

Scaling-up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific: Key outcomes of subregional workshops

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A regional assessment of the status of community-based fisheries management (CBFM), and requirements to achieve its effective, scaling-up was successfully conducted through virtual workshops. The workshops brought together over 200 participants from 18 Pacific Island countries and territories.

The greatest challenge for the region's coastal fisheries is ensuring that widespread sustainable management is practiced across the vast coastal fishing areas; areas that are subject to both immediate local pressures and external ones. The Regional Roadmap for Sustainable Pacific Fisheries⁴ and A New Song for Coastal Fisheries⁵ provide the regional context for managing coastal resources in ways that are underpinned by community-based fisheries management (CBFM). Management approaches that are community-driven are inclusive, equitable and consider the whole ecosystem in sustaining livelihoods and ensuring resilient communities. Such approaches have been identified as the most suitable in harnessing the diverse, dispersed and dynamic fishing practices in the Pacific Islands region to ensure consistent, productive coastal fisheries that can sustainably support the well-being, food needs and income of Pacific people.

To address this challenge, the Heads of Fisheries Meeting in May 2020, requested the Fisheries Aquaculture and Marine Ecosystems Division of the Pacific Community (SPC FAME) to assist member countries with the scaling-up of CBFM. SPC FAME was requested to assist members in assessing CBFM status, and in developing and implementing effective scaling-up approaches that are appropriate to national contexts.⁶

Initiating this, SPC FAME and its regional partners, the Locally Managed Marine Area Network and the University of Wollongong, facilitated a series of virtual CBFM scaling-up workshops in January–February 2021. Three one-week, subregional workshops were organised for Polynesia, Micronesia and Melanesia each. Participants logged into the common Zoom meeting portals for the different virtual subregional workshops, bringing together more than 200 representatives from national and subnational fisheries agencies, community groups (traditional leaders, youth and

women representatives), local civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations, and regional and international organisations.

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To establish a basic collective understanding among participants about scaling-up CBFM in the region, an information paper⁷ was developed to help frame the principles of scaling-up CBFM that are both regionally appropriate and nationally useful. This formed a reference point for participants in their discussion on ways to scale-up CBFM to secure long-term sustainability of national coastal fisheries.

Understanding current CBFM challenges are important before mapping scaling-up approaches. Common CBFM challenges include: geographic isolation of communities; the need for securing political support for CBFM; inadequate budget and staff to support and implement CBFM needs; ensuring participation; and empowerment of communities through strong legal frameworks. Given the challenges faced, a strategic approach to scaling up CBFM is vital to ensuring that countries achieve their national development targets related to productive and healthy coastal fisheries. The information paper proposes two key strategies involving direct CBFM actions and actions towards developing enabling conditions for CBFM.

The subregional workshops enabled countries from the same regional and cultural context to share what they have accomplished, and what is needed to scale-up CBFM. In each virtual workshop, participants engaged in a range of facilitator-guided, break-out group sessions by country to discuss and assess the current status of CBFM; share approaches, experiences and lessons-learned; and identify

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⁴ Future of fisheries: A regional roadmap for sustainable Pacific fisheries (<http://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/xnc9f>)

⁵ A new song for coastal fisheries (<http://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/b8hvs>)

⁶ Twelfth SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting outcomes (<http://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/ra7tj>)

⁷ Scaling-up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific region – Information paper (<http://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/cc937>)

opportunities to bring such ideas to scale. Workshop participants ultimately sought to identify potential avenues by which CBFM could be scaled up in each country.

The outcomes of the subregional workshops informed discussions at a combined regional workshop that was held in March 2021. This regional workshop consolidated findings from across the different subregions, with a view to co-develop and refine a Regional Framework of Action for Scaling-up CBFM. Here, we will not discuss the outcomes of the combined regional workshop nor the Framework for Action. Instead, we present the main results from the subregional workshops and highlight key differences and commonalities across the three subregions. Additional and detailed information about the workshop-series can be found in the SPC FAME meeting page.⁸

Key workshop outcomes

In discussions among participants, two major challenges requiring high-level political engagement were commonly identified in all subregional workshops:

- 1) inadequate budget and staffing of fisheries agencies to support the urgent need of managing coastal fisheries, and
- 2) difficulties supporting subnational approaches to CBFM, particularly in larger countries.

Ensuring community support structures are in place requires budgetary investment in coastal fisheries management. To make this support accessible, subnational approaches need to be strengthened. These were noted by most country participants as being essential but largely out of their control.

Summarised below, by subregion, are key outcomes identified from the three subregional workshops relating to actions that can be taken by fisheries agencies.

Melanesia

Status and needs of direct CBFM action

In Melanesia, there is a broad variety of experience on information and awareness, with radio being the most common medium used. However, there are issues with coverage, regularity and continuity of information dissemination and awareness raising. Additional strategic approaches are needed to ensure regular and cost-effective ways of disseminating information, monitoring the performance of tools used, and identifying capacity needs.

Communication from government to communities generally exists, although improvements are required in the feedback mechanism from communities to government. The communication between communities and non-fisheries agencies, as well as between communities themselves, need to be improved as well. Therefore, specific attention on strategising, and formalising feedback and representation mechanisms across these channels are needed.

Site-based CBFM is implemented in various ways, although it is challenging to do at scale due to large numbers and extensive geographical spread of communities and limited resources. This can be addressed in part through strengthening the engagement of, and support for, the provincial government to ensure that services for local communities are more accessible.

Status and needs of enabling environment

Non-governmental organisations provide significant direct CBFM activities that could be better utilised through strategic collaborations. Although, policy and legal frameworks are adequate, the actual implementation of action plans and enforcement is lacking.

Wider environmental planning mechanisms are lacking, and improvements are suggested in community involvement, public awareness, government-to-government coordination and enforcement. With the continuing focus on improving processes of inclusion of marginalised groups in the subregion, some progress has been achieved in the inclusion of different stakeholder groups.

Ways forward for scaling-up based on lessons learned from current initiatives

- Investing in cost-effective approaches that ensure availability of information to all fisheries stakeholders, especially communities.
- Strengthening cost-effective approaches on community representation, exchanges, feedback and engagement at all levels of communication on coastal fisheries management are important in scaling-up.
- Prioritising and increasing subnational level support to ensure effective and efficient service for communities and to achieve scaling-up of CBFM.
- Improving development planning, environment impact assessment processes and particularly enforcement mechanisms of wider environmental regulation and plans.

⁸ <https://fame1.spc.int/en/meetings/255>

Micronesia

Status and needs of direct CBFM action

Micronesian workshop participants noted that the provision of information is challenging and, therefore, generally irregular or infrequent, with uncertain coverage and impact. There is a need to review, develop and implement strategic approaches for messaging, and ensuring reach and regularity, so that all communities and stakeholders have the information they need.

Various communication systems between government and communities have been established and used in some countries, while others are developing their approaches. Participants identified a need to improve feedback and representation mechanisms from communities to government, between communities, and with non-fisheries agencies.

Across the Micronesian region, site-based joint action approaches vary widely in coverage between countries. Some countries have no confirmed data on CBFM coverage while in others site level activities are already reaching a wide coverage (e.g. Marshall Islands), in some the reach is increasing (e.g. Kiribati), while others are in the early stages of developing and implementing CBFM (e.g. Nauru).

Status and needs of enabling environment

CBFM specific strategies and policy are required in most countries (except Kiribati) as well as capacity development in CBFM and monitoring compliance and surveillance (MCS). Supportive legal frameworks are adequate, although rights and roles need to be clarified.

Ecosystem planning mechanisms exist and are functioning, but improvements are needed in community involvement and awareness and effective enforcement. There is progress in inclusivity, although some effort is needed in including potentially overlooked marginalised groups.

Ways forward for scaling-up based on lessons learned from current initiatives

- Ensuring effective use of current available resources requires a strategic national CBFM strategy that includes information and awareness, community participation (including outer island communities) and MCS.
- Implementing a national CBFM registry will help assess and monitor the effectiveness of site-based approaches and the contribution of CBFM to the broader coastal fisheries management.
- Assessing potentially marginalised groups.

Polynesia

Status and needs of direct CBFM action

All countries and territories in Polynesia have experience with a variety of information and awareness tools, with radio and television being widely used for broad coverage messaging. Strategic approaches for information and awareness, especially for CBFM, need to be developed and implemented.

Systems of communication between government and communities are well established and may also be used for feedback of community interests to government. However, it may not be ideally suited for fishers as their concerns are not always adequately raised and addressed by fisheries agencies or other government agencies.

Overall, site based CBFM approaches are estimated to reach a large proportion of communities in some Polynesian countries, with numbers varying significantly from country to country. Whereas Tuvalu is implementing CBFM at the community level in all islands, Wallis and Futuna have not yet initiated site-based approaches. Larger countries such as Samoa and Tonga have strongly supported site-based approaches and reach around half of the coastal communities. Cook Islands' approach is ad hoc and relies on traditional closures placed by island authorities and local communities, while in French Polynesia it is implemented based on fisheries, environmental and traditional approaches.

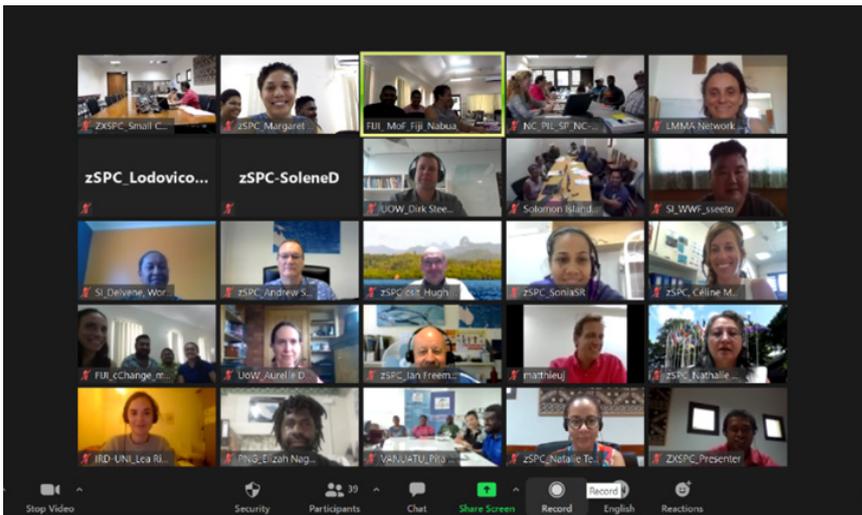
Status and needs of enabling environment

Specific CBFM strategies and/or policies do not exist in countries and territories. Particular note was made by some participants of the need for effective national and sub-national enforcement of current regulations.

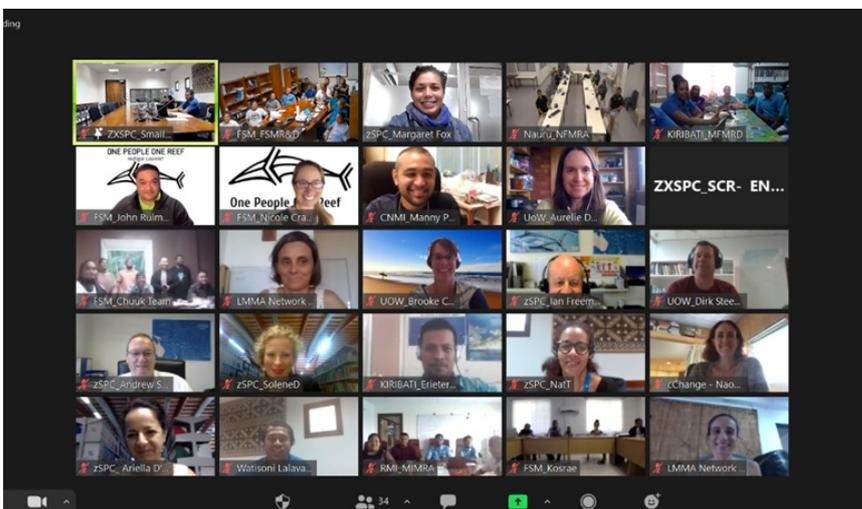
Wider environmental planning mechanisms exist, but participation of communities and fishers needs improvement with needed effective inter-agency collaboration. There has been good progress in gender, some improvement required in the inclusion of marginalised groups.

Ways forward for scaling-up based on lessons learned from current initiatives

- Strengthening current efforts on information and awareness, a cost-effective strategic approach is needed.
- Improving effective participation of community, especially on approaches that will allow fishers to raise their concern to relevant authorities.
- Developing or defining CBFM strategies where needed.
- Increasing support of effective compliance and enforcement of rules.
- Improving ecosystem and disaster response approaches.
- Assessing the potential existence of marginalised groups and impacts on equity.



A subset of the Melanesia workshop participants.



A subset of the Micronesia workshop participants.



A subset of the Polynesia workshop participants.

Conclusion

Given the global COVID-19-induced travel restrictions, in-person workshops were not possible. However, convening subregional virtual workshops on CBFM that involved break-out sessions proved very effective at facilitating discussion and sharing of experiences from countries and territories of the same subregion in a relatively short amount of time. Participants noted substantial financial and staffing constraints on implementing CBFM let alone scaling it up. Despite the need to urgently address this, participants concluded that specifically tailored interventions in each country could substantially improve implementation. Depending on the country, these included strategic information and awareness approaches, improvement in CBFM strategy, policy or legal support and effective enforcement of existing rules.

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This report represents the discussions and analysis carried out during the workshop by governments, non-governmental organisations and community participants, with the facilitation of staff from SPC, the University of Wollongong and the Locally Managed Marine Area network. The full results of the workshop and other workshop documents are available from the [Scaling up CBFM Workshop](#) webpage, which should be referred to for the full account. Any inaccuracies or omissions are the responsibility of the authors.