

Social Assessment

March 14, 2018

CEPF Grant 103948

Wildlife Conservation Society

Protecting the Upland Forests of Kolombangara

Kolombangara Islands, Solomon Islands

Grant Summary

1. Wildlife Conservation Society
2. Protecting the Upland Forests of Kolombangara
3. CEPF-103948
4. \$187,244.82
5. Start date: 6/1/2018. End date: 5/31/2020
6. Solomon Islands
7. Date of preparation of this document: 3/14/2018

8. Indigenous People affected:

The indigenous peoples of Kolombangara are broadly known as the Dughore people. There are at least five major tribal groups and a number of sub-tribes, with a total population of over 6,000 people. There is a complex history of land alienation and use around the island; around three quarters of the island was alienated by the British colonial government. This land is managed as a Fixed Term Estate by Kolombangara Forest Products Ltd (KFPL), an FSC-certified timber company that is a joint venture between the Solomon Islands Government and Nien Made Enterprise, a Taiwanese company. The remainder of the island, where this proposal is situated, is held under customary tenure at the tribal level. Most residents live in communities of between 100 and 500 people, and land below 400 m is managed by landowners to support local livelihoods. This land is a mosaic of different uses and provides a variety of ecosystem services, including: food provision from gardens and wild crops; provision of building materials such as sago palm for thatch; provision of essential drinking water and, in some cases, hydro power; and income generation from market gardening, small timber plantations (particularly of teak and eucalyptus) and a variety of other sources. Above 400 m, primary forest is intact. Key uses of this area include the harvesting of medicinal and other useful plants, pig hunting (in some areas, though the Seventh Day Adventist church, which forbids eating pork, is the major denomination in many areas), and tourism for a small number of operators. There is a rich cultural history on the island, and there are many tambu (sacred) sites above and below 400 m.

9. Summary of the proposed project:

This project will seek consent from landowning communities and tribes to designate a National Park on approximately 6968 hectares of land under customary title above 400 m on Kolombangara Island under the Solomon Islands Protected Areas Act. Such a statutory designation would ban logging and mining activities within the Park boundaries, and could place a number of other restrictions on the use of plants, animals, and features of the area, if agreed by the landowners as rules developed for the Park's management plan. Ownership of the land is not changed by National Park designation. The land will remain under customary ownership despite the formal registration of land as protected.

The proposed project will: build the program administration and financial management capacity of an indigenous community-based conservation organization to implement the project; facilitate formal consultations with landowners using a government designed and approved free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) process to gain approval for National Park designation; facilitate development of the management plan for the National Park; and initiate conversations with indigenous landowners around benefits sharing, with a focus on opportunities from small-scale ecotourism.

10. Potential impacts:

Commercial logging has greatly diminished intact primary forest cover around Western Province, with only small areas remaining on each of the major islands. This has had concomitant impacts on livelihoods and health of rural inhabitants, and many villages have experienced declines in water quality, increases in invasive species and social issues, as well as the loss of resources that accompany large-scale logging projects. Recent modeling shows that logging in the area above 400 m

on Kolombangara would lead to significant increases in sedimentation in the major rivers, with negative effects on drinking water quality and productivity of downstream agricultural land.

As such, the designation of the area as National Park is expected to have a number of *positive impacts* on indigenous people. The proposed activities under this grant will allow for community members and tribal owners to register their interest in protecting the area, which will redress the imbalance in benefits flowing from present land-use practices that provide financial benefits to logging companies and a small number of wealthy, Honiara-based elites who are interested in logging. Indeed, during scoping consultations led by rangers from the Kolombangara Island Biodiversity Conservation Association (KIBCA) with landowners residing on and off Kolombangara in 2016 and 2017 (*see section 11 below*), 98% of respondents supported protection of the area. The KIBCA rangers discussed an array of potential benefits to landowners from National Park designation, including: (i) preservation of water sources, leading to clean drinking water and good health; (ii) small-scale income from ecotourism; (iii) potential livelihood opportunities from certified logging and bottled water production; and (iv) the ability to maintain traditional knowledge and practice through preservation of cultural sites and intact ecosystems.

The designation of the National Park will involve some restriction in use rights, however this is only absolute for logging and mining activities. Under the Protected Areas Act, in a National Park, people can access and use the area for cultural, educational and recreational purposes. Tourism facilities such as campsites, toilets, tracks, holiday resorts and shops can be built if they are approved by the Management Committee. For other activities, as long as impacts are deemed to be minor, they can be permitted at the discretion of the Management Committee, who will be elected to represent the interests of the landholders. We note that the Management Committee cannot be legally appointed by the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology (MECDM) until after the protected area is created. However, for practical reasons to develop a management plan, a provisional Management Committee will be developed through consultative processes under this project.

There is potential for *negative impacts* of this work on indigenous people, largely stemming from the large and diverse stakeholder group and the need to ensure that consultation and discussion is adequate to minimize social issues. The consultation process is designed to clarify expectations and minimize conflict, and it will take skill and patience from the facilitating team to ensure that the process is transparent, just and equitable. We will seek to ensure this by providing trainings to KIBCA, focusing on FPIC issues and consent. In the end, however, communities are required to reach internal consensus to propose a National Park; at a minimum, this will require sufficient time, as well as likely multiple rounds of consultation and internal village and tribal discussion. If not done properly, there is some risk that dissenting groups will be sidelined, which could disrupt the process later if they do not consent. Moreover, because some of this work will occur during the run up to parliamentary elections in late 2018, it is possible this issue will become politicized, which may further divide some of the stakeholders. Ultimately, the designation of a National Park will restrict rights to invite commercial logging or mining enterprises into the area above 400 m. Our argument, and that of many of the landowners surveyed during scoping work in 2016 and 2017, is that protected area designation will provide more sustainable and equitable benefits over the long-term, rather than short-term financial benefits from logging or mining that accrue to a few individuals at a cost to many.

11. Participatory preparation:

This project builds on work carried out for over a decade by KIBCA, which represents the biodiversity conservation interests of Kolombangara landholders. KIBCA was formed on December

10, 2008 at a meeting of leaders, elders and chiefs of Kolombangara villages, communities and tribes. In 2008 and 2009, KIBCA brought together all of the landowning tribes on Kolombangara to sign a community conservation agreement promising they would refrain from logging or mining above 400 m altitude on the island. The forests over 400 m in the fixed term estate lease held by KFPL on the alienated land are presently relatively secure due to KFPL's stewardship. However, the remaining forests in the customary land are urgently threatened, most prominently by commercial logging operations, and the informal community conservation area arrangement offers no legal teeth to prevent logging incursions above 400 m on customary land.

In 2016 and 2017, KIBCA (with technical support from Ecological Solutions-Solomon Islands [ESSI] and financial support from the Wildlife Conservation Society [WCS]), conducted major scoping consultations with indigenous landowners. During this work, they met with over 750 landowners with tribal links to Kolombangara at 81 villages and settlements across the island and around Western Province. They also conducted one major consultation meeting for Kolombangara descendants in Honiara. The purpose of the consultations was to sample attitudes about the proposal to develop a National Park and to provide background information on the concept and benefits, towards gaining free, prior and informed consent from landowners for the proposal (see proposal Annex 4, Summary Report on Scoping Consultations). The findings from these consultations were emphatic: 98% of respondents to a distributed questionnaire were supportive of a protected area for Kolombangara's upper forests.

In March 2017, KIBCA received endorsement from the Kolombangara Landowners Trust Foundation (KLTF) and the Kolombangara Island Council of Chiefs (KICC), two organizations who have customary and legislative authority to represent landowners on the island, to work with WCS to develop proposals to raise funds to conduct the formal consultations required under the Protected Areas Act to obtain FPIC from landowners and island residents for submission of an application to MECDM for protected area designation. During an extra-ordinary annual general meeting in June 2017, the KIBCA Executive Committee endorsed the submission of proposals to donors to try to secure funding to establish a formal protected area (see proposal Annex 2, KIBCA Executive AGM). They additionally noted ongoing issues with logging operations impacting the customary land in the upland forest. KIBCA also has support from the Western Province Government to move ahead with protected area developments. In August 2011, KIBCA received endorsement from the Western Province Government to protect Kolombangara's forests above 400 m. Further, in August 2016, the Western Provincial Executive endorsed KIBCA's proposal for Kolombangara Island to be declared a National Park under the Protected Areas Act of 2010.

The proposed project is, in essence, a delivery mechanism to secure FPIC for the establishment of a National Park. This consent is required by the Protected Areas Act 2010, and the Director of Environment must be satisfied that this consent has been obtained before granting any National Park status. Given the complexity of the consent required (41 distinct villages, multiple tribal members outside the island, and a lack of clear boundary areas or differentiation between tribes), we are proposing to build this consent in two broad stages.

First, under Project Component 1 (*Secure project endorsement from stakeholders*), we will seek specific project endorsement from KIBCA, KLTF and KICC for the CEPF project to develop a National Park on customary land. This will be obtained through annual general meetings (to be held in July 2018) of KIBCA (supported under this proposal) and KLTF and KICC (supported under complementary funding through the Rainforest Trust). These organizations will be presented with a summary of the proposed approach, landowner and other stakeholder consultation schedule, and risk analysis, and will be asked to share concerns and / or voice their consent. Following these critical

meetings of organizations, we will convene a stakeholder roundtable in Honiara or Gizo (expected timing in early August 2018). This roundtable will serve three functions: (1) bring together all parties working on Kolombangara and seek to align and harmonize various project agendas in order to minimize conflict and confused expectations from landowners; (2) strengthen the role of the Solomon Islands Government in coordinating and strengthening the process of protected area designation; and (3) obtain specific endorsement for this work from all stakeholders present. If time allows, we will also seek guidance from this group on the framework for a management plan, including identification of management rules (i.e., uses to be maintained or restrained).

Once this endorsement has been obtained, under Project Component 4 (*Formalize protection of Kolombangara Upland Forest on customary land*), we will seek to enact the formal consultation processes described in the Protected Areas Act Regulations 2012. The Act dictates that for a protected area to be approved the applicant must show that the landowners, and other people who have rights in the area, want the area to be protected, and that the boundaries are agreed upon by neighbors, in addition to having an agreed, effective implementation plan and management committee. Specifically, the Act requires the consultation process to meet certain standards (described in Regulation 44(1)(a)). In each community, an internal consultation must be held to reach consensus or resolution about creating a protected area. To be legally valid these consultations must be given with appropriate notice so that all affected parties are able to attend. A record must be kept of the resolutions by the person chairing or presiding over the meeting, and records and minutes must be signed by at least two other people (Regulation 44(2)(a)).

We will run these meetings in each of the 41 villages within the project area, beginning in January 2019. We expect that there will be at least two meetings in each community. The first set of meetings will coincide with the advertisement of 30 days' notice for the formal consultations and will involve: presenting outcomes of the scoping investigation in 2016 and 2017; highlighting comments, concerns and expectations from community members; introducing the proposed consent process; and introducing grievance mechanisms and communication channels. The second set of meetings will: seek consent from community leaders to continue with the protected area process; discuss the protected area boundary; and discuss potential rules and regulations, with the aim of highlighting concerns. Following this meeting, community leaders will be asked to run internal village consultations about the proposal, and if in support, to sign an endorsement. All concerns raised about proposed management rules that restrict access or use of resources in the proposed Park boundaries will be communicated to the provisional Management Committee, who will adjust proposed rules based on local feedback. A third follow-up visit will collect endorsements and discuss any concerns.

12. Mitigation strategies:

The consent procedure described above is designed to identify and avoid adverse impacts. In general, if consultations identify that the proposed national park is likely to have adverse impacts (i.e., by restricting certain uses of the area), this will generally be resolvable by discussion with the Management Committee who will set the management rules. For example, if one community is concerned about restricted access to particular forest plants, this can be identified in the consulting process and allowed (either across the Park or in that specific area) by the Management Committee. To ensure the consent procedure is enacted with the appropriate nuance and sensitivity, under Project Component 3 (*CEPF project management and monitoring*), we will ensure that all KIBCA rangers are trained in best practice FPIC procedures, using expertise from WCS's Papua New Guinea program where we have designed a protocol for community engagement that recognizes the sensitivities of engaging in activities on indigenous lands (see proposal Annex 5, WCSPNG Standard Engagement Protocol). Training of KIBCA rangers will also involve discussion of appropriate measures to engage women, youth and other marginalized sections of the population in consultations.

Success of project implementation in Solomon Islands depends on clearly articulated and realistically described benefits. Some of the benefits of the proposal are noted above in section 10. In addition, we will use this work to build a foundation to increase the viability of small-scale tourism operators in and around the Park, by working with national government to promote the area and linking with training providers to up-skill community operators. More broadly, we will seek to link with other work in Solomon Islands (funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and Oceans 5) that WCS is undertaking in collaboration the University of Queensland and the Solomon Islands Community Conservation Partnership to establish site-based trust funds that provide a benefits sharing mechanism to incentivize conservation efforts. Over the next two to five years we will seek to set up and capitalize a fund for Kolombangara. Ultimately, we expect that this fund will provide culturally appropriate benefits to landowners in a form decided upon by the landowners themselves—this may include payment of school fees or improvements to critical infrastructure (e.g., health clinics, etc.).

13. Monitoring and evaluation:

Social impact monitoring is built into the project design, via the consenting process for the National Park. If indigenous landowners feel that management rules unduly affect their ability to undertake cultural practices or access resources within the proposed Park boundaries, they will not give consent for its designation.

During the first set of community meetings, KIBCA staff facilitating the meetings will present the grievance mechanisms and process framework. They will additionally record any initial concerns raised by indigenous landowners about how management rules might negatively affect their cultural practice or access to needed resources within the Park boundaries. These concerns will be reported to CEPF in our six monthly safeguard monitoring reports and raised to the provisional Management Committee to ensure that management rules do not adversely impact local people, particularly vulnerable or marginalized sectors of the communities. During formal consultations, KIBCA staff will again record raised concerns to be reported to CEPF and the Management Committee. WCS, KIBCA and the Management Committee will need to address all concerns when drafting and revising the management plan to secure consent from each village and tribe for protected area establishment. We will note any changes to proposed rules to mitigate negative impacts through successive drafts and arising from the KIBCA Annual General Meeting in 2019 in our six monthly reports to CEPF.

14. Grievance mechanism:

Stakeholders will be able to raise grievances at all times. The consenting process is designed to identify and mitigate grievances around the process to establish a National Park on customary land above 400 m. Landowners will be able to raise grievances to KLTF, KICC and the Provincial Government, with whom we will maintain regular contact. We will make sure that each of the above organizations has a printed brief with the project objectives and a description of the grievance mechanism, which will include the email and telephone contacts for WCS, the CEPF Regional Implementation Team, and the local World Bank office, as well as the email of the CEPF Executive Director. During the first set of community meetings, KIBCA staff will go through the grievance mechanism with each community. We will share all grievances – and a proposed response – with the Regional Implementation Team and the CEPF Grant Director within 15 days. If the claimant is not satisfied following the response, they may submit the grievance directly to the CEPF Executive Director at cepfexecutive@conservation.org or by surface mail. If the claimant is not satisfied with the response from the CEPF Executive Director, they may submit the grievance to the World Bank at the local World Bank office.

The first months of the project will focus on building KIBCA capacity to respond effectively to any complaints. These reports will be included in periodic project reporting and will be discussed with the CEPF Regional Implementation Team. More importantly, significant grievances will inform the implementation of the project in terms of the eventual management of the protected area.

15. **Budget:**

The costs for monitoring local concerns about how the National Park might negatively impact cultural practice or access to resources within the Park's boundaries will be incorporated into the following activities:

- Activity 4.2.2. Meetings in all villages on customary land to provide feedback on scoping consultations and describe project, including draft complaints system, to be facilitated by KIBCA rangers
- Activity 4.2.4. Formal consultations completed by KIBCA for all participating villages associated with customary land over 400 m
- Activity 4.4.1. Meeting of provisional Management Committee facilitated by KIBCA to refine outline of plan content
- Activity 4.4.2. Drafting of management plan by WCS, with guidance from KIBCA and outline produced by provisional Management Committee
- Activity 4.4.3. Meeting of provisional Management Committee facilitated by KIBCA to check and endorse draft plan and budget.
- Activity 4.4.4. KIBCA to organize and hold Annual General Meeting to review and endorse plan.