Better management of beche-de-mer and maximisation of benefits to communities.
- n Lack of recognition and actions on fisheries offences by the judicial system.

Based on the list above, participants further identified the following top three priority issues:

- a The need for CSO/NSA representation at CBFDs (and other national-level dialogues on coastal fisheries) based on a transparent national selection process.
- b The need to accurately inform and build capacity of CSOs and NSAs on CBFM.

- c Better integration of traditional/local knowledge with modern/conventional science for effective coastal fisheries management.

The participants of CBFD2 also expressed their hopes and expectations for future CBFD processes. These included, among others:

- a Increased collaboration and support between communities and government agencies.
- b Integration of youth and technology into CBFM activities.
- c Inclusion of small-scale fishers from the private sector.
- d CBFD recommendations to be considered for adoption by higher-level decision-makers.
- e Genuine and representative two-way communication process that includes:
  - a process to be led by civil society with real financial support,
  - community feedback and issues must not be censored or modified,
  - report should reach Fisheries Ministers and Forum Leaders, and
  - resources and design should be focused on meaningfully engaging the grassroots communities in countries through national processes that respect the principles of Free Prior and Informed Consent and other key social safeguards.

### Session 2: Hearing the voices: Community-based fisheries priorities

Through breakout groups in Session 2, “Hearing the Voices: Community-Based Fisheries Priorities”, participants discussed in detail the top three priority issues identified in Session 1, which are common in our region, and came up with the following ways to address or enhance them.

- a The need for CSO/NSA representation at CBFDs and other national-level dialogues on coastal fisheries based on a transparent national selection process:
  - Select several focal points responsible for facilitating the selection process.

Participants at the LMMA Workshop in PNG. Images: Watisoni Lalavanua, ©SPC





- Provide support on speaking, making interventions prior to meetings (which will require funding support for such in-country meetings) and provide capacity building for participants to engage in high-level dialogues.
  - Involve communities in defining who “suitable participants” are and what the principles for diversity and good representation are; consider whether a sub-committee of CSOs/NSAs should be set up in each PICT to identify “suitable participants”.
  - Enable communities to define the issues that need to be addressed by science.
- b** The need to accurately inform and build capacity of CSOs and NSAs on CBFM:
- Learn from the successes of CBFM in Fiji, Tonga and Samoa.
  - Access to better means of communication and support, and sustainable finance mechanisms for CBFM activities.
  - Need alternative livelihoods to compensate for time spent on CBFM activities.
  - Need an appropriate and usable framework for CBFM monitoring, evaluation and learning at the community level.
- c** Better integration of traditional/local knowledge with modern/conventional science for effective coastal fisheries management:
- Incorporate traditional/local knowledge and practices into CBFM, including by documenting them in plans so knowledge is not eroded or lost.
  - Fisheries agencies need to build trust with traditional knowledge bearers and community leaders.
  - Involving fishers’ local knowledge in evidence-based management is key.
  - Fish may be totems for particular cultural practices and fished despite fisheries regulations, so an exemption for cultural practices should be considered.

<sup>5</sup> <https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/6aasm>

<sup>6</sup> <https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/4jr7q>

### *Outcomes, actions, and reporting to HoF15 and RFMM3*

One of the two main purposes of having the CBFD is to provide CSOs and other NSAs a regional platform to provide advice on key needs and issues associated with coastal fisheries resources across the Pacific Island region. This is done through the RTMCFA to the Heads of Fisheries to assist with informing regional Fisheries Ministers (through RFMMs) and Pacific leaders (through the Leaders Forum) about priority issues associated with the sustainable access and use of coastal fisheries resources.

At the end of CBFD2, the participants agreed to report three main recommendations to the RTMCFA for endorsement at the 15<sup>th</sup> SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting (HoF15)<sup>5</sup> and also by the Fisheries Ministers through the Fourth Regional Fisheries Ministers Meeting (RFMM4)<sup>6</sup> and the Forum Leaders. The three recommendations include:

- a** CBFD2 requests HoF15 to encourage SPC member governments to initiate a national community-based fisheries dialogue to improve communication with CSOs/NSAs and better address their needs and concerns related to coastal fisheries management.
- b** CBFD2 requests HoF15 to recognise the emerging issue of deep-sea mining and its potential consequences for coastal fisheries, and requests governments to facilitate more independent research on deep-sea ecosystems before consideration is given to commercial deep-sea mining.
- c** CBFD requests HoF15 to encourage SPC members to increase operation budgets for CBFM within national and sub-national government agencies, and to develop appropriate financial mechanisms to directly support communities to more effectively manage their coastal resources.

Participants at CBFM scaling-up workshops in PNG and Solomon Islands. Images: Watisoni Lalavanua, ©SPC





The three recommendations were endorsed by HoF15 and were transmitted in full to the Fisheries Ministers as part of the SPC FAME HoF15 report to RFMM4. All three recommendations were recognised and endorsed by the Fisheries Ministers. Currently, SPC FAME is working on its Fisheries report to the Forum Leaders, which will include recommendations from CBFD2.

## Future dialogues

Based on what actually transpired at CBFD2 as a consequence of the logistics, processes and issues discussed, the following observations and suggestions have been shared with SPC FAME and CBFD-AG to contribute to improving future dialogues:

- a The nomination and selection of representatives from CSOs in each country to attend the dialogue in person should be given to the local focal points who know more about their nominees and their contributions to the local communities in the development of CBF. In addition, the number of CSO representatives from each country should be increased to an appropriate level (at least more than one) to guarantee continued teamwork at the national level.
- b In order to share experiences and lessons learned by CSOs and NSAs from the region, a brief country report and update by their representatives on the status and progress of the communities in engaging in CBF developments would benefit everyone. This could be used to monitor the progress made by each country in implementing the issues discussed and agreed at the CBFD.

- c Efforts need to be made to appoint the Convenor and Vice Convenor as required under their ToRs. In the event that one of these roles is not fulfilled in time, a member of the Community-Based Fisheries Dialogue Advisory Group (CBFD-AG) from the same sub-region could be appointed as an interim Vice Convenor.
- d SPC FAME needs to establish a regional database on the status of CBFM in each country to enable it to accurately identify the CSOs that need direct assistance.
- e As there are vast differences in the level of formal establishment of CBF CSOs and other NSAs in the region, there is a need to ensure that the newly established CSOs are identified and given the opportunity for their voices to be heard both at the national level and at CBFDs. This will avoid domination by well-established NGOs with secured funding sources.
- f As a general rule, CBF issues identified for discussion at CBFDs should be, by nature, common and relevant to all countries across the region. In this regard, participants need to have the opportunity during the dialogue to deliberate on these issues among themselves, without the presence and participation of government officials as observers. This will give them the opportunity to express their views more openly and to refrain from continued dependence and reliance on the views and directions from government agencies. The presence of SPC FAME staff and the CBF Adviser during this closed session will serve the need of participants for any technical advice and information.
- g Providing the opportunity at CBFDs to explore and discuss potential and relevant programmes with secured sources of funding to assist CSOs to implement tangible projects and establish their national focal points is recommended. Whilst CBFD1 and CBFD2 have focussed on 'software' issues, we need to start looking at 'hardware' issues to translate what has been discussed and agreed at the CBFDs into realistic results on the ground.
- h The required contracts for the CBFD3 Convenor and Vice Convenor need to be completed and signed before the dialogue commences.

The key standing and general agenda items proposed for CBFD3 are summarised as follows:

- a Progress on actions taken by CSOs, NSAs and SPC members on the implementation of CBFD2 outcomes should continue to be the focus of CBFD3. In particular, implementation of the CBFD2 recommendations by governments needs to be closely monitored and reported to CBFD3.

CBFM workshop break-out group session in PNG.  
Image: Watisoni Lalavanua, ©SPC



- b The arrangement for the meeting sessions to be held in plenary and breakout groups needs to continue with CBFD3.
- c The establishment of national focal points for CBF needs to be formalised to facilitate proper coordination of CSO participation at CBFDs and actions taken to implement CBFD outcomes.
- d ToRs for the CBFD process and CBFD-AG, Convenor and Vice Convenor roles need to be updated (if required) during the dialogue, taking into account lessons learned.
- e Specific programmes with secured funding to assist CSOs need to be explored and discussed at CBFD3.

## Conclusion

Coastal fisheries play a fundamental role in sustaining the livelihoods, nutrition, health, cultures and economies of Pacific Island communities. It is crucial to prioritise the inclusion of voices from CSOs and other NSAs, which encompass local communities and fishers, prior to making any decisions pertaining to the sustainable access and utilisation of coastal resources and their surrounding ecosystems.

CBFD stands as a recognised regional platform through which CSOs and NSAs engaged in community-based fisheries across the Pacific region provide invaluable insights on critical regional coastal fisheries matters to their governmental counterparts. These counterparts include Heads of Fisheries, regional Fisheries Ministers and Forum Leaders. Although CBFD is still in its early stages, it has begun to effectively engage with and amplify the voice of CSOs and NSAs concerning the sustainable management of Pacific coastal fisheries.

Nevertheless, a prominent challenge faced by CBFD is the scarcity of funds required to sustain its ongoing operations. It is therefore crucial for bilateral donors and philanthropic organisations to offer their support to this regional mechanism. This support will ensure the enduring resonance of CSO voices, which encompass local communities and fishers, throughout the decision-making processes concerning regional coastal fisheries.

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