

COMMUNITY-BASED FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PROGRAM IN AMERICAN SAMOA

Abstract

As the population in American Samoa has expanded, the demand for fishery resources has similarly increased. Fisherfolk have used effective but often destructive fishing methods, including the use of bleaching agents, dynamite, and avaniukini (a local plant-derived poison). In addition, outside fishermen, who were often reported to be from other Pacific Islands, have entered village reefs and used bleaching agents. There have also been various reports of fishing nets, which are left on the reef, eventually trapping and killing many marine species. From these identified problems and recommendations from village communities, which were obtained through carefully designed surveys, came the need to establish a program to improve fishing and marine resources in villages.

The Community-based Fisheries Management Project assists villages in managing and conserving their inshore fishery resources by a voluntary scheme of co-management with the territory, which enhances ownership and stewardship by the village community. The project's aim is to improve fishing and sustainable development of marine resources in participating villages as well as the territory. For this, the identification of village sites to establish traditionally oriented management regimes is featured in conjunction with well-developed village fisheries management plans. In addition, monitoring and regular reef checks by village communities and fisheries staff are conducted.

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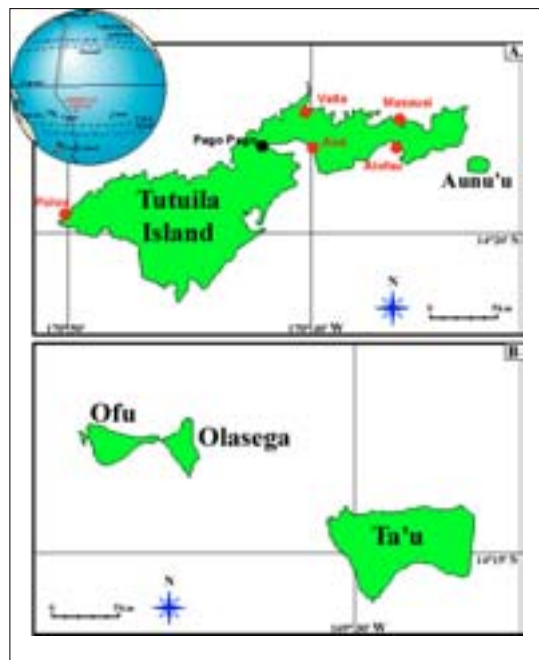
Introduction

American Samoa is the only US territory south of the equator. It consists of five rugged, highly eroded volcanic islands and two coral atolls. It comprises the main island of Tutuila, Aunu'u, the Manu'a islands of Ofu, Olosega, and Tau, Swains Island, and the uninhabited Rose Atoll. The land area of the territory is about 76.7 square miles with a population of approximately 63,000 (census 2000). Tuna fishing and canning are the major industries, and

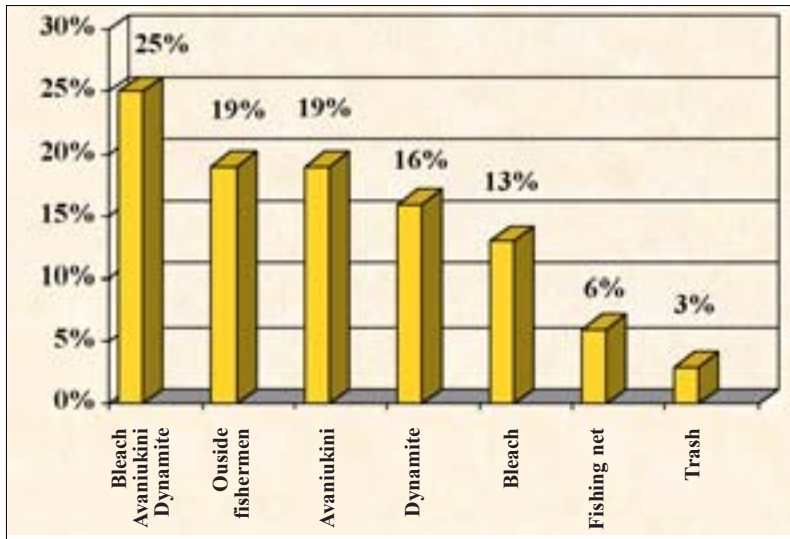
many native Samoans practice subsistence fishing and farming.

The population in American Samoa is rapidly increasing, which places increasing pressure on its marine environment. Fish and shellfish catches have declined in the lagoons and inshore reefs of American Samoa for many years. Reasons for this decline include probable overexploitation, the use of destructive fishing methods such as dynamite, bleach, a traditional plant-derived poison (avaniukini), and environmental disturbances. Other harmful activities include the destruction of nursery areas such as mangroves, by road construction and land reclamation. In addition, poor land management has resulted in erosion and siltation of lagoons.

The extent of the problem was determined through a carefully designed survey conducted by the Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources (DMWR) in



American Samoa (A: Tutuila Island; B: Manu'a Islands)



Fishing methods that damage village reefs

11 selected villages. Participating villages were randomly selected based on their geographical locations on the main island of Tutuila and the Manu'a islands. The survey was implemented in both Samoan and English. Its purpose was to determine fishing problems and recommendations as well as input from communities on ways to improve fishing in their village.

Fishing in American Samoa, either on the reef or in the open ocean, can be accomplished using careful and discrete fishing practices. However, a high percentage of respondents were of the opinion that the use of destructive fishing methods such as dynamite, bleach, and plant-derived poison were used in their waters. In addition, outside fishermen from other villages come and used destructive fishing methods. There have also been various reports of fishing nets, which are left on the reef, eventually trapping and killing many marine species.

The survey report, along with previous studies by the department on the territory's reef area, justifies the need to include communities in improving the sustainable development of

resources. The Community-based Fisheries Management Program was implemented in 2001. At present, there are five villages in the program, four with established marine protected areas and Fisheries Management Plans (Poloa, Alofau, Vatia and Aua) and one which is in the process of drafting its Fisheries Management Plan (Masausi).

Co-management of the resources at the village level

The Community-based Fisheries Management Program exists to assist villages in managing and conserving their inshore fishery resources by a voluntary scheme of co-management with the government. The program's goal is to enhance ownership and stewardship of the marine resources by the village community. The program aims to improve fishing and sustainable development of marine resources in the villages.

For this, identification of village sites to establish marine reserves or marine protected areas (MPAs) is featured. In addition, restocking of giant clams in MPAs, as part of DMWR's assistance in the program, enhances

the development of good fisheries practice and management approaches.

The Community-based Fisheries Management Program was adopted from a similar program in Samoa under the Fisheries Office. Although the two Samoas practice the same tradition and culture, the differences in lifestyles and economies impact the way in which the programs are implemented. Thus, the program development process is essentially the same with a few exceptions to meet the system and regulations organized in American Samoa.

Extension process of the program

The first step in the process is to conduct an initial contact with a village's chiefs to set a date for a first meeting with the village council. The program's cultural officer, who is a representative from the Office of Samoan Affairs, makes contact with the village mayor and leaders for the arrangement of a meeting with the village council. The First Meeting, which is a formal traditional meeting with the council of chiefs, requires the presence of the department's director, cultural officer and the head of the program.

This important meeting provides DMWR with an opportunity to explain and introduce the program in a manner that gains the village's support and its permission to start the program. If the village accepts the program, then a date is set to conduct group meetings. The cooperative agreement is given to the village during this first meeting for its signature of cooperation with DMWR in the program. The agreements provide assurance from both the government (DMWR) and village of the tasks and obligations to the program, and the

Summary of the Program's Extension Process

- 1) Initial contact with the village
- 2) First meeting with the village council (to explain the program for village's acceptance)
- 3) Group meetings – 3 Groups
 - Chiefs
 - Women
 - Young men
- 4) Fisheries Management Advisory Committee (FMAC – to draft a Fisheries Management Plan)
- 5) Village Fisheries Management Plan (agreed to at the village council meeting)
- 6) Monitoring and Enforcement Committee (to oversee, monitor, and enforce the undertakings agreed to in the management plan)

endorsement and cooperate support from the village.

The purpose of the group meetings is to identify problems with village reefs and fisheries, and to identify solutions by using a problem solution tree. Meetings are carried out in three groups: the chiefs group, women's group and the young men's group. This is done because different people fishing the reef, use different fishing methods. After the group meetings, selected members from each group will then work as the Fisheries Management Advisory Committee to put together a Fisheries Management Plan with assistance from DMWR.

Village Fisheries Management Plans

Villages with MPAs have Fisheries Management Plans, which include a description of the village, village rules and regulations, information on village MPAs and map, information about their fisheries, concerns and recommendations gathered from group meetings, additional information necessary for the

protecting and monitoring of village MPAs, and a Cooperative Agreement. A draft Management Plan is sent to the village council for its approval before the final draft is given to different government agencies and the general public. Rules and regulations and other actions written in the Fisheries Management Plan will be enforced and implemented by the village's Monitoring and Enforcement Committee with assistance from DMWR.

The village and DMWR work together in co-managing the marine protected areas, with each party having its own role. The village works on establishing rules and regulations to be written in their Fisheries Management Plan (e.g. a ban on the use of destructive fishing methods, monitoring and protecting the reef area, and implementing other actions to protect the environment). DMWR provides technical assistance and advice, workshops and training, and other appropriate fishery support such as restocking of clams in MPAs and assisting villages with their Fisheries Management Plans.

Criteria for selecting a village

There are at least three criteria for selecting a village for the project. The first is to look at how well organized the village is in regards to its *matai* system, women's groups, and young men's groups. The second is to informally meet with the village mayor and leaders to briefly explain the project. The third is to carefully assess the village's potential as a target village for the program by determining: a) the significance of the marine environment to the village; b) the extent of any problems with the marine environment, fish catches, etc; and c) the level of concern and willingness to do something about existing problems. The extension staff will review the assessment of a village's potential for inclusion in the program.

As the program progresses, some villages have requested to have the program started in their village because of the reef condition and the need to improve their fisheries. In addition, media awareness programs about the ongoing progress and work in villages in the Community-based Fisheries Management Program have enticed many villages to participate.

Increasing participation and support from communities

Getting the program started in a village and working with the community is a difficult task; however, these are the ways to gain people's motivation, support, and understanding of why there's a need to improve resources. We have put together some information sheets about the program and other fisheries issues, brochures about the program, and workshops for the community and government agencies. We also send out press

releases about village activities to local newspapers, conduct radio advertisements and TV interviews, and held panel discussion with village representatives about the program.

In starting the community program, a series of three, one-day workshops were held to present and discuss the program to three different groups. The first workshop was with government officials working on conservation or management of inshore marine and coastal resources. The second workshop was with the legislature (*Fono*) to gain its support and recommendation on the implementation of the program. The third workshop was with the territorial mayors. The fundamental purpose of the workshops was to present the project to different stakeholders and achieve significant recommendations to aid the implementations of the program in American Samoa. In addition,

the workshops were held to inform island leaders about the benefits and limitations of co-management of fisheries at the village level.

Conclusion

The end result of the Community-based Fisheries Management Program will be a village with a Fisheries Management Plan including guidelines and regulations to monitor and protect its reef area, a productive and healthier reef area, improved fisheries, and an increased awareness, motivation, consultation, and participation from different stakeholders.

The Community-based Fisheries Management Program in American Samoa will increase conservation awareness in government, community, and the private sector. It will aid in recovering the reefs and improving fish catch.

In addition, the program allows the community to keep a close watch on the marine resources and their condition, and address management needs so that resources will continue to be healthy and productive for its people and future generations to come.

References

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