

IWRM in Solomon Islands : an achievement story

By Isaac Lekelalu



Exploring innovative options for catchment management



Above: Undertaking the biodiversity of the Kovi/Kongulai catchment

When the IWRM Project started there was no committee or group to organise the development or management of the Kovi/Kongulai Catchment. There was a trusteeship who received money from lease agreements but they did not undertake any works on the ground or develop management strategies. To inspire new thinking on how to manage the catchment and see its ecological value as a potential benefit the IWRM with the communities developed an eco-tourism plan for the Kovi/Kongulai Catchment.

The IWRM Project began to liaise with the community through the two chiefs of Kongulai and Kovi. Through their role as community representatives the chiefs were able to improve the projects understanding of the community's needs and incorporate their traditional knowledge into the project. The chiefs also facilitate community consultations and workshops with the IWRM creating a two-way street of information and understanding.

Mr. Kalisto Ngao was appointed as a casual staff member to operate the hydrological installations in the catchment. His appointment increased community involvement in the project and improved peoples understanding and ownership of the technical aspects of catchment management. Mr Ngao goes out each week to take readings and reports to the IWRM project office. These data are used to monitor the Kovi stream's water level and flow behaviour. During other catchment investigations and assessments, members of the community went out and assisted consultants to undertake biodiversity, water quality and health surveys.

Through their involvement in the surveys, community members gained experience in survey techniques, technical knowledge about their water catchment and how we can impact upon it. Participants in turn provided the project with extensive and essential traditional knowledge about the ecology and biodiversity of the area. People are now starting to understand the value of the natural assets in their area. As Mr. Peter Pukuvati said, "I used to see the insects and everything as creatures of

no value. When I saw the results of the bio-diversity survey I see now that they are integral parts of the environment and are valuable for themselves".

From the assessment of what is actually in the catchment the community has become interested in the idea of an eco-tourism plan as they now recognise the richness of their environment and how this might be interesting to other people. Through partnership with IUCN the project secured funding from the Kiedanrem Nature Conservation Fund of Japan who funded the development of the Kovi/Kongulai eco-tourism plan. Currently tourists can come to the area and pay a local person to be their guide however there is no formal mechanism for this and no management plan, the eco-tourism plan seeks to formalise all these activities so they can be limited and monitored.

"I am currently involved in another association that links culture and the environment from a traditional context and I see this as the next step for our catchment, eco-tourism could be the idea to venture into", said Chief Primo Pukukesa, when asked about the significance of moving toward eco-tourism.

The community and IWRM Project hope this will be an example for other communities to explore options for sustainable financing to take care of their catchments and generate money for their communities. By venturing into eco-tourism the catchment can be preserved and the community will have some incentive to manage and look after their land and water resources.

The eco-tourism plan was completed through local consultation and will now be used to leverage additional funding from other line government ministries and donors to support its implementation. These interventions include camping, bushwalks along the streams, and caves in which was found some early cave paintings. Further works need to be undertaken to identify the cultural value of the area, in particular the newly discovered cave painting and locations of cultural importance for preservation purposes.

Through the development of the plan I have realised the importance of learning from community what their aspirations are for their area and together discovering ways to use the unique biodiversity to the advantage of both the environment and the communities livelihoods.



Right: a local species of mantis recorded through the biodiversity assesment