

Social Assessment

07/05/17

CEPF Grant 66418

Grantee: The Vanuatu Environmental Science Society

Project Title: Strengthening monitoring, community management, and policies for Dugong Conservation in Vanuatu

Project Location: Vanuatu

Grant Summary

1. Grantee organization: The Vanuatu Environmental Science Society
2. Grant title: Strengthening monitoring, community management, and policies for Dugong Conservation in Vanuatu
3. Grant number: 66418
4. Grant amount (US dollars): \$ 92550.00
5. Proposed dates of grant: 01/07/2017 – 30/06/2019
6. Countries or territories where project will be undertaken: Vanuatu
7. Date of preparation of this document: 07/05/17

8. Indigenous People affected:

Vanuatu is a remote island nation in the South Pacific. Land is custom-owned and the majority of the rural population lives a subsistence lifestyle using the natural resources from their land. Most people living in Vanuatu still have a strong connection to the land and nature. The system of chiefly governance is still strong in many communities, although different in different areas. There is a long tradition of natural resource management using such mechanisms as 'tabu' areas. The level of education is poor in many rural areas with only a limited portion of the population achieving more than basic primary school education. This project will be working in the communities located in dugong hotspots in the islands. These are likely to be Efate, Epi, Malakula and Santo.

9. Summary of the proposed project:

In this project the VESS team will work along side the local communities in the dugong hotspot areas to establish a programme of seagrass monitoring within their areas. It is likely that Efate, Epi, Malakula and Santo will be identified as hot spot areas. Seagrass-Watch is a community base monitoring scheme so the communities themselves will be gathering data and reporting it back to VESS. The communities in the hotspot areas will be contacted by VESS staff and asked if they would like to participate in the activities. At the same time as the community workshops to monitor seagrass the VESS team will conduct aerial surveys of the hotspot areas to assess the number of dugongs in the areas. Communities will be encouraged to put measures for conserving dugongs and seagrasses in the management plans for their Community Conservation Areas.

10. Potential impacts:

Monitoring and taking care of seagrass meadows will have benefits for the community. Seagrasses help to mitigate storm damage and tsunamis and along with mangroves assist in capturing sediments and improving water quality which aids the

coral reefs. They are important nursery areas for juvenile fish and looking after them can help to maintain fish stocks. Conservation of the seagrass meadows will not only help the dugong and green sea turtle but other marine organisms that use the habitat such as sea cucumbers and shellfish some of which are utilised by people.

Depending on what conservation measure are put in place, some fishing grounds may be declared tabu or be restricted under the management plans of a Community Conservation Area set up or strengthened under this project to conserve dugongs.

11. Participatory preparation:

Once the dugong hotspot areas have been determined, the VESS team will visit the communities in the Dugong hotspot areas and raise awareness about dugongs and sea grass and the ecosystem service it provides. We will explain what Seagrass-Watch is and invite the communities to join the programme. Vanuatu communities will determine the format of discussions or presentations; if a formal village forum is requested, we will make a presentation to the community or village. However, often information is disseminated in an informal household setting. We will use English or Bislama as preferred by communities allowing ample time for questions after any presentation. Communities who would like to participate will be asked to give their prior informed consent prior to starting any activities. They will be asked if they will be willing to allow research on the seagrass beds and dugongs in their areas and if so to give written consent.

12. Mitigation strategies:

If any members of a community would like to create a new CCA the protocols set out in the CCA handbook by the Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation will be followed. All sections of society within the community will be consulted before any recommendations are made about new conservation areas, or new management actions. Fishing will only be restricted in the areas if there are alternative fishing areas or alternative target fish available.

13. Monitoring and evaluation:

The safeguards will be reviewed at least every six months throughout the project to ensure the mitigation measures are sufficient to guard against adverse effects and to identify any unforeseen detrimental impacts of the project. This review will be reported to the CEPF every six months.

14. Grievance mechanism:

Indigenous Peoples and other local communities and stakeholders may raise a grievance at any time with VESS or CEPF about any issues relating to the project. During meetings with the communities at the beginning of the project community members will be informed about this possibility and contact information will be provided for the VESS managers, the CEPF RIT and the CEPF secretariat. VESS will respond to grievances in writing and inform the CEPF and RIT in writing within 15 working days of receipt. Claims will be filed, included in project monitoring, and a copy of any grievance will be provided to the CEPF Secretariat.