



# SUCCESS STORY

## Partners in Community Engagement

### *Working together to build capacity for conservation in Milne Bay*



George Bukoya and George Aigoma bring the message of marine conservation to the community level in Milne Bay, Papua New Guinea.

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*“What I’ve learned from Papa George is patience and the ability to control emotions. Sometimes there is tension in a conversation, and he knows just what to say to make people laugh. He gets respect from the communities—he’s a father figure to them.”*

– George Bukoya, Conservation International

In the Conservation International (CI) office in Milne Bay, Papua New Guinea, they call them the Two Georges—George A. (for Aigoma) and George B. (for Bukoya). Community members call them Papa George and Young George. Whatever you call them, they make a great team. George A., a graduate of Highlands Agricultural College, worked as an agricultural extension officer before finding a home as a community engagement specialist at CI. George B.’s history is diverse, including newspaper layout, advertising for Air Niugini and almost a decade on the police force in the New Guinea Highlands. CI hired him for his skills in communications, graphic arts and computers. He has quickly become an important part of the team.

As is usually the case in a small office, the Two Georges do many types of work. One important project is the Learning and Training Network, leveraged using funds from USAID’s Coral Triangle Support Partnership (CTSP). According to the national government’s Marine Environment Branch Manager Vagi Rei, the Network is “part of the Coral Triangle Initiative Regional Plan of Action which needs to be implemented by the PNG Marine Program. It is one of those ways in which we will move forward . . . towards making the (national) marine program a reality.” George B. explained, “We realized there was a lot of expense involved in bringing people from foreign countries to train us, whereas in PNG we already have many people able to do this.” The Network gathers effective “how to” resources about community engagement, sustainable conservation practices, and policy and governance and shares them in workshops with interested communities, implementing the country’s Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security (CTI-CFF) National Plan of Action at the local level.

One George might be working to establish a marine resource and training center for the Network on Nuakata Island, while the other is talking with community members in Divinai village to learn what marine conservation information might best meet their needs. Most often, they are problem-solving and sharing perspectives on communities and the best ways to work with them, in the office and shoulder-to-shoulder in the field. George B. said, “What I’ve learned from Papa George is patience and the ability to control emotions. Sometimes there is tension in a conversation, and he knows just what to say to make people laugh. He gets respect from the communities—he’s a father figure to them.” His partner responded, “Young George taught me to use the computer, which is very helpful to me, I didn’t know how to use a computer before. We are a team.”

They love their jobs because of the interaction with villagers and the pleasure of bringing new information to people and learning from them, too. They both agreed, “The more patience we have and the more we educate them, the more likely they are to be the drivers of the program. Once they understand, they are very interested.” The cheerful, supportive and patient styles of the Two Georges are a central part of CTSP’s community-level marine resource conservation efforts.