

The Vanuatu International Waters Project

Using a social marketing approach to strengthen the community management of coastal fisheries

By Steve Menzies and Leah Nimoho



The Crab Bay Community

- Located on Malekula Island
- Consists of eleven villages with a population of over 1,000 people.
- Five different languages.
- Mangrove vegetation, reef flat and a lagoon
- Habitat for many invertebrates including *Cardisoma carnifex* a species of land crab.



What is the problem?

- In Vanuatu 80% of the population lives on the coast and continues to depend largely on subsistence farming and fishing
- Land crab is one of the main sources of protein and cash for local villagers.
- The land crabs are collected daily, mainly by women for family food, with any surplus being sold at the market for cash
- The growing demand for cash and the absence of harvesting controls is resulting in a rapid decline of this key resource.



What is the problem?

- Traditional practices such as the use of “taboo” or “no-go/no take” zones are still used to manage fisheries resources.
- Community chiefs set a “no fishing and no entry” tabu zone in 2002
- The women fishers were not included in this decision-making process
- Tabu rules were not clearly explained to the rest of the community



Objectives of Vanuatu International Waters Project

- Help the community find practical, low-cost, ways to improve the management of coastal fisheries resources.
- Provide a model for other communities facing similar problems
- Inform national policy development
- Partners: Vanuatu Environment Unit, Global Environment Facility, SPREP



A Participatory Process

- 30 local community members trained in the use of participatory processes
- Also trained in the use of ecological and biological baseline and monitoring surveys.
- These community facilitators ran village meetings to create a better understanding and to motivate participation.
- Improved understanding of the coastal fisheries management problems
- Allowed the community to determine their own possible low/cost solutions
- The facilitators became “Champions” and advocates of resource management

Building Understanding

- Ecological baseline survey used GPS technology to define geographical boundaries and record over 50 different species
- Understanding when the crabs reproduce and where they release their eggs could be vital in determining harvesting rules
- The critical size of maturity of land crab was determined as 7cm and this has now enabled better decision-making at the community and national levels.
- Building greater understanding of the importance of mangroves as a habitat could also help to discourage people from cutting large areas for firewood or housing.



“Using a participatory approach has really helped us to try and develop a better understanding of the perceptions, desires, and commitment that our communities have to manage their own resources.”

**Russell Nari
Deputy Director, Vanuatu Environment Unit**

Chief Manoa was of 30 local facilitators who were trained to work together with the rest of the community to develop a better understanding of the root causes of their resource management problems.



A Social Marketing Approach

- The social marketing strategy helped focus on achievable short-term goals and build a solid platform for addressing long-term behaviour change.
- The information generated by the community participation exercises and baseline collection surveys provided a vital starting point for developing appropriate management, evaluation and communications tools.
- Social marketing focused on advocating specific behaviours and tools to promote the sustainable management the land crab resources.



A Social Marketing Approach

- The programme used tools such as the use of “Community Champions”, Community Drama, brochures, signboards, radio etc.
- A 12-minute video documentary on the community pilot project was also produced and screened for the local community and broadcast on national TV.
- The facilitators worked with the Wan Smolbag theatre company to develop a community drama to promote specific actions to manage the land crab resource



What were the results?

- The community established a management plan for land crab resources with a focus on the taboo, size limits, market quotas
- People are now observing taboo rules and poaching has more or less stopped
- Studies show that land crabs are regenerating: from 100 juveniles per hectare in 2003, to 500 per hectare in 2005
- Increased demand to establish seven other 'taboo' areas to reinforce sustainable land crab management
- Women are now part of the local Community Taboo Management Committee
- Project lessons are being used to improve the sustainable management of other fish resources



What were the key lessons?

- Programmes must focus on promoting clear benefits for changing damaging behaviours.
- Must create a sense of ownership and motivate ongoing participation in sustainable management activities
- It is appropriate to start small to demonstrate clear results and influence wider.
- By selecting the land crabs as a “signal” resource, the IWP has paved the way for the Vanuatu Government to address management of other target fisheries resources.
- The community should be encouraged to develop its own communications messages, tools, and “Champions”.

