



Fisheries Management by Communities

A manual on promoting the management
of subsistence fisheries by Pacific Island communities

COMMUNITY FISHERIES SECTION
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Preface

It is impossible for government fisheries agencies to properly manage subsistence fisheries without the involvement of fishing communities. Most agencies have limitations on budgets and staff which make it impossible to constantly work in communities which are spread out in many different villages. But, more importantly, community involvement results in the ownership of fisheries management actions and regulations. Under community ownership, fisheries management measures are enforced by the communities themselves.

This manual is about community-based fisheries management. It provides guidelines and suggestions on how communities can be encouraged to take a leading role in the management of their fisheries and the marine environment. The Samoan model of community-based fisheries management, which is referred to in this manual, has stood the test of time. Over a period of about three years, some of the 60 villages in the programme have fallen by the wayside, but most are now successfully managing their own fisheries resources.

I believe that the model used in Samoa is transportable to other island countries in the Pacific, perhaps with some alterations to suit local conditions and culture. I urge agencies in these countries to consider the benefits of community-based fisheries management, and develop a suitable programme of village participation.

I wish you the best of luck with your endeavours.

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Contents

Acknowledgements	1
1. Introduction	2
2. Subsistence and artisanal fisheries in the Pacific	5
Fisheries	5
Types of coastal ecosystems	5
Estuaries – brackish water and mangroves	6
Beaches and seagrass	7
Coral reefs and lagoons	7
Outer reef slopes and the open sea	9
<i>Foodwebs and relationships between ecosystems</i>	11
Resource species	12
Echinoderms – sea stars, sea cucumbers and sea urchins	12
Molluscs – clams, sea snails and octopuses	12
Crustaceans – lobsters, crabs and prawns	14
Fish	15
Marine algae (seaweed)	18
Fishing gear and methods	19
Reef gleaning	19
Traps	19
Hooks and lines	20
Longlines	21
Trolling and lures	22
Gill nets, tangle nets and barrier nets	23
Seine nets and drive-in netting	24
Cast nets and scoop nets	24
Spears	24
Fish aggregating devices (FADs)	24



Processing and marketing of seafood	25
Seafood quality and handling	26
Preservation of fish	29
Fisheries management	31
3. The importance of subsistence fishing	33
The role of subsistence fishing	33
Traditional culture and the division of labour	33
Nutrition	34
Informal Employment	35
4. Problems with fisheries	37
Lack of information on inshore fisheries	37
Declining fish catches	38
Lack of government support	39
5. Raising community awareness	41
The need for awareness	41
Environmental education in schools	41
<i>Information for teachers – marine environmental studies in high school curricula</i>	43
Radio and television	44
Printed material	45
Direct contact	48
Planning an awareness-raising campaign	48
6. Involving communities in marine resource management	51
Extension work	51
Government attitudes to fisheries management by communities	51
Extension staff skills	52
Extension goal and strategies	54
Extension process	55



1) Assessment of community awareness, concern and willingness to act	57
2) Meeting with community leaders – acceptance or rejection of the programme	57
3) Community Group Meetings (GMs) – problem/solution trees	57
4) The village Fisheries Advisory Committee (FAC)	60
5) Village leaders' meeting to consider the Village Fisheries Management Plan	61
6) The community Fisheries Management Committee (FMC)	61
Ensuring continuing community commitment	62
7. Community-based management measures	65
Community versus national fisheries regulations	65
Community conservation measures	65
Limiting the number of fishers	65
Limiting the efficiency and types of fishing gear	66
Banning destructive fishing	66
Closed areas and seasons	66
Minimum mesh sizes	67
Size limits (minimum legal lengths)	67
Rejection of females, or spawning females	68
Catch quotas	68
Protecting the marine environment	68
Community compliance and enforcement of regulations	69
8. Alternative fishing methods and sources of seafood	71
Supporting community-based fisheries management	71
Village-level aquaculture	71
Fishing for less exploited species, and in less exploited areas	73
References and further reading	75
Glossary of terms	79
Appendix Joint review of Community-Based Management: form	83

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Drawings by Michael King, except where noted in the text.

1. Introduction

This book was written for two reasons. First, there is a concern that catches of seafood in inshore lagoons and reefs are declining in Pacific Islands. Second, there is growing recognition that fishing communities themselves hold the key to preventing this decline.

Fishing and the marine environment have always played an important role in the lifestyle and culture of people in Pacific Island countries. Now, after many years of rapidly changing lifestyles, people are being encouraged to eat more local foods – that is, to eat plants and meat that are traditional and healthy. One of the most traditional and appropriate foods for people living in islands is, of course, seafood. But it is no use encouraging people to eat more seafood if it is becoming increasingly difficult to get and more expensive to buy.

Catches of the most accessible seafood, fish, seaweed and shellfish of the lagoons and reefs, have been declining in several island countries over many years. Reasons for the decline in inshore catches may include overexploitation, the use of overly efficient and destructive fishing methods (including the use of explosives, chemicals and traditional plant-derived poisons), and environmental disturbances. Environmental disturbances have resulted from not only natural events such as cyclones and storms but from human activities.

Even though inshore catches of seafood are decreasing in Pacific Islands, subsistence fishing, the catching of fish to eat rather than to sell, often still results in a total catch that is several times larger than

that from commercial fishing. In spite of the obvious importance of subsistence fishing, government authorities usually concentrate their conservation and fisheries management efforts on commercial fish stocks. Governments may be concerned about falling fish catches in villages, but their ability to do something about the problem is limited. Most fisheries agencies have small numbers of staff and limited budgets. Although most Pacific Islands have enacted national laws to protect fish stocks, enforcing such laws in widespread rural areas and villages is often impossible. It is, at least, impossible without community involvement and support.

Fishing communities are often repositories of valuable traditional knowledge concerning fish stocks and have a high level of awareness of the marine environment. In addition, many villages have some degree of control, either legal or traditionally assumed, of adjacent waters. Together, these factors provide an ideal basis on which communities can be encouraged and motivated to manage their own marine resources.

This manual has been written in response to growing regional interest, from fisheries and environmental agencies as well as non-government organisations, in how to provide this motivation.

- How can villages be encouraged to manage their own fisheries?
- What can be done to support village communities in their efforts to conserve fish stocks and protect their marine environment?
- What particular conservation actions can village communities take?
- What can be done by communities and what must be done by governments?



This manual is based on the following premise.

Regardless of national legislation and enforcement, the responsible management of fisheries resources will only be achieved when fishing communities themselves see it as their responsibility rather than that of the government.

This manual is designed to provide some technical background on fisheries and the marine environment, and to be a guide on promoting and encouraging their management by Pacific Island communities. Such management is said to be community based. The community-based methods presented in this manual are not the only ones possible, and, in any case, must be adapted to a greater or lesser extent to suit local situations, culture and customs. Readers interested in pursuing the subject from a more academic viewpoint are directed to the references provided at the end of the manual.