

Community issues, concerns and suggestions for improving coastal fisheries in Vanuatu: A community perspective

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Loss of traditional knowledge on resource management

Overfishing or overharvesting is one of the major issues faced by coastal fisheries managers in Vanuatu. This is largely a result of an increasing population (some relating to internal migration), and increasing competition for a limited amount of resources. Although community management approaches and *tabu* areas (periodically closed areas) are used to address the growing pressure on fisheries resources, the younger generation and other members of communities, are unaware of these traditional management methods. Respect for traditions and *tabu* areas is decreasing. The youth of today do not know the traditional ways of fishing and have forgotten the art and skills of building canoes. The National Council of Chiefs can be used to reinforce the concept of traditional *tabus* in all provinces, and awareness needs to be raised on the importance of respecting traditional and community management approaches. This will help promote understanding among the country's youth and those that are unaware of the importance of managing coastal resources.

Aquaculture as a source of livelihood for women and youth

Aquaculture, such as establishing fish farms in rural communities, can be a good option for declining coastal resources, especially if these can be managed by women and youth. Farmed fish can be consumed in the villages, will likely be cheaper than wild-caught fish, and will relieve pressure on coastal resources. Fish farms can be an opportunity for youth to become successfully involved. With funding support, freshwater collection tanks could be installed in rural communities for aquaculture purposes.

Access to fishing technology

There is currently only one boat-building company in Vanuatu, which makes purchasing a boat very expensive for rural communities. This is in addition to the high costs of purchasing fishing gear and fuel. The Vanuatu Government should look into the option of subsidising the costs of boats, fishing gear and boat fuel for those who cannot afford it. Traditional canoes are easy to handle and do not require an outboard engine. However, it would help if a boat-builder could build these canoes in fibreglass, which last longer than traditionally made canoes, and can withstand rough weather and cyclones.

Access to markets and seafood storage options

The remoteness of many local communities, inadequate transportation systems and the irregularity of shipping services makes access to seafood markets an issue for fishers all over Vanuatu. Sometimes it is hard to sell fish that comes from the outer islands because hotels and restaurants prefer fresh fish, not frozen. Teaching value-adding techniques to rural communities can really assist in the marketing of fish and marine resources. A good example is teaching community members how to fillet and package fish to sell to markets, hotels and restaurants. Filleted fish can be more attractive to hotels and restaurants. Another example of value-adding is to teach women how to smoke or dry fish to be able to keep marine products for a longer period of time.

The availability of ice is a major issue for rural fishers as well as those operating around in Port Vila. Ice machines or solar freezers in communities could solve this problem. While freezers provide some benefit, they can be problematic if they break down because island communities generally do not have the capacity to repair them. Providing training to community members on how to maintain and repair solar freezers and ice machines is important for preventing catches from spoiling and resulting in a loss of income. Another idea is to have an official vessel travel to remote communities equipped with a cooler or freezer to act as a buying point for rural community fishers. In this way, coastal community members could continue to engage in fishing and be able to sell their marine products without worrying about transport and direct access to distant markets.

Market places

The newly built fish market in Port Vila, which is managed under the Department of Cooperatives, is now open and functioning. Women are struggling to find places to sell their marine products, especially because market fees are expensive. In addition, fisheries centres are not being utilised and are lying dormant. The government should explore the option of the Port Vila Fishing Association to manage the new fish market in Port Vila, and make spaces in markets and fisheries centres more affordable, especially for women, so that they can make a sufficient profit from selling fish at these centres.

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Fishing associations

Fishing associations are not registered or recognised in any official capacity in Vanuatu. Fishing associations should be registered with the Government Financial Services, and should be recognised and registered under VANGO (Vanuatu Association of Non-Governmental Organisations). Fishing associations should have a special control committee that collects data on catches, and informs association members about legislation, which will help in national reporting and contribute to regional reporting.

Lack of information and awareness

There is a lack of awareness of government policies within communities, and a lack of access to information. Government officials need to increase their visits to rural communities to inform and educate communities on what is happening at higher levels of government. It would be valuable for government officials to receive training on how to translate government policies and 'speak' a language that communities can understand. Different approaches should be used and can assist with getting messages across to community members in a way they can easily understand (e.g. pictures, videos).



Originally from the Shepherd Islands in Shefa Province, Alice Kaloran is the President of the Tongoa-Shepherd Islands Women's Association. Tongoa and Shepherd islanders are heavily reliant on artisanal and commercial fishing for food and local livelihoods. The association is working to empower women and men alike to develop their entrepreneurship skills in business development, and in sustaining fish supplies to local domestic markets in Port Vila. Alice was one of three community representatives that was selected by the Pacific Community to participate in the second Regional Technical Meeting on Coastal Fisheries and the third Coastal Fisheries Working Group meeting in New Caledonia from 12–16 November 2018. Alice shared her unique perspective on community issues, concerns and suggestions for improving coastal fisheries in Vanuatu.