



SUCCESS STORY

From Vision to Reality in Milne Bay

Community members in Papua New Guinea monitor reefs and train others to do it, too



Trainers from the Nuakata-Labam-Palele Marine Management Area pass along their knowledge of marine resource protection and monitoring to residents of Wiyaloki and neighboring islands.

Photo: © USAID CTSP / Tory Read

“In the next five to ten years, I want to see that when a community wants training, the guys we have worked with will be the ones to do it.”

— Noel Wangunu, Conservation International

Distressed by reef and fish monitoring programs that failed to truly engage local communities and that relied on NGO staff to do the work, Noel Wangunu, a marine biologist, was sure there had to be a better way. Believing that the best hope for long-term monitoring continuity was to put communities in the driver’s seat, he worked through the Alotau office of Conservation International (CI), with support from USAID’s

Coral Triangle Support Partnership (CTSP) to create a program in 2009 that trains islanders to do their own monitoring. He found that once community members understand that reef monitoring benefits them, and the young adults see that volunteering as monitors gives them status, it isn’t difficult to create a self-sustaining monitoring system. His definition of success? “In the next five to ten years, I want to see that when a community wants training, the guys we have worked with will be the ones doing it,” taking CI out of the loop, he said.

Less than four years into the program, success is at their doorstep. The first training started with funding from CTSP, and more than 50 young people from Nuakata, Labam, and Palele Islands attended. Two workshops and many field trips and study sessions left only the strongest and most committed volunteers. Less than five months later the first monitoring of 16 stations was underway. Following 100-meter transects and recording what they saw every five meters,

the monitors counted and categorized corals, fishes, and invertebrates. They’ve done so every quarter since then.

Three star pupils—Joel Araea, Jameson Solipo, and Simeon Isaac—have volunteered to train monitors on other islands. They have also learned how to enter data from their monitoring activities into computer spreadsheets and interpret the results to share at village and government meetings. The three of them recently ran workshops for communities in the neighboring Bwanabwana district southeast of Nuakata, and monitoring has already begun there at 16 new sites with full local involvement. The new monitors are eager to spread their knowledge further. The value of scientific resource management, combined with traditional closure methods, is clear to the participants. Recently the National Fisheries Authority recognized their expertise by hiring them to conduct local sea cucumber surveys for the national database.

Nedson Isako, the chairman of the local community-based organization and one of the students at the first trainings, observed, “CI really helped us. They saw what we did not see, then showed us how to stop over-harvesting.” Now, he and others like him want to share this knowledge with other communities in Milne Bay and perhaps beyond through the Learning and Training Network process enabled under the country’s National Plan of Action created as part of the six-country Coral Triangle Initiative for Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security (CTI-CFF). *Conservation International is the lead implementing partner of CTSP and the USCTI Support Program in Milne Bay, PNG.*