

## CEPF Environment and Social Impact Assessment

January 2017

*Project: Promoting gender equity for conservation initiatives through catalyzing a women's environmental network across CEPF priority sites.*

*Grantee: Island Reach*

*Project Location – Island Chain of Vanuatu, including priority sites in Aneitium, Tanna, Santo, Gaua, and Tongoa-Laika*

This document addresses potential positive and negative environmental and social impacts that may occur as a result of the proposed project, *Promoting gender equity for conservation initiatives through catalyzing a women's environmental network across CEPF priority sites*. The main goal of this project is to catalyze and grow the new indigenous women's resource monitor network, established in 2016 as a branch of the national Vanua'tai Network which is a volunteer program of environmental champions working in their communities on behalf of marine and terrestrial ecosystems. This project will involve working in partnership with indigenous peoples at both the national and local levels; in particular, the project seeks to increase participation of women in natural resource management and biodiversity conservation nation-wide and from key CEPF biodiversity sites on the islands of Aneitium, Tanna, Tongoa-Laika, Santo, and Gaua.

### Indigenous People Affected

Indigenous people in communities across Vanuatu, from the southern province of TAFEA to the northern province of TORBA, are the direct beneficiaries of this project. The current estimate for the country's population is at roughly 290,000 people. The archipelago is known for its relatively robust cultural diversity, reflected in part in the densest linguistic diversity per capita in the world. Customs and traditions vary significantly, with, for example, different chiefly structures, land ownership practices, and roles and status for women. Religious diversity is on the increase. In addition, different rural communities have somewhat varied access to economic markets related to tourism, agriculture and fisheries, and craft. Environmentally, across the island chain there are different micro-climates and degrees of seasonality. The region has been identified as containing hotspots with critical habitats that include coastal vegetation, mangrove forests, lowland rainforests, seasonally dry forests and grasslands, and montane rainforests.

With this breadth and diversity, there are still many commonalities across the diverse sites where this project will take place. To begin with, while customary governance may vary, the value of customary land ownership and management is enshrined in the Vanuatu constitution and there is national consensus that the role of Chiefs and traditional knowledge are vital components of sustainable development. Moreover, under the constitution, the environment is recognized as a national priority –as an essential pillar of economic and social development – and every person is considered to have the duty to protect and safeguard the environment. Bislama, the national language, serves as the unifying language that enables pan-region collaboration.

Other commonalities shared across the 80+ islands that span over 1300 km include the fact that most Ni-Vanuatu people are primarily subsistence harvesters, working their forest gardens and reefs and near shore seas to secure their food. Nearly every community faces threats to food security that are being posed by climate change impacts on both land and sea. In addition, population growth places increased pressure on those natural resources. In 2014, Vanuatu was identified as having one of the highest annual population birthrates as well as the second highest youth bulge (15-24 years) at 20 per cent of total population. As a Small Island Developing State, most Ni-Vanuatu communities share the challenges of remoteness and lack of infrastructure, as well as low levels of education.

### Summary of the proposed project

The main goal of this project is to catalyze and grow the new women's resource monitor network, established in 2016 as a branch of the Vanua'tai Network which is a volunteer program of environmental champions working in their communities on behalf of marine and terrestrial ecosystems. These women are stepping forward into a traditionally male-dominated arena and therefore face many challenges. They recognize that they need the support and collaboration of their male counterparts as they break new ground, and they also need to build more alliances with other women nationally and in their communities to enable their work. Establishing an active network of women environmental champions will help open

up a broader realm of information and action that is not widely available or accessible in Vanuatu related to gender-differentiated practices and knowledge with regards to biodiversity and its conservation. The network will forge new pathways for the transfer of scientific knowledge, adaptive skills, and resource management from women monitors to their communities. Bringing attention to gender-differentiated knowledge and practices will give women stronger positions in their communities, including assisting with other project implementations related to energy, water, economy and production, and tourism, and has the potential to create positive impacts on poverty alleviation.

#### Expected project impacts (both positive and negative)

The project is expected to have many positive impacts on Indigenous people living in each project site and across Vanuatu as expressed in the project rationale and as articulated in the above statement. Through fortifying the indigenous monitors' network, through facilitating the participation of women and creating new roles for women as environmental champions, this project will increase awareness of local biodiversity issues and conservation in communities across Vanuatu, strengthen management and possibly lead to new protected areas, and help to increase gender equality in natural resource decision making, and promote mainstreaming into nation-wide efforts for biodiversity conservation.

Potential negative impacts include the following:

Supporting women's participation and leadership in decision-making about natural resources in their communities must be done with sensitivity to cultural traditions and existing power dynamics, otherwise the women may face discrimination, rejection, or worse, within their villages. With the women's network embedded in the larger Vanua'tai network, these potential negative impacts can be reduced as the women are

Supported by local, regional, and national partners that can assist in helping communities see the advantages that can come from including women in planning and natural resource management. Our cross-cultural team working in Bislama, our regular consultations with relevant national stakeholders from the civil and government sectors, and our Ni-Vanuatu advisors, including women's network chairperson, Salome Kalo, will help in mitigating and smoothing the pathway for greater women's participation. In addition, the project directors' professional training in cultural anthropology and cross-cultural psychology give us a sensitivity and skill-base for dealing with the delicacies of this cultural shift. Another potential negative impact comes from the possible expectation that as monitors become more active and new resource management goals may be pursued, new conflicts may arise in communities around resources, particularly with regards to expectations about benefits from or threats posed by new management strategies. Because this project is affiliated with the Vanua'tai network, and because these individuals are embedded in their respective communities, there is long term opportunity for negotiation, clarification, and adaptation to occur, in order to adjust expectations, respond to concerns, or revise goals.

#### Participatory Preparation

All community engagements will be undertaken with free, prior, and informed consent to most fully identify peoples' views and obtain broad community support. Through our MOU with Wan Smolbag, and our collaborations with monitors from across the country, Island Reach serves as a catalyst for promoting local participation and informed decision making, and helping to build capacity for environmental champions at the local level. IR is already working closely with many women monitors, the new executive committee, and their male partners in communities to reach out to grow the network. Prior to undertaking activities in any new communities where IR is not already active with monitors, we will contact stakeholders to seek permission to come to the communities for presentations and any workshops. Locally relevant stakeholders will include Provincial Government officers, local customary leaders, and community organizations. We'll work with these stakeholders in partnership to identify local concerns, interests, and, where possible, to include local representatives (e.g., government representatives, church leaders, etc.) as part of any presentations and actions. Presentations are to be open to all members of the

community and coordinated with community leadership. The women monitors are the ones who will identify, in collaboration with their own communities, priorities, pathways, and strategies that best suit local context. The Island Reach team includes Ni-Vanuatu members and our advisors are drawn from local communities and government offices.

#### Mitigating Strategies

As identified above, this project will adopt numerous mitigating strategies to avoid adverse impacts and provide culturally appropriate benefits. An aim of this project is to facilitate national and local goals and initiatives towards the protection of critical biodiversity in a manner that reflects the inextricable links between culture and environment in Vanuatu. Foremost, the goal is to catalyze and grow the new women's resource monitor network, embedded within the larger Vanua'tai Resource Monitors Network. We will work in strategic alliance with the country's national sustainable development plan and in close partnership with relevant stakeholders, including our partnership with Wan Smolbag. The women monitors themselves have identified food security as the theme and entry point for their conservation actions. This focus will help tie biodiversity conservation to the health and well-being of communities. As just one example, organic gardening awareness and techniques have the benefits of helping reduce habitat loss, reducing women's workloads by promoting nearby gardens that can be cultivated continuously, increasing food security through climate-change adapted techniques, and supporting healthy soils. The project will work in partnership with the women to foster their empowerment, including knowledge sharing and capacity building through mentoring one another and learning exchanges.

#### Monitoring and Evaluation

Social impact monitoring is integral to the project. With our expertise in the social science fields, and our experienced local team and advisors, we will take a flexible approach to project development, responding quickly to what is working and what is not working. With an important line item in our budget dedicated to facilitating regular contact both among and with the women monitors during the course of this project, we can assess and respond to issues as they arise. This collaborative model will help promote a supportive group environment both between the women and with the project team where all can share critical reflections on the work and process. In addition, this evaluative and monitoring process can extend to the wider Vanua'tai network, and will seek input and insight from our team of local advisors, from community leaders, as well as provincial government officers, including area secretaries, and contacts in the civil society and NGO sectors.

The project team will confer regularly and prepare quarterly reports to be submitted to CEPF during the course of the one-year project. Short field videos and the final, longer video will serve as monitoring and evaluation tools as well, which communities can use to assess their own goals and actions. As part of the project, we'll partner with the women monitors to identify a project they can collectively undertake in their respective communities and villages and which they can come back with in 2018 (following the end of this project) to report on their findings to the AGM. Depending upon the nature of that project, Island Reach can assist in 2018 in compiling collected data into a report that can be made available to key national and regional stakeholders, as well as to monitors and their communities.

#### Grievance Mechanisms

Should anyone or any community have a grievance with this project, they may raise this grievance at any time to any member of the Island Reach team. We will respond within 15 days of receipt of the grievance. If the claimant(s) are not satisfied, they may submit their grievance to CEPF via the dedicated email account. If the claimant is not satisfied with the response from the CEPF Secretariat, the grievance may be submitted to the World Bank at the nearest local World Bank Office. Monitors, community members, and relevant stakeholders will be informed about these avenues for making claims and contact information will be provided for IR and the CEPF secretariat. We will announce this at the start of each meeting with new participants. Any claims received by IR will be filed, included in project monitoring,

and a copy of any grievance will be provided to the CEPF Secretariat. The Regional Implementation Team can be contacted via phone on +679-331-9084 or email on [cepfeastmelanesia@iucn.org](mailto:cepfeastmelanesia@iucn.org) and [vatumaraga.molisa@iucn.org](mailto:vatumaraga.molisa@iucn.org) or via post on c/- CEPF Regional Implementation Team, PMB 5 Ma'afu St, Suva, Fiji. The Grant Director can be contacted via email on [mzador@cepf.net](mailto:mzador@cepf.net).

**Budget**

Costs related to compliance with the safeguard policy on Indigenous Peoples are covered by IR's general operating budget which is co-financing this project.

**Map of the project area:**

