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Community-based Fisheries Management in American Samoa

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Community-based Fisheries Management in American Samoa

1. American Samoa, the only U.S. territory south of the equator, consists of five rugged, highly eroded (and extinct) volcanic islands, and two coral atolls. It is composed of the major island of Tutuila, Aunu'u (a small island less than 1 mile off Tutuila), the Manu'a Islands of Ofu, Olosega, and Tau, located about 65 miles east of Tutuila, the uninhabited Rose Atoll about 180 miles east of Tutuila, and Swains Island about 220 miles north of Tutuila.
2. The land area of the territory is 76 square miles. The population is approximately 63,000 with most people living on the main island of Tutuila. Tuna fishing and canning are major industries. Many native Samoans practice subsistence farming and fishing.
3. The population of American Samoa is rapidly increasing which places an increasing pressure on its marine environment. Catches of inshore fish and shellfish have declined in American Samoa for many years. Reasons for this decline include probable overexploitation, the use of destructive fishing methods (including the use of bleaching agents, dynamite, and traditional poisons,), and environmental disturbances, such as the destruction of nursery areas (including mangrove areas) by road construction and land reclamation. In addition, poor land management practices have resulted in erosion and the siltation of lagoons.
4. The Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources (DMWR) conducted village surveys in 11 selected villages, from February through May 2000 to determine the fishing problems and recommendations, as well as needs, from the community on ways to improve fishing in their villages. These villages were mostly situated on the main island of Tutuila and one was from the Manu'a islands. When details of these surveys were released, DMWR received numerous requests from village communities for solutions to the problems and recommendations to improve the development and sustainability of marine resources in village reefs.
5. In American Samoa, modern fishing methods are rapidly replacing traditional fishing methods. The preferred fishing gear is spear, followed by pole/rod and reel. Knives are used mainly for gleaning on the reef. Women in American Samoa mostly practice gleaning. The use of fishing nets is relatively uncommon; however, it is in the same demand as traditional fishing methods.
6. In American Samoa, fishing in the open ocean or on the reef simply requires careful and discreet fishing practices. However, survey results shows a high percentage of respondents believe that destructive fishing methods still in use, have damaged the village reefs. These destructive fishing methods include the use of bleaching agents, dynamite, and traditional plant-derived poisons (ava niukini). In addition, outside fishermen have lurked in the villages and used bleaching agents to make their fish catch. There have also been various reports of fishing nets which are left on the reef and eventually trapped and killed many marine species.

7. To help minimize these problems, village people suggested clean-ups on the reef (37%), banning the use of dynamite, bleaching agents, and traditional plant-derived poison (27%), enforcement of rules and regulations (21%), banning outside fishermen from utilizing the village reefs (12%), and banning over fishing (3%). These preferred ways would aid in preventing fishing problems in the villages and improving food resources from the ocean.
8. The Community-based Fisheries Management Program assists village communities to carefully examine the status of their reefs and plan actions that will allow lagoons and reefs to recover, and eventually improve fish catches. It seeks to establish community-fishing practices, which results in the maximum productivity and sustainability of marine resources. The most important role is that of the village community. They decide what are their major concerns, and what action needs to be taken.
9. In this program, the community's undertakings include the establishment of village rules, banning destructive fishing methods, size limits on fish, monitoring fish reserves, and environmental protection. In support, DMWR gives technical advice and assistance, workshops, and appropriate fishery support (e.g. Stocking of giant clams). It also assists with technical support when the village develops its own Village Fisheries Management plan. DMWR has a legal advisor to assist in providing implementation in drafting plans incorporated under DMWR.
10. The process or approach used in this program has been based on the system, regulation, and life styles in American Samoa. The summary of the extension process for the Community-based Fisheries Management Program in American Samoa is shown in the diagram (See Figure 1).
11. There is a biannual review on the marine reserves by DMWR and village people to follow up on the status and resources of the marine reserves.
12. In this program, there are two criteria for selecting a participating village. The first is the level of organization in the village with regards to the Matai (chief) system, the women's group, and the untitled men's group (aumaga). The second is to carefully assess the village's potential by estimating the following: 1) the significance of the marine environment to the village; 2) the extent of any problems with the marine environment, fish catches, etc.; 3) the level of concern and willingness to do something about the existing problems.
13. A series of three 1-day workshops were held on November 29th through December 1st, 2000 to present and discuss the program "Community-based Fisheries Management" to three different groups. The first workshop was with government officials whose work involves conservation or management of inshore marine and coastal resources. The second workshop was with the legislature (Fono), and the third workshop was with the mayors in the territory. The purpose of the workshops was to present the program to different stakeholders and achieve from them significant recommendations to aid the implementations of the program in American Samoa. The workshops also informed island leaders about the benefits and limitations of co-management of fisheries at the village level.

14. The Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) has assisted American Samoa to set up its Community-based Fisheries Management Program through the service of the Community Fisheries Advisor
15. In addition, SPC has also assisted in conducting the training of our program staff with the assistance of two community facilitators from the Fisheries Division in Samoa. The training included community-based skills that required to carry out a role of the Community Facilitator. In addition, it also covered the formulation of village management plans, problem/solution tree, behavior in meetings, community and government undertakings, program review, and practical exercises. DMWR will train village communities on how to map out, make assessments, and monitor their marine reserves.
16. The culture in American Samoa is similar to that of the Independent State of Samoa with few exceptions on the government system, lifestyles, and economy. With these few differences, the Community-based Fisheries Management Program established in American Samoa is slightly different with the concepts outlined for its extension process.
17. The program is currently running in 3 of the 6 target villages for FY01. The first village for the program is working on a draft for their management plan with the assistance from DMWR. The second village is still waiting for a date to have group meetings to identify the problems and solutions. However, both villages have already identified the areas to be zoned as “no-take” marine reserves. These marine reserves will be “no take” until seasonal fishing on the akule (big eye scads) and I’a sina (goatfish). Fishing on these marine species is known to be a tradition in the Samoan culture. Samoans use traditional fishing methods specialized for these marine species during the season. It has become a customary activity for the local people to set rules and regulations in their villages to carefully fish for these species. DMWR has just recently met with the third village who has accepted the program.
18. A two day workshops will be held later this year to inform the communities in Tutuila and Manu’a about the purpose and significance of the program. These public workshops will aid the community to understand and learn more about the program and to obtain views and updates from the participating villages. In this manner, DMWR will obtain more information upon which to plan and improve the research, specific to the fisheries issues, and increase stakeholders’ participation and consultation in regards to DMWR marine resources research and management.
19. The Community-based Fisheries Management Program in American Samoa will increase conservation awareness in government, community, and the private sectors. It will aid in recovering the reefs and improving fish catch. In addition, the program allow the community to keep a close watch on the marine resources and their condition, and address management needs so that the resources will continue to be healthy and productive.

Figure 1: Summary of the Extension Process for the Community-based Fisheries Management Program in American Samoa.

