

Community-based fisheries management project in Kiribati: First steps

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A community-based fisheries management (CBFM) project was recently initiated in Kiribati to empower communities in managing their own coastal marine resources. Marine resources are very important to I-Kiribati communities, and coastal fisheries in particular, are the main support for subsistence and livelihoods, and are vital for the maintenance of cultural values. As such, these coastal fisheries need to be managed to ensure their sustainable use for future generations of I-Kiribati.

This CBFM project is funded by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research and is a component of a larger initiative being jointly conducted in the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. The CBFM team in Kiribati works in partnership with Australian National Centre for Ocean Resources and Security at the University of Wollongong, WorldFish Center, and SPC, and is supported by the Ministry of Fisheries Marine Resource Development of Kiribati. In May 2014, two local staff (Tarateiti Uriam and Ben Namakin) were recruited by SPC as community-based fisheries management officers. The pilot phase of this project is initially for three years during which time the project aims to work with three island communities. Two of the communities,

Butaritari in the northern Gilbert Islands, and north Tarawa in the central Gilbert Islands, have already been involved, a third island site will be determined in 2015, based on expressions of interest by island communities and lessons learned from Butaritari and north Tarawa.

The first phase of the CBFM project consisted of consultations with local government agencies (Island Councils) to follow local processes and to ensure that the project would be accepted. Island Council consultations were individually conducted on north Tarawa in March and on Butaritari in May of this year. The team consisted of two SPC staff members, and staff from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine



Figure 1. Island Council consultation on Butaritari. Standing is the vice mayor; men in black and white are council members (image: B. Namakin).

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Figure 2. View of Butaritari Island (image: B. Namakin).

Resource Development and the University of Wollongong. Presentations of the project explained its overall objectives, the need to manage coastal fisheries, and the roles of communities in fisheries management. Following the presentations, Island Council members raised questions about the project, took time to decide whether to accept the project, and decided on the pilot communities. After intensive discussion, councillors from each Island Council nominated three pilot communities: Buariki, Tabonibara and Buota on north Tarawa, and Kuuma, Tanimaiaki and Bikati on Butaritari.

Subsequently, visits to pilot communities were conducted to explain the overview of the project, acquire a clear understanding of the context of each village, and understand the status of each village's coastal fisheries and the issues and concerns village members have towards their local coastal marine resources. During the discussion, villagers were given a strong sense of ownership and were told that they were the experts on their local resources and have a role to play in managing their coastal fisheries; villagers know where and when fish spawn, are aware of when a resource is declining, and know the possible reasons. This message encouraged communities to identify issues with their fishery resources and discuss some of their destructive fishing methods and gear types used. Having a meeting with the whole community, however, was not enough because some people did not feel confident expressing their ideas in front of everyone. However, working in groups was a more efficient way of getting more detailed information. Different groups were formed according to age and gender (e.g. groups for women, youth, elderly men, and middle-aged men). In each group, members were

encouraged to draw maps to outline their village and lagoon and identify fishing grounds, spawning aggregation sites, important marine ecosystems and the direction of water currents. Matrices were filled out to capture information about the fish they catch, who catches the fish, use of catch (cash, barter or food), seasonality of catches, where fish spawn, perceived status and conditions of the stock. From those village consultations, a few main concerns were raised by village members, including the use of small mesh-size nets, the impact of causeways on migration and the life cycle of important marine species, crow-of-thorns starfish (a threat to coral reefs and giant clams), poaching and the lack of legal support for effective bylaws.

Out of the six pilot communities, only Buota in north Tarawa remains unvisited with consultations planned for September. Buota is a large community, consisting of people from Buota and people from other parts of Kiribati and is the village closest to the largest population centre in Kiribati, south Tarawa. Due to these challenges, the team is still working out the best way to undertake community consultations.

The next phase of the CBFM project includes further community visits as well as hosting a stakeholder workshop at the end of October. The workshop will welcome participants from different government agencies and partner agencies, and will also invite representatives from the project's two pilot island communities. The main purpose of the workshop is to raise the profile of CBFM in Kiribati to a national and regional level, and to design a model for the implementation of CBFM in the country.