

*Traditional "gwala" stick marks the boundary of the marine protected area in Anagusa Island, Milne Bay Province, Papua New Guinea*

# GWALA RISES IN THE BWANABWANA ISLANDS - SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES TO CONSERVE CORAL REEFS USING TRADITIONAL CONSERVATION PRACTICES

Led by Conservation International (CI) and local partner, Eco-Custodian Advocates (ECA), with support from the Australian Government, the Spread the Reach of Community-based Resource Management Project supported partner communities to better protect their coral reefs and to develop innovative tools that encourage communities to work together to protect the marine environment which they all rely on.

## Introduction

The Spreading the Reach of Community-based Resource Management in Papua New Guinea Project worked with local partners to help island communities take strategic actions to protect their marine ecosystems. Community-based resource management (CBRM) is when communities work together to implement rules that limit the fishing and harvesting of local coral reefs and fishing grounds. Through these actions, coral reefs and fisheries can be sustained and continue to provide for the communities that rely on them for food and livelihoods.

Coral reefs and other marine and coastal ecosystems are threatened by intensifying impacts from climate change, destructive fishing, overfishing and pollution. Consequently, the health of these ecosystems and the abundance of marine species has declined significantly in recent years. This decline has had devastating impacts on local communities, threatening food and livelihood security.

Conservation International and local partner, Eco Custodian Advocates, worked together to help communities in the Milne Bay Province of Papua New Guinea to implement CBRM and protect their precious coral reef ecosystems. The high cost of operating conservation projects due to remoteness of communities and difficulties in undergoing community engagement has limited the number of communities to receive CBRM support. Out of PNG's 8,000 coastal communities, best estimates indicate approximately 100 communities have received assistance from government or NGOs. To address this problem, this project developed innovative tools to effectively reach more communities with CBRM support at a lower cost.





© CI / PHOTO BY NOEL WANGUNU

*Community training on biological monitoring on Dawson Island, Milne Bay Province, Papua New Guinea.*

## Project Approach

To support local implementation of CBRM this project trained and mentored communities to develop the knowledge and skills needed for communities to independently and effectively protect their coral reef ecosystems. Additionally, we focused on developing innovative tools that communicate the fundamental aspects of CBRM so that the goals and solutions are well understood and so that these can be shared on to other communities exponentially with little follow-on effort. Through the combination of these two elements, a movement has begun to spread from island to island. Communities that have experienced success through CBRM share their experience through associated tools and encourage their neighbours to also implement CBRM activities. Through this approach, less intensive facilitation by NGOs or other supporting organizations is required to persuade communities to do CBRM, which lowers the cost of supporting more communities.

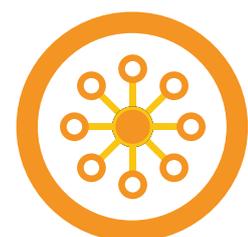
## Innovative Tools



Interactive Workbooks with illustrations and activities guide communities so that they can directly design and implement CBRM activities.



Videos demonstrate to communities that the environmental challenges they face are shared by other communities, and showcase the local success stories in order to encourage them to also implement CBRM.



Local storytelling activities facilitate the revitalization of traditional conservation practices and give communities a sense of ownership and pride.

## Spreading the Reach

As a result of this project, CBRM has spread throughout many of the communities in the Engineer Islands Group of Milne Bay Province. The successful CBRM program in Wiyaloki Island influenced neighbouring island communities of Dawson, Anagusa, Kwaraiwa, and Skelton to also do CBRM to protect their coral reefs. As a result, community leaders in Kitai and Tewatewa are now also interested in doing CBRM. A network has organically formed between these communities, and they are now working cooperatively together in a larger communal effort to protect the connected environment which they all rely on.



## Beneficiaries



Communities have started their own movement, revitalizing their traditional values and practices, and providing each other with advice and guidance in a collective effort to reduce threats to their marine ecosystems.



Local, Provincial and National Government see this project and approach as an opportunity to strengthen the delivery mechanisms for development and necessary aid to communities across the country to protect their vital natural resources.



Through collaboration with Regional Partners under the Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security, the innovative tools developed in this project are widely shared and have the potential to reach communities in countries around the region.



Man on a boat in Milne Bay Province, Papua New Guinea

## What's Next

---

In the next phase of this work, efforts will be enhanced to support communities to implement CBRM in three ways:

- Videos and other targeted communications products will be produced that mirror and reinforce the interactive workbooks developed in this project.
- Lessons learned from partners in the region will be integrated into project strategies, further facilitating the spread of CBRM.
- Conservation International and local partner, Eco Custodian Advocates will work with Local and Provincial Governments to support communities in the implementation of this CBRM and its tools.

Through these three elements, the current initiative will be further expanded so that the communities in Milne Bay Province and further across the country of Papua New Guinea can independently and effectively protect the nature that they depend upon.



*Coral reef, Milne Bay Province,  
Papua New Guinea*

For more information on this project and CI's work in Papua New Guinea, contact **Niquole Esters** at [nesters@conservation.org](mailto:nesters@conservation.org).