

A new idea for coastal fisheries:

asking the right questions to enhance coastal livelihoods



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A new idea for coastal fisheries: asking the right questions to enhance coastal livelihoods

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Preface

The content of this document is based on “How can we support communities to build on what they have for a better life? Supplementary livelihoods in the Pacific”, which was published as a Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific International (FSPi) report in 2011. The project was supported by the Secretariat for the Regional Environment Program (SPREP) with funds from the Coral Reef Initiative for the South Pacific (CRISP).

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“Is this a good idea?”

The meeting started at nine o'clock. The sun scorched the church hall where we convened. The coconut trees rustled in the warm sea breeze. Several young children were playing on the jetty in front of the village. Having done their morning chores, the women of the association came in one by one. A pile of flip-flops started to form in front of the doorway. We all sat on the rough wooden floor planks and waited. A few looks and nods, chords on a guitar, then all the women started singing. Their songs and cheers filled the church. Timidly, Elizabeth, the chair of the women's association stood up to say a prayer, and to welcome us in the community. Then Margaret stood up to explain the purpose of our visit. As an experienced community organiser, she skilfully translated the words livelihoods, diversification and participation. “We want to hear your ideas on how your group can find more money and food by using the sea.” It prompted a lively and long discussion. One woman, Edlyn, explained how they sold baked fish to the weekly passenger ship. But Christina shook her head: “Last week, the ship did not come and all the fish was wasted.” The women around her nodded in

agreement: “Yes, our problem is that we can't keep the fish fresh.” Margaret then probed: “How do you think you can solve that problem?” We had been speaking pijin, but now all the women continued in their own language. The room was suddenly full of talk and laughter. Coffee was brought in, and a baby was passed from one to another. After half an hour, Elizabeth stood up: “We are thinking of buying a solar freezer to earn money for the group,” she said, “but do you think this is a good idea?” Suddenly, the room was quiet, and 35 pairs of eyes turned to us. The heat was pressing. A solar freezer? We hadn't expected this suggestion. Was it a good idea to invest in technology? Who would maintain the freezer? Would it be financially viable? Would it not aggravate the exploitation of marine resources? How would the money be divided? And was there actually enough demand for fish and other frozen goods in the village? We could think of many reasons why such a project would fail. But the women seemed determined. We looked at each other: how to answer this question? Is this a good idea? Margaret said calmly, “Well, let's think it through together.”

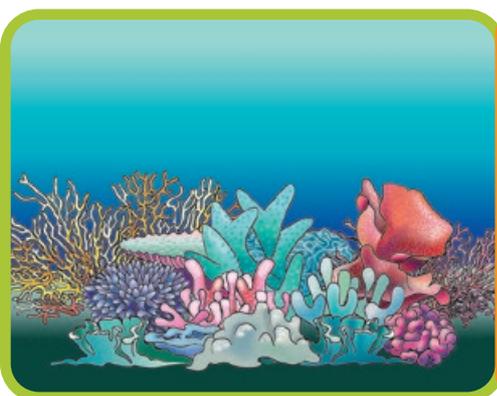




Livelihood diversification is actively promoted in fisheries policy. For example, “*A new song for coastal fisheries – pathways to change: The Noumea Strategy*” describes how alternative sources of income may need to be explored by coastal communities as the state of marine resources becomes increasingly uncertain. Fisheries departments continue to seek better ways to diversify rural livelihoods as a mechanism to break natural resource dependence and improve incomes and food security. This has resulted in many externally designed interventions. However, livelihood diversification projects that are not attuned to community capacity, local contexts, aspirations and opportunities are unlikely to succeed. This highlights the need for a participatory approach: by better incorporating the ideas, needs and problems of people in the village, more appropriate and realistic development innovations can be identified. But translating participatory approaches to something practical has remained a challenge: systematically, critically and rapidly assessing the potential risks, benefits and equitability of an innovation is notoriously difficult.

This “New Idea” tool is for guiding conversations about a new livelihood activity and helping to answer the question “Is this a good idea?” In any new endeavour – especially those that are championed by community members – there is an optimistic tendency to underestimate the potential risks and obstacles to success. This tool seeks to support extension officers and community organisers to ensure that all relevant aspects of a proposed livelihood innovation are considered. It provides a structured process and guiding questions to assess the viability of a proposed activity within five broad domains: natural resources, equipment, skills, markets and finances.

The tool¹ was developed in 2011 and has been tested in Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste. Using these experiences, we updated its content with a specific emphasis on considering the roles of women and men in livelihood projects. We found that using the “New Idea” guidelines helps clarify roles and balance expectations in the process of evaluating ideas. For example, two community groups in Timor-Leste were keen on developing tourism homestays and a fish restaurant and this tool helped clarify that each activity required more effort and investment than was first imagined. In Solomon Islands, it helped to highlight the technological vulnerability of the idea of solar freezers. Identifying these issues together has helped participants think more realistically around the question “Is this a good idea?”



1 Govan, H. 2011. How can we support communities to build on what they have for a better life? Supplementary livelihoods in the Pacific. FSPI Reports, Suva, Fiji. Available at <http://bit.ly/1fx84Nt>.



What are sustainable livelihoods?

In this document, the word livelihood means how we make our living and make sure our lives run well. This may include earning a better income or producing more or different foods. A sustainable livelihood is one that you can continue into the future. It also means being aware of the roles of women and men in livelihood activities. New livelihood ideas are more likely to be sustainable if they build on the strengths of people.

Components of sustainable livelihoods

This guide contains six sheets to enable you to assess the viability of livelihood ideas, according to the following categories:

	Natural resources include lands, plants, fresh-water sources, animals and minerals. In the sea this includes mangroves, sea grass, coral, fish, marine animals, sand and gravel, clean sea water, currents, etc. These resources are often closely connected. What happens on land can affect the sea; what happens to one animal or plant in the sea can affect other plants and animals and also people.
	Equipment includes things like agricultural tools, fishing gear, buildings needed for processing, storage, or selling, transportation such as boats, trucks or planes, which depend on roads, wharves, or air fields. Other important equipment can be phone, radio, internet, water supply, sanitation, fuel such as firewood or diesel and electricity.
	People and skills required to implement and sustain a livelihood can sometimes be found within a community, and sometimes you will need to learn new things. These ventures may be run by individual people, groups, families, tribes or the whole community but in all cases it will be very important how other people support the idea and whether it is felt to be appropriate to the local culture.
	Markets are more than just a place to sell something: markets are also places where things are bought and sold (such as a market place, shops, passing ships, visitors or the internet) but also how things are traded (transport, rules and laws, taxes) and information (on prices or competition) or credits and loans.
	Finances may need to be considered for starting and running your idea and often a good understanding of some key issues regarding money is essential. You should consider the costs to get started (such as equipment and training), as well as ongoing running costs the business has to pay regularly (wages, fuel, materials).
	Information related to your livelihood idea such as a technical advice or training, start-up equipment, experiences and lessons learned may need to be sourced from outside the village. Government or provincial government agencies can be a source of information and support, as well as private businesses, non-governmental organisations, community and social groups.

At the end of the guide, you will summarise your assessment for each of the guidance sheets to help get an overview of the challenges and opportunities that you have identified.

Using this guide

This guide is meant to:	This document is NOT meant to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• help leaders, staff and community members to ask the right questions relating to livelihoods;• be used by individuals or groups to explore new ideas;• be used to assess or compare ideas that have already been identified;• take about 3 hours to complete.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✗ serve as a list or menu from which to choose livelihoods;✗ raise expectations of more external assistance;✗ replace more complete assessments or participatory planning;✗ depend on a community facilitator.

Identifying the livelihood idea you wish to test

1 Brainstorm a list of potential ideas. Remember that these can include new ideas or ideas to improve existing practices. Select one of these to assess.

Please write the selected livelihood that you have chosen to assess:

2 Develop a desired objective of the idea of the livelihood. This could be to:

- improve or secure food production such as wild harvest, cultivation, water supply or land management;
- reduce how much you are affected by natural disasters, seasonal changes or changing market prices;
- generate cash or, just as importantly, reduce expenses.

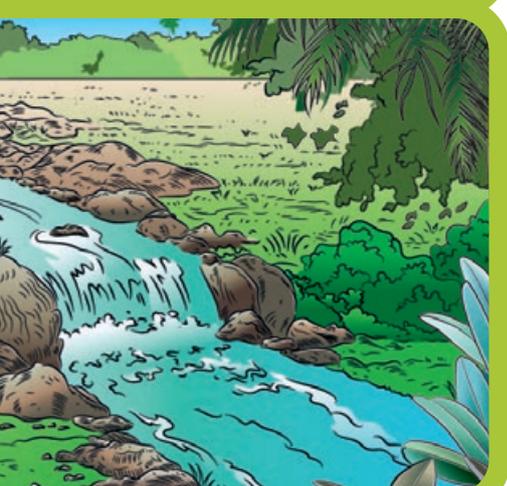
Please write the desired objective of the livelihood:

3 Determine who will run and manage the livelihood: is this an idea for an individual, family, group or community?



Natural resources

On the land natural resources can include plants, fresh-water sources, animals and minerals. In the sea natural resources can include mangroves, seagrass, coral, fish, marine animals, sand and gravel, or clean sea water.



1a What natural resources does the livelihood idea need or rely on and how much will be available?

- Where will activities happen (e.g. farm land, mangroves, deep sea, shallow sea, reef)?
- What must this place be like (e.g. fertile, access to fresh water, cleared land, weak currents)?
- What plants and animals will be directly used or affected by the livelihood idea and how many/much are available?

1b How are these natural resources already being used, and how will your use affect them in the future?

- Who is already using these resources and how are they being used?
- Do men, women or other groups have different uses for these resources?
- Who makes decisions about these resources?
- Will your use of resources affect other people?
- Do people feel that these resources are healthy, improving or getting worse?
- Are you sure that using this resource will not damage it or reduce your chances to use it in the future?
- Is there a possibility that other resource uses or users could affect the resources you are interested in (e.g. logging, mud covering the reef)?
- Do you have permission or authority to use these resources now and in future?

1c How can you work with these resources in the future without spoiling or finishing the resource?

- Will your use affect other resources (plants, animals or places)?
- Are steps being taken to manage the resource use wisely (e.g. management plans, conservation areas, traditional tabus). If not can you take these steps?
- How will you know how much of the resources you can use?
- How will you be able to tell if the resource is being badly affected?

Natural resources

Write down your answers for each of the questions

Sheet 1



1a

1b

(please also
note any
problems
you have
identified)

1c





Equipment

Equipment includes the man-made things such as tools, canoes, boats, trucks and buildings. It can also include communications (phone, radio, internet), water supply, sanitation, fuel such as firewood or diesel, electricity or market stalls.

2a What equipment do you need?

- What equipment do you need (e.g. tools, transportation, storage shed)?
- Do you know all the equipment that may be required and if not, who you can ask or check with?
- Are there local or traditional tools or structures you could use instead?

2b How can you access and maintain the equipment in the future?

- Will you be able to access and use the required equipment?
- What equipment or buildings are available to you or your community already?
- Will you have the money and skills to maintain or replace old and broken equipment and structures, and if not, who will?
- Will providing the equipment or buildings cause damage to natural resources or the community?

2c How can you make sure you will always have the equipment you need?

- Will you be able to get permission to use local equipment and buildings now and in the future?
- Do you know where to obtain the things not available locally?
- What are the prices of these things?
- How can you make sure using your equipment or structures will not be harmful to people or the environment?



Equipment

Write down your answers for each of the questions



2a

2b

(please also
note any
problems
you have
identified)

2c

(please
note plans
AND costs
for getting,
maintaining
and replacing
equipment
and structures
- one-off costs
or yearly)





People and skills

This refers to the availability of individual people, groups, families, tribes or the whole community, and if the required skills and knowledge can be found within or outside the community. This also includes ensuring activities are culturally appropriate.

3a What people and skills are required for this livelihood, and how much time would each person need to work?

- Will this livelihood be undertaken individually? If so, what skills do you need?
- Will this livelihood be undertaken as a group or family? If so, what people are needed to carry out the livelihood?
- Will the jobs of men and women in this livelihood differ?
- What sort of skills would each person need?
- How much time would each person need to work?
- What compensation, salary or other things would each person need?
- Are you certain these people will always be available or replaceable?
- Are women and youth able to participate, and do they have the time available?
- What might cause people to lose interest and how could this be avoided?

3b How will you ensure you have the people, skills and permissions you need to manage the livelihood?

- Do you have the skills required or are the skills available locally? If not, how would you get these skills?
- Have you got or can you get basic financial, accounting or budgeting skills?
- Will you need to pay for training or can skills be acquired in cheaper ways?
- How can you avoid relying on just a few people that have key skills?
- Who will make decisions and how will they be made? Who will watch progress?
- Will there be any special involvement of church, women and youth?
- Have you got community members' and leaders' support and permission?



3c What steps will need to be taken to ensure the livelihood is sustainable in the future?

- How will people's feelings or support change when benefits start flowing?
- How can you ensure that continued community support and conflicts are avoided?
- Will neighbouring areas be affected and can harm be reduced?
- Do people understand that for a business to work some of the income has to be put back into running the business?
- How will requests for loans or free products or benefits be handled?
- Could the livelihood damage community or culture? Will it affect other people?



3a

3b

(please also
note any
problems
you have
identified)

3c





Markets

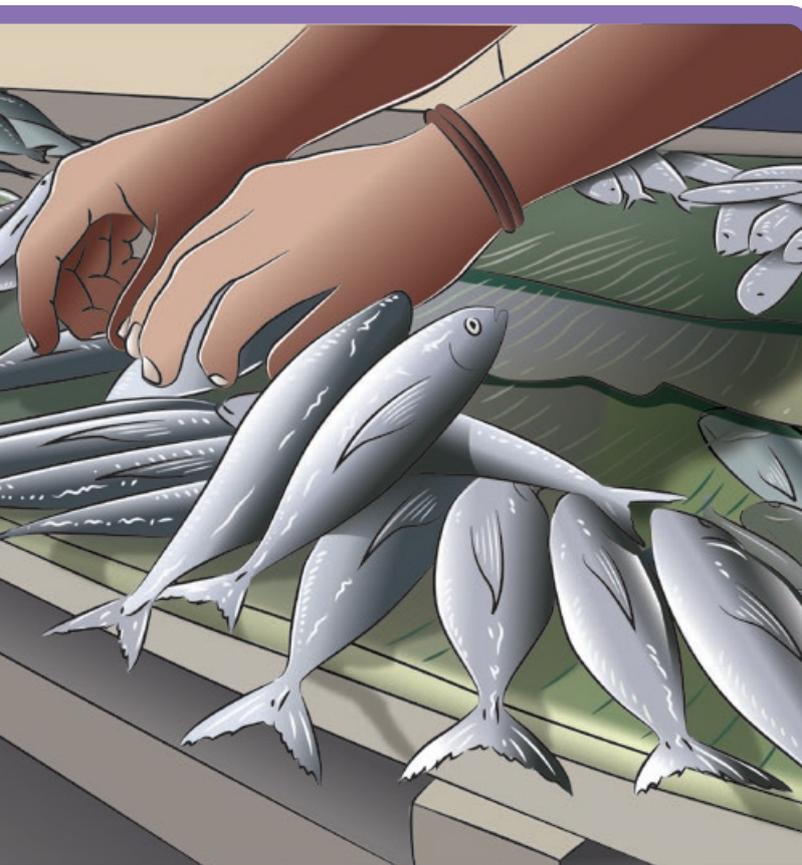
This includes where things are bought and sold (such as market places, shops, passing ships, visitors, internet) but also how things are traded (transport, rules and laws, taxes) and information (on prices or competition) or credit and loans.

4a What is the market for your livelihood product?

- Who wants to buy the product you want to sell?
- Where are the markets or the people you want to supply?
- How much of the product do they want?
- What are the prices that you may be offered and how can you check these?
- Do the prices vary, by how much and why?
- Will the buyer or market offer any help?
- Will the jobs of men and women related to markets differ (e.g. preparation, transport, sale)?

4b What transport, handling, packaging or other help do you need?

- Are there many other people selling the product? Is this good or bad?
- What is the cost of transport and is it reliable enough?
- Can you meet the quality requirements?
- Can you produce or handle the right amounts for market demand?
- Do you need packaging or advertising? What will it cost?
- Do you need to go through another person, middleman or company?
- What laws, regulations, permits, standards or rules may apply?
- Do you need any other service or support? What will it cost?
- Are there any things that could change and affect costs or prices?



4c How can you work to improve or reduce costs of marketing and transport and is any further information needed?

- In what ways can you compete with others?
- Can you add value by processing or packaging so you can charge more?
- Is it possible to cooperate with other producers for transport or marketing?
- What are ways of reducing costs of transport?
- Can you reduce time and money costs of marketing?
- How can you handle changes in price, cost or market demand?
- Can you reduce reliance on just one buyer or transporter?



Finances

This includes start-up costs (the costs the business has to pay to get started, such as equipment or one-off training) and running costs (the ongoing costs the business has to pay, such as wages, fuel or materials).

5a What are the likely start-up and running costs?

- What building, equipment or tools will you need to buy?
- Will you need to pay for any labour, training or advice?
- Will you need to buy stock, seed, food, petrol etc.?
- Will any of these costs need to be repeated soon? Are they regular running costs?

5b How can you find enough money to start?

- Will you be able to meet all or part of the start-up costs?
- Do you have any savings, wages or income you can use?
- Who has a say in deciding what to invest in?
- How does your family, tribe or village raise money? Can you use any of these ways?
- Can you get a loan from friends, relatives or bank? Could you pay them back, and what is the interest?
- Grants are rare but are there any you can ask for? If so, what proportion of your costs could you yourself cover?
- If you receive a grant, how will you fund your business when it runs out?
- What are the reporting requirements of the grant?

5c What are the possible ways to ensure a financially sustainable business?



- Do the running costs look too high compared with likely income?
- Are you able to reduce start-up or running costs by other means?
- How will you make sure that money received is used on repayments and running costs before family or other social obligations?
- Will the profit be enough to compensate for the time spent on the venture?
- Will there be other benefits (maybe social or community benefits) of the business and how can you take this into account?
- Will the business provide income or profits soon enough?
- How will the profits be shared and used?
- Are there government charges, fees or taxes that you will need to pay?



5a

Note the cash and other materials you may need for start-up and note the likely running costs.

5b

(please also note any problems you have identified)

5c





Livelihoods assessment

Complete the table that summarises the assessment that you have done on each of sheets 1 to 5.

Working through these sheets, you or your group should now have a clearer idea of what might be some of the benefits or problems of the livelihood idea. The following table can be used to list some of the main issues relating to the idea you considered. The questions in the boxes relate to the questions on the previous sheets.

The final column gives you a chance to score the idea as good = promising, bad = with serious problems, or in need of more information.

	What are the strong points?	What are the potential problems or needs?	Can these be solved? If so, how?	Potentially good=  Potentially bad =  Need Information = ? 
 1a	1a	1b	1c	
 2a	2a	2b	2c	
 3a	3a	3b	3c	
 4a	4a	4b	4c	
 5a	5a	5b	5c	



Information

This includes technical advice or training, startup equipment experiences and lessons learned

You or your group should now be able to make a decision about whether this livelihood idea is worth pursuing. If any of the rows have a cross X, it means that there are big problems that will be hard to solve for that aspect. In this case the livelihood idea probably should not be put into action. If you have assessed your livelihood idea and it appears to be viable, or you have question marks in your table, the next step would be to seek further information.

7a What information do you need?

Examples are:

- information on market prices and outlets
- information on equipment, techniques and methods
- information on managing businesses, money and labour salaries
- information on managing or replenishing natural or other resources
- information on laws, rules or regulations, your rights and obligations
- information on transport schedules, boats, roads, air flights.

7b Where can you get the different information?

This list is a general guide, and it often pays to seek advice or support from different places to compare and make sure that the advice or information is correct. Examples:

Information needed	Where can you get it?
Market prices Advice on techniques or methods Equipment and materials	Buyers, exporters, extension departments of government ministries, cooperatives, NGOs, universities, chambers of commerce, producers associations, hardware stores
Possible impact of venture on environment or community	Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Fisheries, community elders, NGOs, universities
Laws, rules or regulations, your rights and obligations	Lawyers, government departments, church, business groups, private companies
Transport schedules, boats, roads, air flights	National or provincial shipping or works department, private shipping or air companies
Financial advice, loans or savings	Banks, mobile banks, cooperatives, microcredit, small or local businesses, NGOs, women's saving groups
Experience, lessons learned, examples	Other villages, associations of villages or chiefs, networks, businesses, friends, wantoks, schools
Other information sources	Schools, community centres, information kiosks, libraries, churches and advice centres

7c Who can access the required information and when?

- Who will access this information? Will this require travel?
- Are women and youth able to access this information?
- Can any of the information be gained by sharing or exchanging with other communities or projects?
- Has any of this information been received by community members before?

