

# Community-based management and conservation

## Community-based marine resource management in Fiji: The challenges

By Aliti Vunisea, SPC Community Fisheries Officer

Community-based marine resource management — argued by researchers, writers and community workers as the best approach to modern fisheries management practices — is a more regularised and organised version of traditional management practices that have been widely used in Fiji and other Pacific Island countries for generations.

Community-based management promotes maximum community participation, and the inclusion of all sectors of a community (including both men and women). This approach faces the challenge of relying on community cooperation (or existence) within a semi-capitalistic, primarily individualistic, lifestyle. Community management work in Fiji over the last six to seven years has enjoyed varying degrees of successes depending on the location, implementing agencies, and the initial contact made at the community level. Recently, a network of people involved in community-based fisheries management has managed to establish contacts and networks with government departments, NGOs, conservation agencies and individuals. The FLMMA (Fiji Locally Managed Marine Areas) have firmly established their initiatives, forming partnerships with communities and other organisations. FLMMA is also using pilot management areas and those involved in these projects to facilitate continuing community management work. The Fiji Fisheries Division, with assistance from SPC's Community Fisheries Section, has also established their own programme, which will make community-based fisheries management a government initiative. The vulnerability of coastal resources and the need for awareness-raising and management proposals has prompted this initiative. Like other established initiatives, the fundamental concept is to mobilise resource owners or communities to take over resource management responsibilities.

Traditional community-based controls and check systems on resource use may not have been intentional management measures, but they served to either directly or indirectly manage resource use. These controls included periodic closures due to the death of those of chiefly birth, seasonal closures on fishing grounds or on certain species, taboos on eating totem fishes, declared sacred fishing areas, ritualised fishing and associated activities, which

on numerous occasions, eased pressure on fishing for certain periods of time. There are also legends of turtle and eel calling in certain areas of Fiji. Such management practices were similar to those known and practised in most other Pacific Island countries, varying only in form and implementation. In most instances, these control systems were not direct fisheries management practices but were part of a wider community mechanism on the use of a diverse range of resources. In most cases there was no exact distinction between the land and the sea, as these were seen as integral parts of each other; thus, regulated use applied to all resources that were encompassed under the word '*vanua*' (which means the land, the sea, and all the resources and people).

These traditional practices have, over time, gradually been affected by modern thinking, Christian beliefs and other such factors, but the 'institution' and its associated leadership structures, protocol, respect and beliefs still exist. Community mobilisation is, in most cases, already built into people's daily work schedule and routine. Traditional roles and resource use systems within these communities are still well defined, but like any other system, these roles are undergoing change and their usefulness and relevance are being questioned.

The modern approach to community-based management, which people will need to adapt to, is working with outside 'intervention' and adapting to new leadership and learning modes. Village leaders must deal with distributing money, working out monetary compensation and organising people's time to balance both traditional lifestyle needs and modern demands and requirements.

Complicating all this, is the gradual change in leadership structures and community dynamics, a result of rural-urban migration, urbanisation, western oriented education and global networking and telecommunications. Therefore, common at the community level are changing eating preferences, the exploitation of new fisheries and arrangements for such ventures infiltrating traditional village settings, and employment both by men and women outside the village, and many other such new challenges.

People in rural areas and villages still perform specific traditional functions within their community, but many of these have been adapted to modern lifestyles and new forms of socialisation.

The current community-based resource management approach primarily utilises participatory learning activities (PLA). These tools are well known and widely used around the world for information gathering and for mobilizing people to participate in development and management initiatives. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs), ministries and conservation agencies involved in community-based work in Fiji utilise a wide range of PLA tools. The success of community-based initiatives are due in part to these PLA activities as these allow for a wider interaction with communities, the participation of all sectors of the community, and provides forums for discussions, debates and questioning without any social or traditional restrictions.

Discussions on gender, ethnic and culturally sensitive issues that may have not been possible in the past are easier dealt with through current community participatory learning processes. In spite of these, there remain major areas that need to be addressed before meaningful participation can happen.

The following are questions that remain unanswered, or areas that remain to be explored further:

- The dual mode of ownership and understanding of resource use or access has been an accepted operational fact. Will change in ownership of the *I qoliqoli* systems upset the current equilibrium?
- Changing administrative and leadership structures. How will the re-structuring of the Fijian Affairs Board affect the modern needs and aspirations of the Fijian people?
- Should women be considered participants or partners in fisheries management?
- More networking among the various sectors involved in community-based management work.
- Continuity of projects.
- Indicators of success.

### 1. Change in ownership of the *I qoliqoli* systems

Marine tenure in Fiji is, in the majority of cases, well defined and registered. Customary understandings on marine resource use allow for access to and ownership of fishing grounds and rights to all foreshore and shore areas up to the outer reef (*kanakana* and *I qoliqoli*). *Kanakana* is the subsistence fishing area, which usually refers to the immediate shore area adjacent to a village and includes all mangroves, mudflats, sandflats, lagoons and reefs. *I qoliqoli* refers to the total fishing area, including the areas beyond the *kanakana*.

Legal access allows customary owners proprietary fishing rights over their *I qoliqoli* while the state has ownership rights of waters up to the high-water mark. Thus, there exists dual ownership and understanding of resource use. Customary owners in both instances still have significant rights over their coastal areas, so that any marine resource management initiative must involve the community. This dual ownership is at times a source of conflict and concern for customary owners. There are 410 *I qoliqoli* areas in Fiji, more than 200 of which have been surveyed and registered by the Native Lands and Fisheries Commission. Most of those that have not been registered are rivers and creeks.

Ownership or user rights of *I qoliqoli* areas are at a higher level than the *yavusa* or *vanua* (land). Therefore the *liuliu ni yavusa*, or chief of a *yavusa* has ownership rights. Unlike land tenure in Fiji, which is *mataqali* or clan owned, demarcation of specific *I qoliqoli* areas has always been disputed. In many cases the communal ownership of the *I qoliqoli* is complex. Sometimes the paramount chief who has the *I qoliqoli* ownership can sign fishing licenses or make agreements with coral harvesters or other outside investors, for example, without the knowledge of the several villages and districts under his or her jurisdiction.

The current government has stated in its blueprint the need to return full ownership rights to customary owners of the *I qoliqoli*. This, however, prompts several questions:

- How will this be specifically drawn if the argument in traditional ownership is where land ownership extends to foreshore areas? Will ownership be along *mataqali*, or clan lines, as in land ownership?
- If this is adopted, will this effectively leave people without any land adjacent to bodies of water or foreshores?
- What will be the future of the *I kanakana* and *I qoliqoli* arrangements for subsistence fishing areas, if these are demarcated and specifically owned? Where will communal ownership fall?
- How will these changes in ownership affect community-based management initiatives, where consent may depend on one clan as opposed to the *yavusa* as is the case now?
- If ownership remains with the *yavusa*, and *liuliu ni yavusa* as is the case now, does ownership mean the right to negotiate for and deal with investors for all members or sub-groups of such a large amalgamation of clans or villages?

Ownership can also mean total control over development in coastal areas, which may be an advantage for management and detrimental if development becomes the focus of the *yavusa* with ownership rights. It will also mean more responsibility on

the part of *I qoliqoli* owners to look after their resources. The question of ownership and access by all community members as highlighted above can only be solved at the initial stages of the attempt to revert ownership to traditional owners and this will need the goodwill and support of all the parties concerned before any finalisation of demarcated grounds and ownership status.

## **2. Changing administrative and leadership structures**

In addition to the complexity surrounding ownership and user rights, there is also a dual administrative or control system for the people. The government administrative system and the traditional system both come into play when working with people in communities. This is important because any work in communities still uses both systems. In the village for example there is a village headman who is the administrative head or village headman.

The headman may have no high traditional positions. The village traditional head or *liulu ni yavusa* is different from the village headman or *turaga ni koro*. The village headman then liaises or works with the traditional leaders in projects. Their roles are mostly administrative and they are contact persons for government or other external contacts or developments.

A review of the Fijian Affairs Board is currently being undertaken. The question is whether the restructure will take into account the aspirations of all Fijians, including urban-based Fijians. This is important for many resource owners with decision-making powers now reside away from their communities. Thus, there remains a sort of remote control over resources and the people using them. People living away from home may also have very different views of how resources should be used, developed or managed as they have different lifestyles and aspirations. The models above depict a simple process that people should be able to work with, but in some situations, elders or leaders in communities have migrated to urban areas and there is a new leadership at the community level. The challenge, therefore, is how the restructuring of the Fijian Affairs Board will take into account these changes, and how best they plan communities' future direction and linkages to the modern administration.

## **3. Should women be considered as participants or partners in fisheries management?**

Women play a major role in most community-based work in Fiji, and every attempt has been made by NGOs, ministries and conservation agencies to include women. Yet women are still expected to pre-

pare and cater food for the very workshops and training activities they are attending. So, women must both attend meetings and workshops, and cater these affairs. The challenge then is for women to be *partners*, not just participants, in the decision-making, planning, monitoring and evaluation process. Some NGOs, such as the Women in Fisheries Network, specifically target women. The question, however, is whether these activities should continue to target only women or, should women's development come under a community approach to fisheries management? To do so would require that all hindrances and social restrictions that may deter full partnership in such activities be identified and addressed.

## **4. More networking among the various sectors involved in community-based management work**

In spite of all the progress made in community-based management in Fiji, there remains considerable room for linking different ministries, and NGOs and other sectors. Coastal resource management involves not only the shoreline, but all activities within watershed areas, the upper reaches of rivers and farming areas. Factors affecting coastal fisheries are varied and inter-linked, and attempts to address them should likewise be inter-connected. These activities directly or indirectly affect any resource management work. Management initiatives should include the departments of forestry and agriculture, tourism and health, and take into account the Agriculture, Land and Tenant Agreement. Such connections will help keep various interested groups informed of each others' activities, and enable collaboration on community-based work. Increased networking among the various sectors will enhance the fisheries management work that has already started.

## **5. Continuity of community-based projects**

A question that has haunted developers and managers in the past has been how projects can continue and be maintained long after the initiators, donors, specialists or experts leave. Monitoring and evaluation are essential for the success of a project. What happens three years after the 'outside' partner of a management project pulls out? Does the partner need to periodically visit the project throughout the following years to check the progress? This might be possible if only 20 marine reserves or taboo areas are considered. If, however, there are 200 or more *I qoliqoli* areas, then there must be a huge financial and human resource back-up system to continue the project. NGOs can play a crucial role in keeping the necessary groups informed and in touch with one another. The government could also consider building these management systems into the current restructuring of the Fijian Affairs Board, as this can

provide for a permanent mechanism of continuity for the people.

## 6. Indicators of success

There are numerous examples of success in Fiji Islands and most of these have been on biological measures, with little socioeconomic indicators. Complementary social indicators of success should also be drawn up where those people specifically identified as being dependent solely on marine resources within their *I qoliqoli* areas for the economic and social livelihoods, can be continuously surveyed over certain periods of time to ascertain change in lifestyle, social attainment, educational attainment and other such social and economic indicators. This should be divorced from other collective factors that can contribute to general social improvement at the village level. This will involve rigorous research, study and data collection but should be instrumental in establishing needed factors to gauge success of projects. Most importantly, this should involve communities doing their own research or being part of the assessment process.

Fiji Islands has come a long way with regards to community-based marine resource management, but it has a long way still to go. The above stated challenges reflect questions that continuously plague people at all levels about the relevance and success of these initiatives. FLMMA continue their work with vigour and enthusiasm after the success in the pilot areas of study, the Fiji Fisheries Division's recently introduced community-based fisheries management project will also be pursued with enthusiasm. These challenges remain and need to be answered and addressed in the near future.



## Community valued in Pacific conservation

By Scott Radway, *Pacific Islands Report*, 28 June 2002

Simpson Abraham remembers bringing a new land-use plan to the people of Kosrae at a community meeting, and how his own uncle told him the plan was no good.

'My uncle stood up in the back and said, "To hell with that report. I will never, never support it," said Abraham, Director of the Kosrae Resource Management Program. 'He thought we were taking over rights to his land.'

Abraham told that story yesterday at a workshop at the annual Pacific Islands Environmental Conference.

The people of Kosrae — an island state in the Federated States of Micronesia — rejected the land-use plan because no one had consulted them, he said. Officials just showed up one day with the finished copy of the plan, he said.

Abraham was part of a panel of regional leaders who discussed the need to engage the community if any environmental program is going to work.

Pacific Islanders, especially in more traditional areas, do not respond to outsiders dictating what should be done with their land and reefs. There is a great strength in working through traditional leaders and employing traditional practices that have successfully maintained the environment for

thousands of years, said Noah Idechong, a Palauan delegate.

Idechong said many Palauans were dispirited in the 1980s because fish stocks were being severely harmed by poor fishing practices. Idechong turned to grass-roots leaders and worked with village chiefs to temporarily ban fishing in certain areas, as was often done long ago to preserve resources.

That action later led states to establish official marine protection areas and Idechong is now working at a national level to establish a united system of preserves. Idechong, who has won several prestigious national awards for his work, said that by building from the village up, the effort was successful.

If the national government had decreed marine preserves from the beginning, villagers would never have enforced them.

Alan Freidlander, from the Oceanic Institute in Hawai'i, said the state has had greater success protecting coral reefs and fish stocks in areas where traditional culture survived. Traditionally, people have had a stronger connection with the land and sea. Freidlander cited the deterioration of culture in Hawai'i as a reason for reef degradation.

Guam officials, too, said fighting coral reef degradation has been harder because of a dilution of tra-