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RESCCUE lessons-learnt workshop
North Efate – Vanuatu
Report

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Introduction

The lessons-learned workshop of the RESCCUE project in Vanuatu took place on the 8th of November 2018.

The workshop objective was to articulate lessons that can be learned from the project activities implementation at a technical level, and, by taking “a step back”, to provide advice and input into future projects addressing environmental issues in Vanuatu. The workshop was structured around the main project thematic interventions. Each project thematic intervention was presented in a plenary session subsequently followed by discussions. The discussion focussed on a) the tangible changes brought by the project, b) the challenges that have been faced and the way they have been overcome (or not), c) the main issues related to sustainability and replicability.

The RESCCUE project in Vanuatu was implemented in the northern side of the island of Efate, including five nearby inhabited islands and about 40 local communities.

It focused on:

- Protecting marine resources and improving decision-making, through the development of a Community Marine Monitoring Toolkit, a guidebook to design and manage community-based tabu marine areas and the development of an ICM plan for the North-Efate area.
- Enhancing terrestrial ecosystem management, through the implementation of a “Bioblitz¹” on the ELMA project area², a demonstration garden for the control of rats and African-snails and restoration activities on a site invaded by *Merremia pelata* (big leaf vine).
- Improving waste management practices, by performing awareness work all around North-Efate at the community level, reinforcing the waste collection framework and supporting the Vanuatu government “plastic-ban” policy and campaign.
- Funding ICM and environmental management in the long term through innovative financial mechanisms, the construction of a resource centre and the development of an ICM plan for the North-Efate area.

To perform these objectives, the project relied on an operator group composed of consultancy firms and NGOs, led by a New-Zealand based consultancy firm. Overall coordination of the activities relied largely on overseas consultants. Even if local coordinators have been appointed since the beginning of the project, the RESCCUE project certainly suffered from the lack of resources and responsibilities allocated to them and didn’t benefit from the continuous presence of an overall project coordinator in-country. Despite this, it is important to underline that the operators meaningfully connected with the two local environmental networks (*Tasi Vanua* and *Nguna Pele*).

¹ The Bioblitz activity implemented consisted in a biodiversity survey implicating both scientists and local communities members

² Situated in the north-west of North-Efate, the Efate Land Management Area (ELMA) project has been led for about 20 years by the Shefa Province and aims to protect a large portion of the North Efate landmass.

Since the beginning of the project, the central Vanuatu administration requested repeatedly to be directly funded by RESCCUE. Whilst SPC was not able to respond positively to this request as it was not the initial project design agreed with AFD, the SPC project team offered opportunities to fulfil specific government requests. Three requests were effectively submitted by the government and the provincial administration agencies, and all three were successfully addressed:

- Support to national habitat mapping initiatives on Lelepa and Moso islands in North Efate by the Vanuatu Fisheries Department (VFD).
- Support to the “plastic-waste” campaign (requested by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs).
- Performance of a “Bioblitz” as a pilot biodiversity survey on the ELMA project area (Shefa Province demand).

Part 1 – General overview of the project results in terms of outcomes and tangible changes

Training and building the capacity of champions

One of the most important outcomes of the RESCCUE project in North-Efate is certainly the training and capacity building of about 15 “champions”, most of whom are associated with the Tasi Vanua or Nguna Pele networks. These champions for marine or terrestrial resource management, or waste management have been the linchpins for most of the activities implemented during the project. Awareness activities undertaken amongst the North-Efate communities relied heavily on these champions and their commitment was underlined by different participants to the workshop.

Beside supporting the project activities, the champions contributed to improve the visibility of both Live and Learn Vanuatu and the Tasi Vanua and Nguna Pele networks at the community level. In term of sustainability, it has been underlined that these champions need ongoing funds, to enable them to circulate amongst and engage with communities. The continuity of the champions work will rely on the functioning of the recently created trust fund (cf. part 2).

Toolkits and communication supports provided to reinforce the champions work

A community marine monitoring toolkit has been developed under the project activities in connection with VFD. Different issues have been mentioned during the workshop:

- The data collected through the surveys by the champions are centralised at the Emua resource centre³. In addition to the local data processing designed to inform community-based management of marine resources, the same data are also to be collected and processed by VFD to inform national management. At the time of the lesson-learnt workshop, no feedback from both the local and national use of the data

³ The resource centre was build and funded as one of the activities of the RESCCUE project

collected has been provided. This is a matter of concern as this feedback would be a support and recognition to the champions work and to maintain motivation of communities involved in the survey network.

- Community marine resource monitoring is not new in the Pacific. Previous experience has highlighted that it is as important to focus on collecting “stories” to raise awareness on marine resource management issues among local communities as it is to collect data.

Several communication tools were developed to support the waste management awareness work and the “plastic-waste campaign” to support the government plastic-ban policy. These activities led to the uptake of the “yellow trash bag⁴” use among North-Efate communities, allowing the Port-Vila municipality to organize the recollection of waste in the area. It is to be noted that a critical-mass had to be reached in terms of use of these “yellow trash bag” such that the collection of waste by the municipality became viable. The awareness work began with one community, although alone this did not justify the implementation of the municipal waste collection. This is undeniably a success-story of RESCCUE, which underlines the importance of close collaboration between the project and the government administration and the timing of on the ground implementation with government initiative. The plastic-waste campaign provided the impetus needed for the RESCCUE project waste management activities to be implemented at a larger scale. The project provided funds and champions to support the Vanuatu government ambitions.

Enhancing terrestrial ecosystems management

The RESCCUE project ends before the Epau restoration site is fully implemented. Ecological restoration work in North Efate watershed areas means dealing with invasive species (in that case “Big Leaf Vine” and pigs) which represents a quite intensive investment in terms of manual labour. An economic incentive had to be found to involve communities through local champions in such a restoration work, and make it a higher priority. An agroforestry model has therefore been designed collectively with the forestry department and the local Kava association, and is now being implemented with trees to be planted in the coming months (the area has been fenced). If the consultation process held with local stakeholders did not allow to fulfil the initial objectives of the activity within the project period, it permitted to redesign the activity in a more relevant way and led to an action plan that is likely to be implemented out of the project period.

Therefore, the main activity discussed during the lessons-learnt workshop related to invasive species management through a pest proof fence trial on a demonstration garden at the Emua community. It appears that the initial diagnosis in this matter was inappropriate or incomplete. This diagnosis led to the implementation of an activity that is considered at least to be questionable and unlikely to offer any opportunity for replicability. A participant at the workshop notes: *“We Melanesian people we don’t use fences, it’s not a Melanesian way. [...] If the rats are coming, well we share with rats, we just plant more!”*.

⁴ “Yellow trash bags” are sold by the Port-Vila municipality, they fund the recollection framework that is performed. As so, Port-Vila only recollects waste in the “yellow trash bags”.

Perhaps as a result of this, this activity was abandoned before the project's end. Answering to a question during the workshop about what should have been done regarding the issue of agricultural losses due to rats and African snails, a participant replied that *"If it had to be done again, we could do the garden, but without the fences"*. This response suggests that the general objective of the activity wasn't senseless⁵ (rats and African snails are indeed impacting crops significantly in Vanuatu or other South-pacific countries), but the design of the activity performed to overcome this issue was disconnected from local agricultural practices and custom. Discussions highlighted however that the operator based the diagnosis and, ultimately, the design of this activity on a significant number of interviews with local community members. Furthermore, the local champions of Emua were involved in the early implementation of the activity and never alerted the operator consortium or the steering committee to its lack of relevancy. One lesson here certainly should be the necessity of building activities connected with agriculture issues on a strong systemic agricultural diagnosis.

The Bioblitz performed on the ELMA area was designed to support the achievement of this 20-year-old project from the Shefa Province. A participant to the workshop noted that it had the benefit of *"resetting and reinforcing the ELMA project on the administration's agenda"*, although the implementation of the activity does not seem to have led to significant progress in the ELMA project. The main issue in the ELMA project appears to relate to concern over customary rights in the area, an issue and a general topic that was beyond the remit of the RESCCUE project.

Part 2 – Lessons-learnt regarding ICM planning and long-term funding of conservation activities

North-Efate ICM plan

Despite an ICM plan having been developed under the RESCCUE project for the North-Efate area, the ICM plan was barely mentioned during the workshop. The plan was developed with Tasi Vanua and Nguna Pele networks although it appears to have lacked significant involvement of relevant administrations. Even if the Vanuatu government is supportive in principle to ICM planning processes (a national framework for ICM exists in Vanuatu) the North-Efate ICM plan is not officially recognised by any administration. Without further analysis, given the limited participation at the workshop, it is not possible to determine the root-causes of this. The relationship between the Vanuatu government and the RESCCUE project in general in regards to the differing visions for how RESCCUE funds should have been used in Vanuatu may have been an issue. Despite the lack of profile of the ICM plan amongst stakeholders, the work done in developing the plan was not lost as it fed the conservation action plan adopted within the North-Efate conservation trust fund.

⁵ Nature-based solutions exist in term of crops protection against these two pests, but if experimentations have been conducted by farmers involved in the BIO PASSIFIKA network in New Caledonia, there isn't any strong scientific data on the subject for now and little dissemination of these results has been made.

North-Efate Conservation Trust Fund

One of the most promising achievements of the RESCCUE project in Vanuatu is the North-Efate Conservation Trust Fund. The trust fund is based on a partnership between Live and Learn Vanuatu, the two environmental networks and tourism operators in North-Efate (via the local tourism associations) and it includes an action plan for environment conservation activities. A 10% levy on tourism activities will be collected from the tourism operators represented by the Shefa tourism council as a member of the Trust Fund and will fund the action plan implementation. The RESCCUE project has provided 90 000 € seed funding in order to initiate the operation of the trust fund and implementation of the conservation activities while the financial stream from the tourism levy starts and grows.

Given the trust fund was established late (mid 2018) within the RESCCUE project it is difficult to draw lessons. It can be underlined that this trust fund is the first of its kind in Vanuatu. Leading the consultation work with tourism operators and the two environmental networks was a long process, as it was to establish the two deeds.

There are great expectations of the North-Efate Conservation Trust Fund. For the Champions trained by the RESCCUE project, it may provide an opportunity to fund their activities after the project's end. The representative of MFA (focal point of the RESCCUE project) declared during the last steering committee meeting that *“this trust fund is a great achievement [...] along with its 90 000 € initial funding from RESCCUE. [...] There you may have the sustainability of all you've done with the project, and sustainability has been the greatest concerns for the government all along”*. The running of the North-Efate Conservation Trust will be closely examined, not least by the Vanuatu government who will likely assess the success of the RESCCUE project against the success of the trust fund.

Part 3 – Lessons-learnt regarding the project design for Vanuatu

The operator model

The Vanuatu pilot site has been challenging in terms of implementation through the “operator model”. The SPC team faced two specific challenges in Vanuatu:

- The lack of proposal submitted by an in-country project coordination in the early operator selection.
- The high level of conflicts between some of the organizations composing the operator consortium.

These conflicts in particular subsumed a lot of time and energy, both for the operator and the SPC team and certainly had effects on the relationship between the project and the Vanuatu administration.

The absence of strong local coordination at least during the first half of the project implementation made it difficult to build fluid relations and mutual trust with the relevant administrations, who were not as involved in the project implementation as the Government would have liked.

These significant difficulties lead the authors to question the applicability of the operator model in Vanuatu and hence the consistent application of this model across different pilot sites where the landscape of potential operators greatly varies.

Intervening in Vanuatu

Relationships throughout the project between the Vanuatu government and the project team have been difficult. The necessity of *“doing things differently”* in term of project design has been underlined, both by MFA’s representative and the SPC RESCCUE project coordinator. An evaluation and analysis of the different intervention models used for projects implemented in Vanuatu during the last decade would provide an important resource for the preparation of future projects.

General overview of the lessons learnt from RESCCUE in Vanuatu...

... a project which brought tangible changes...

- By training and building capacity of 15 champions, who contributed to awareness on environmental issues and increased the visibility of local environmental networks within the communities of North-Efate.
- By building a resource centre in Emua, developing a toolkit for community marine resource management and waste management, and supporting communication strategies for the champions to use in awareness raising on different topics.
- By supporting the Vanuatu government plastic-ban policy and the municipal waste collection initiative implemented in North-Efate.

... whose activities sustainability will mostly rely on the success of the North-Efate Conservation Trust Fund...

- The ICM plan developed under the project is not officially endorsed by the administrations and does not rely on changes of practices in the administration in term of integrated approaches, nor on an endorsed committee linking different stakeholders implementing sectoral actions that together comprise ICM.
- Despite the shortcomings in the ICM plan, it has been significant in providing a framework and definition to the activities implemented by the RESCCUE project and the 5-year conservation plan developed as part of the Conservation Trust Fund. The Conservation Fund seems to be on track and raises expectations in so far as it is the first of its kind in Vanuatu and has the potential to provide sustainability to the project activities, or more generally to conservation activities in North-Efate.

... and led to question both the operator model and the initial design in Vanuatu.

- The operator model led to various difficulties in Vanuatu, perhaps questioning the merit of having the same model of intervention in each pilot site where the landscape of operators and administrations vary greatly.
- There was an unsatisfied explicit request by the Vanuatu government administration to be directly funded by the project. This led to a tense relationship, likely to detriment of the RESCCUE project. An evaluation and analysis of the different intervention models used for projects implemented in Vanuatu during the last decade would provide an important resource for the preparation of future projects.

Annex 1: workshop participants

MFA:

Roel Tari - Policy Officer, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and External Trade,

SPC RESCCUE coordinators:

Raphaël Billé - RESCCUE Project Coordinator, SPC

Jean-Baptiste Marre – RESCCUE Project Deputy Coordinator, SPC

Operator consortium:

Rowan Dixon – RESCCUE Vanuatu Coordinator, WSP Opus

Glarinda Andre – Local Projects Manager, Live & Learn Vanuatu

Emil Samuel – Live & Learn Vanuatu

Jessie Kampai – Information office, Live & Learn Vanuatu

Local Stakeholders:

Kenneth Lango – Chairman, Tasivanua Environment Network

Joel Leisavi – Marine Champion, Tasivanua Environment Network

Salome Xato – Nguna Pele Environment Network

Andrew Api – Nguna Pele Environment Network

Tatu Tosaruolu – Nguna Pele Environment Network

Mark Kalotap – Shefa tourism office manager

Vanessa Organo – Consultant and former Efate Land management officer, Shefa Province

Workshop facilitation:

James Comley – Golder

Aurelien Degoy – GIE Océanide

Annex 2: workshop program

Thursday 8 November

8h30 – Reception of the participants (MFA + SPC)

9h00 – Introduction

- General overview of the RESCCUE project (Raphaël Billé - SPC)
- The lessons-learning process of the RESCCUE project – what we aim to achieve from the two days and how the schedule is structured (James Comley - Golder)
- Project objectives and activities for the Kadavu and Ra pilot sites (Rowan Dixon – WSP Opus)
- Participants introduction – roles and responsibilities both within and outside the RESCCUE project (participants).

Session 1 – Supporting marine environmental management strategies and planning processes: the Community Marine Monitoring Toolkit, the tabu areas review and the North-Efate ICM plan

Presentation of the activities implemented by RESCCUE and their results.

Plenary session discussion.

Session 2 – Supporting the protection and restoration of terrestrial ecosystems: the Bioblitz and the demonstration sites (Emua garden and Epau restoration area)

Presentation of the activities implemented by RESCCUE and their results.

Plenary session discussion.

Session 3 – Waste management activities

Presentation of the activities implemented by RESCCUE and their results.

Plenary session discussion.

Session 4 – Ensuring sustainability of North-Efate conservation activities: the Tasivanua resource centre and the trust fund

Presentation of the activities implemented by RESCCUE and their results.

Plenary session discussion.

16h30 – End of the workshop