Social Impacts of Locally Managed Marine Areas on Coastal Communities in Fiji

Patrick Fonga, Giselle Samontetanb and William Aalbersbergc

aInstitute of Applied Science, The University of the South Pacific, O Suva, Fiji
bConservation International, 2011 Crystal Drive, Suite 500, VA 22202 Arlington, United States of America
cInstitute of Applied Sciences, University of the South Pacific, O Suva, Fiji
fong_pa@usp.ac.fj

Locally managed marine protected area has been implemented in most of Fiji’s customary inshore fishing areas in the last decade to address the decline in fish stocks. Despite all this effort, however, there is very limited knowledge on the impacts of these marine reserves on the livelihood of coastal communities; the group directly affected by the implementation of this management approach. Recently, a study was conducted in Fiji to gauge the impacts of these managed areas on the socioeconomic and governance levels of the local people. It also identified the critical socioeconomic and governance determining factors to the achievement of these impacts. Overall, there have been notable positive outcomes of these locally managed marine areas. The resource management through the locally managed approach has created better overall outcomes at present than those of the former system and period. For instance, there is increase in social cohesion amongst the community members and income level has increased. However, there are also challenges such as conflicts and equitable sharing of benefits that need to be addressed. The critical determining key conditions for the achievement of the positive impacts are: political support through the recognition of the rights of the community to make decisions regarding the fishing ground, availability of alternative sources of income, active participation of the community in project coordination and continuous support from outside agencies. Findings from this study can provide the basis for the design of effective marine resource management strategies in Fiji.

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