

# THE NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN

## SOCIAL ASSESSMENT

Project Title: *Plants and People: Baseline Floristic and Ethnobotanical Surveys in Tafea Province, Vanuatu.*

Organization: The New York Botanical Garden

Application Code: 64251

### Introduction:

The proposed project, *Plants and People: Baseline Floristic and Ethnobotanical Surveys in Tafea Province, Vanuatu*, will conduct project activities largely in areas held by Indigenous Peoples in Tafea Province. In the project planning process, the project leaders have emphasized strongly consultation, collaborative goal-setting, and joint implementation of project activities with Indigenous Peoples and their organizations/communities, and representatives. These include Councils of Chiefs of each island, community organizations, cultural centers, and other indigenous groups (see below). This collaboration with Indigenous Peoples is greatly facilitated by project partners who are both ni-Vanuatu and scientific and conservation professionals. The project will not only avoid adverse impacts on Indigenous Peoples and the environment, but will provide positive social, economic, health, and environmental/ecosystem services benefits to indigenous communities. Project activities will be conducted in a way that builds scientific and conservation capacity among Indigenous Peoples, and protects and conserves traditional knowledge and cultural practices.

### Identify Indigenous Peoples in the project area:

Project activities will be conducted in Tanna, Aneityum, and Futuna, including areas held by Indigenous Peoples, as characterized by ancestral territories; customary and distinct cultural, social, economic, and social/political institutions; and seven distinct indigenous languages, as follows (with numbers of speakers and endangered status in parentheses):

Tanna: North Tanna (5,000, developing), Lenakel (11,500), Southwest Tanna (4,500), Kwamera (3,500, developing), Whitesands (7,500, shifting)

Aneityum: Aneityum (900, developing)

Futuna and Aniwa: Futuna-Aniwa (1500, developing)

Assess expected project impacts (both positive and negative) on Indigenous Peoples in the Project Area:

The project has been collaboratively designed with Indigenous Peoples and their representatives to have positive social, economic, health, and environmental/ecosystem service benefits for local people and indigenous communities. For example, local Chiefs have expressed grave concern about the loss of traditional knowledge of plants in younger generations, including the use of plants in traditional healing practices. The Chiefs have stated that they have sought help in documenting and preserving this traditional knowledge since the date of independence of the country, but that this project is the first time that this request has been supported and acted on.

The project will help stem the loss of traditional knowledge by recruiting from the local communities ethnobotanical and ethnomedical interviewers and collection teams to document traditional and medical uses of plants that is based on “generalist” knowledge, rather than that held by families or is considered taboo or secret. According to the terms of the project’s permit and agreement with the local communities and their leaders, the project will document the botanical source of this information by collecting plants for study and dissemination of vouchered specimens to local, regional, and international herbaria and thus construct a replicated set of information on plant diversity, distribution, and traditional use. Documentation of safe and effective “generalist” plant-based remedies used in primary health care as well as other cultural uses of plants (e.g., in traditional cuisine, local agriculture, local names for varieties of crops, construction materials, etc. as appropriate and offered) will be disseminated in the form of manuals and books as well as media appropriate for local educational programs, including posters, brochures, and community presentations. These project activities and deliverables will help promote preservation of cultural practices, intergenerational cohesion, sustainable resource management, improved diet, and improved public health.

Local communities have also asked for help from project leaders to address development pressures they are facing from outside forces, which may have adverse environmental impacts on watersheds, and road-building plans that may adversely impact traditional lands and natural resources. The project’s work to develop baseline biodiversity data, including determination of endemic and endangered plants and well as plants of local economic importance, will provide data and analyses supporting advocacy for scientifically sound sustainable development and protection of indigenous lands.

Describe how free, prior and informed consultations have been carried out with affected communities during the design of the project:

The project team has consulted extensively with local community members to not only carry out free, prior, and informed consent, but also to thoroughly involve local communities in the project planning process as well as project implementation. Community members and groups have agreed to participate as partners in the project to research and explicate those aspects of their biodiversity-based traditional knowledge and cultural practices that they wish to document. Complementing the letters of support we have received at the national level (e.g., from the Vanuatu National Kaljoral Kaonsel, The Vanuatu Kaljoral Senta, and the Department of Forestry ), the project has also received letters of support and partnership agreements resulting from free, prior, and informed consultations with local organizations, including the Tafea Provincial Health, Tafea Kaljoral Senta, and the

Nikoletan Kaonsel Blong Yeni (The Council of Chiefs for Tafea Province), the Ministry of Health, and the Department of the Environment. In March 2013, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between NYBG and the Vanuatu Department of Forestry (please see attached MOU).

On 7-8 March, 2013 the project partners in the Tafea Cultural Center organized a meeting with various stakeholders on Tanna, in the Chief's headquarters. Present were 17 community members, including a number of Chiefs, the Tafea Customary Land Officer, and field workers. The project team also met with the Assistant Secretary General of Tafea Province and the Provincial Health Manager of Tafea Province. In addition, the team met with a representative field worker from Futuna, who offered to help them carry out this work on his island. On September 26, 2013, the project team visited Tanna for a second series of meetings with a variety of local stakeholders, and obtained letters of support from the Chief's Council, Tafea Provincial Health, and Tafea Cultural Center, which have been submitted to CEPF. On September 28th, the team traveled to Aneityum to discuss the project with 24 stakeholders on that island, holding a meeting with Chiefs, representatives of religious, educational and women's groups and individual farmers. Presentations were made on the project, hours of discussions ensued, and oral consent was granted for this work. PIC is mandated by the project's research permit issued by the Department of Environment.

In addition, at the national level, consultations took place during the trip of Drs. Plunkett and Balick beginning February 26, 2013 with the Vanuatu Department of Forestry (see attached MoU), National Herbarium (Herbarium part of Forestry Department and covered by that MOU), Department of the Environment (see attached Permit), Ministry of Health (two meetings, see attached letter of agreement with the Tafea Provincial Health), and Vanuatu Kaljoral Senta (see letter of support).

#### Outline measures to avoid adverse impacts and provide culturally appropriate benefits:

The project has been designed to stem the loss of both biodiversity and the traditional practices based in that biodiversity, and will provide culturally appropriate benefits by providing the baseline floristic and ethnobotanical data needed for community-based conservation, sustainable development, and improved health care through the incorporation of safe and effective traditional plant-based remedies in primary health care. As agreed upon with communities during the planning process, documentation of traditional knowledge will not include secret or taboo knowledge held by families or clans, but will focus on generalist traditional knowledge.

Measures to avoid adverse impact and provide culturally appropriate benefits include:

- The project will recruit and train local teams in Tafea in the collection of plant diversity and ethnobotanical data. This will build local scientific and conservation capacity and contribute to the baseline data needed to achieve the project's long-term sustainability goals.
- The project team will conduct research on natural resource use and disseminate this information to those working to develop sustainable natural resource management projects. By documenting traditional cultural and economic practices related to plant diversity, the project will support sustainable development that incorporates culturally appropriate and effective traditional practices.

- The project will also teach and train local communities on project findings and recommendations to inform biodiversity conservation, sustainable resource management, and improved health care in Tafea province, including Aneityum, Futuna, and Green Hill.
- The project team will utilize its ethnomedical surveys and research to develop primary health care manuals of safe and effective traditional plant-based remedies that will provide culturally appropriate measures to improve local health. These activities will be conducted in collaboration with the local ministry of health, as well as local hospitals, clinics, medical doctors, health care providers, and traditional healers.
- The project team will also ensure that any information that has been collected by the local teams that that might be determined to be outside of the “generalist” category will be deleted from the project archives. The project leaders have learned from previous experience that this happens from time to time, and will thus be reviewing the type of information prior to incorporating it into the project data base.

Explain how these measures will be monitored:

Project activities and progress will be monitored regularly and corrective measures will be implemented as needed. Monitoring will be conducted in collaboration with 1) traditional communities and their Traditional Leaders, 2) provincial governmental systems, and 3) non-governmental organizations (NGOs) collaborating with the project.

The project team will participate frequently in community meeting where ni-Vanuatu will learn about the activities, findings, outcomes, and impacts of the project and express their concerns, approval, and recommendations. The project leaders will also meet with traditional representatives, such as the Council of Chiefs to discuss the progress of the project and receive feedback and recommendations.

The project will also meet frequently with government agency representatives to assess progress toward project goals, including with the Department of Forestry, Department of the Environment, Ministry of Health, and cultural centers.

Finally, the project team and collaborators will meet periodically to monitor the project, review progress toward goals, and determine corrective actions. including in collaboration with personnel from the University of the South Pacific; South Pacific Regional Herbarium; National Herbarium of Vanuatu; Vanuatu Department of Forestry; Vanuatu Department of the Environment; Vanuatu and Tafea Cultural Centers; Vanuatu Ministry of Health; Councils of Chiefs of each island and other community groups; local hospitals, village clinics and dispensaries, and other health care providers; and the Pacific Basin Medical Association.

Detail a grievance procedure:

A grievance process is already in place in community meetings led by traditional leaders, and the project team will work with local communities to include grievance procedures for project activities and impacts in these community meetings. Local people will be able to express any

concerns they have about the project, and the project team and community leaders will address these concerns together.

Furthermore, project team meets in Port Vila at the Governmental level during each field trip to discuss progress of the project, any need for changes, and is in frequent touch via email and Skype during other times. Government personnel can communicate their concerns and any grievances to agency managers as well as to the project leaders, who can jointly address any concerns.

As per our agreement with the Forestry Department, issues of concern—including those at the community level—are raised and addressed in those meetings, and there is also a clear arbitration clause governing grievances in the Department of Environment's permit granted for the project. The project leaders have found that in Vanuatu people will freely communicate their feelings should there be concerns, which facilitates resolution of issues that may arise. Collaborating NGOs will also help monitor the project and work with the project leaders to hear and address any grievances from personnel working on the project or from participating or affected community members.

Any grievances will be communicated to CEPF and the Regional Implementation Team at IUCN within 45 days, together with a proposed plan of remedial action to be taken by NYBG and its partners.