

Social Assessment

Prepared by Ecological Solutions, Solomon Islands

For the CEPF project Baseline Biodiversity Inventory of Mt Maetambe-Kolombangara River Corridor, on Choiseul Island, Solomon Islands

Project Site: Mt Maetambe to Kolombangara River Corridor

Social safeguards

The project will implement activities in areas with Indigenous Peoples, hence a Social Assessment has been prepared to demonstrate how the project will comply with CEPF's Safeguard Policy on Indigenous Peoples.

(i) Indigenous Peoples in the project area

A total of 17 indigenous tribes (listed below) were identified to have land that is within the proposed project area of Mt Maetambe-Kolombangara River Corridor. This list will be confirmed during the first consultation meeting with our local partners, stakeholders and the communities within the project site. There may be alterations to this list of tribes as a result of community consultations, and it may either increase or decrease.

1. Koloma
2. Ngava
3. Vumba
4. Qoza
5. Kona
6. Sarelata
7. Paleka
8. Kumbongava
9. Bantongo
10. Jito
11. Siporae
12. Sikipozo
13. Padezaka
14. Matakale
15. Vasiluku
16. Sirebe
17. Vuri

(ii) Expected project impacts (both positive and negative) on Indigenous People.

Expected positive impacts:

The positive impact of this project is working with indigenous tribes to protect some of the last pristine tropical rainforests of Solomon Islands. Choiseul Island has some unique

flora and fauna that do not occur elsewhere in the Solomon Islands or other parts of the world.

Additionally this project will empower communities in terms of encouraging traditional leadership and governance, and will provide tools for resource managers as part of the human capacity development outcome through training.

Furthermore, development of a land use plan will aid in the planning and development of a proposed conservation area along this corridor.

Potential negative impacts:

One of the major challenges in Solomon Islands with regards to any development or project is dealing with traditional land ownership conflicts.

Nearly 90% of land in the Solomon Islands is customary owned, which is a form of private land ownership. Certain tribes or an extended family collectively own land, with different levels of ownership – primary or secondary. Decisions on land development or access agreements to enter particular areas are made by primary owners. Secondary owners have free access to the use of the land for gardening or subsistence purposes. Only in rare cases is land inherited by individuals. Conflicts over traditional land ownership can fall under a number of scenarios. (1) Land can be free from disputes give the collective consensus of tribal members to the terms stipulated in any agreement. (2) There may be a land dispute in which case the traditional house of chiefs or the courts of Solomon Islands attend a land hearing and determine who the true owners are. (3) In some instances, a tribe may be engaged with a certain project, and other related tribes may raise grievances or present a dispute over who owns the land. Here is where traditional land conflicts can be a threat to any form of engagement.

Community consultation during which a clear definition of the project aim and objectives is stipulated for all to understand is paramount to the project's success. Our plan of action is to meet with all parties including the provincial government. It would seem sustainable if aspects of this project may be integrated into the Choiseul Province Development plans particularly for the environment, and pertaining to the establishment of protected areas. Field engagements will depend on the agreements made with landholders. This project will exclude areas where conflicts over land are present.

(iii) Description of free, prior and informed consultations carried out with affected communities during design of the project

We have previously worked at Mt Maetambe with the Matakale tribe. Our engagement along the Kolombangara River was in collaboration with the Kubongava, Siribe and Vuri tribes. This was funded by WWF (Solomon Islands) under a sustainable forests project. One of our main project partners, the Luru Land Conference of Tribal Community also met with some traditional land owners of the Mt Maetambe –Kolombangara River corridor during a ridge to reef planning meeting in Taro on January of 2010.

The past meetings were usually conducted in the local language in which all of our team members speak. We first met with the chiefs and sort their consent and permission to conduct field studies on their land. After the fieldwork, an awareness talk follows and is presented to the school children and the community at large. Presenting data from field studies also informs the communities about the unique flora and fauna found on their land from a local, national and global perspective. In all our public meetings we have had both young and older people attend. Question and Answers sessions follow each presentation. These engagements are beneficial as it provides an opportunity to present methods on how to manage better forest systems.

There are a total of 17 customary traditional landowners that have land from Mt Maetambe to Kolobangara River. In the past our team has worked with only four tribes. We envision that the CEPF program will provide an opportunity for our team to work with more traditional landowners to conduct biological baseline survey and look for ways to partner with communities to better manage their forests. The aim of this project is also to link various tribes and to support them in the protection of the Mt Maetambe-Kolombangara River corridor. This project shares the same goal with the Choiseul Province development initiative, which involves an effort to conserve ridge to reef corridors.

Our field studies will involve collections of specimens and genetic materials. The collection will include type specimens of any new taxa encountered in the field or specimens of taxa that will require further taxonomic work for identification. We will have to seek permission from the customary traditional landowners to collect any specimens. We will inform them why it is important to collect specimens and where we will store the specimens. A simple act of consent document will be made between customary traditional landowners and this project team and will be signed by all parties to allow our team to collect taxa specimens and genetic materials. The signed document will be included on the appendix of the final report. All the taxa collected for identification will be documented and we will seek permissions from museums in Australian Museum, Sydney and American Museum of Natural History in USA to store the collected taxa. Export and CITES permit will be arranged through the Department of Environment before specimens leave the Solomon Islands.

The genetic materials collected will be used for scientific studies. This includes the following frog species *Litoria lutea* and *Palmatorappia solomonis*. In addition population structure studies and otoliths studies for following freshwater fishes *Chanos chanos*, *Lutjanus argentimaculatus*, *L. fuscescens*, *Kuhlia marginata*, *K. rupestris*, *Mesopristes argenteus*, *M. cancellatus*, and *Cestraeus plicatilis* will be conducted.

Furthermore, any specimens that are stored in a museum will have a museum catalogue number and such information will be included in the final report. All the taxa collected will be included in the final report that will be submitted to CEPF and also made available on ESSI the website.

(iv) Measures to avoid adverse impacts and provide culturally appropriate benefits

Land settlement through clear and concise agreements is a pre-requisite to sustain any project. Traditional land ownership conflict and disputes are very common on Choiseul. Land dispute can spring up from various factors, including:

1. Improper dialogue with various tribes who might hold ownership over the land.
2. Unclear understanding of the objective of the project.
3. Unspecified written or agreed upon Terms and Conditions on the usage of the land.
4. The wrong identification of the true land owners.

Choiseul people have adopted a sound land tenure system and methodology that can be applied to identify the true landowner(s). Therefore, right at the beginning of this project we have allocated two months for stakeholders and community engagements and meeting. We will work closely with the Luru Land Conference of Tribal Community office to identify and meet with all the chiefs and the traditional landowners of the areas identified within the proposed project. At the meeting, we will inform them of the aims and objectives of this project. At the same time during the meeting we will have to present a map of the project area and ask all the chiefs to identify their land and land boundaries within the project area. Data overlaid from this information will be used to build a comprehensive map that determines tribal boundaries.

The next step is to invite all the chiefs and traditional landowners together for a combine meeting. In this meeting we will present the master map to all the traditional landowners and their chiefs. In this way once there are any overlaps of land boundaries or land disputes within the proposed project area we can identify them. At this meeting all the land boundaries be confirmed and documented. If there are landownerships disputes or conflicts identified we will then refer the conflicting parties to the Choiseul House of Chiefs Hearing where the conflicting parties will present their cases on the ownership of the land before a council of chiefs. The council of chiefs will give their decision on who is the rightful ownership of the land. If the losing party is not satisfied with the decision given by the Chiefs hearing then they can take the case up with the local court of Solomon Islands. Our advice to the conflicting parties would be to ask them sort their land conflicts first and whoever is accorded the rightful traditional landowners then we will work with them.

We will treat the land conflict issues very carefully. The next step is that we will have to go to all the villages both within and outside of the proposed project areas to post the master map that contain the information pertaining to our project concerning all the lands, land boundaries and traditional landownership of the land. This will give opportunities to other tribes to object any particular tribes if they also have claimed of a particular land within the project area. Once there are any objections to a particular land ownership then we will refer them to the house of chiefs hearing. However, if there are no objections then

we can confirm the rightful traditional landownership of any land in the proposed project site through this process.

We want to ensure that we are dealing with the land issues in a very systematic process right at the start before we can proceed into the core of our project. That is to undertake baseline biological inventory of new areas that we haven't surveyed in the past and at the same time re-visit some of the areas we previously surveyed on Mt Maetambe-Kolombangara River Corridor.

(v) Plans for monitoring safeguard measures

The first three months of this project will be very crucial and important. Solomon Islands have a unique way of identifying land dispute issues. Land disputes and traditional landownership is an ongoing issue for some traditional land owners. However, for some land dispute cases they will appear at a time when a particular tribe that proclaims ownership and wants to develop their land when they will be challenged by the other tribes that will claim ownership to that same land also.

That's why it is important that the steps that are discussed in detailed in section (iv) will have to take place.

We see the steps that we have listed above as the most practical way to monitor this project. We have blended in the Choiseul culture and traditions on how to deal with conflicts and resolutions.

By undertaking the above steps first and foremost we will be success in addressing and monitoring of any land issues within the proposed project site within the Mt Maetambe-Kolombangara River Corridor.

(vi) Grievance mechanism

Information about the ESSI team members, and its partners LLCTC staffs and a staff of Luru Affairs for Choiseul Province contact information will be made available to all the communities and chiefs of each tribe during meetings.

All the tribes will be informed that if they have any grievances that they are uncomfortable of informing the ESSI team then they can take their grievance to LLCTC office or Luru affairs staff. Furthermore, we will also provide the CEPF Regional Implementation team at IUCN office in Suva contacts of the local communities to submit their grievances to them if they are not comfortable to talk with ESSI team, LLCTC staffs and the Luru affairs staff.

Our team will record and document any grievances or traditional land dispute encountered during this project term. All the grievances encountered will be included as an appendix in our project reports to CEPF.