

Scaling Up Community-based Fisheries Management in the Pacific

Outlook and prospects for securing sustainable coastal fisheries, livelihoods and ecosystems

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Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | iii Preface The Blue Transformation Roadmap 2022–2030 developed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) provides a framework to strengthen the contribution of aquatic food systems to food and nutrition security,

to improve livelihoods and ecological resilience and to enhance their contribution to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In line with priority areas under the Blue Transformation Umbrella Programme, including the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines), much needs to be done to further align policies at all levels and ensure the participation and empowerment of small-scale fishing actors and communities. The SSF Guidelines call for participatory approaches to fisheries management. The Pacific Islands region is well known for its customary, community-based and fisheries co-management approaches that encompass sustainable resource use and stewardship while preserving culture and livelihoods. The main avenue for achieving coastal fisheries management in the Pacific Islands is a form of co-management termed community-based fisheries management (CBFM). Investing in the existing regional platform for CBFM and the Pacific Framework for Action on Scaling up Community-based Fisheries Management (2021–2030) is the region’s designated approach to achieving coastal fisheries management and the most strategic means of advancing the SSF Guidelines. Most, if not all, the CBFM approaches encompass the main efforts for achieving sustainable livelihoods and coastal conservation in a manner consistent with Pacific contexts and traditions. Reviewing progress, challenges and opportunities for the way forward (including the review of the Framework for Action due in 2028) benefits both the Pacific and the wider global community, as approaches can be replicated, adapted or scaled up in other regions. FAO is strategically positioned to catalyse the resulting knowledge, capacities and recommendations through relevant processes and partnerships at regional, national and global level.

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x | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific Acknowledgements This report describes some of the results of community practices over hundreds of years and documents more recent work by many community members, practitioners, government staff and advisers over the past 50 years. While the report acknowledges the many contributions reflected in these efforts, it cannot aspire to comprehensively capture or reflect them all, and apologies are extended to those whose work may not be adequately reflected. The authors wish to acknowledge the following experts for their contributions: Ariella D'Andrea, Laitia Tamata, Robert Gillett, Anthony Charles, Mark Nicholson and Jan van der Ploeg. The report also benefited from the valuable contributions of the following peerreviewers: Ariella D'Andrea (Pacific Community [SPC]), Chin Hewavitharane (SPC), Dirk Steenbergen (the Australian National Centre for Ocean Resources and Security [ANCORS]), Eugene Joseph, Kim Friedman (FAO), Giulia Gorelli (FAO), Jokim Kitolelei (University of the South Pacific), Lena Westlund (FAO), Margaret Fox (SPC), Hana Matsubara (FAO), Semese Alefaio (Tuvalu Fisheries Authority [TFA]), Varun Tandon (FAO) and Tim Adams (SPC). This report benefited from the copyediting of Canopy as well as the graphic design and layout by Boris Colas (SPC). FAO received funding from the European Union through the project "Supporting a Blue Transformation: Implementation of the Guidelines for Sustainable Aquaculture and Empowerment of Small-Scale Fisheries Actors, GCP/GLO/1225/EC" to convene a regional CBFM meeting with relevant partners from the Pacific to inform, develop and publish a related technical publication or report that documents cases and related lessons learned and recommendations for wide dissemination. FAO collaborated with SPC to support the fifth Community-based fisheries dialogue (CBFD5), which was held in Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands on 25 to 26 September 2025. The dialogue was cofunded by FAO and the Micronesian Community-based Fisheries Management as a Nature-Based Solution for Coastal

Resilience (MiCOAST) project. FAO provided technical support during two sessions of the dialogue and collaborated with the SPC, CBF5 participants and other relevant partners in the region to develop this report.²

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | xi Abbreviations aFAD anchored fish aggregating device ASA artisanal stewardship area CBD Convention on Biological Diversity CBF5 Community-based fisheries dialogue CBFM Community-based fisheries management CBRM Community-based resource management (Solomon Islands) CMT customary marine tenure COP Conference of the Parties CSO civil society organization EEZ exclusive economic zone FAD fish aggregating device FAME Fisheries, Aquaculture and Marine Ecosystems division of the SPC FAO Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations FFA Forum Fisheries Agency FiTI Fisheries Transparency Initiative Framework for Action Pacific Framework for Action on Scaling up Community-based Fisheries Management: 2021–2030 GDP gross domestic product GESI gender equality and social inclusion GEDSI gender equality, disability and social inclusion iFAD inshore fish aggregating device KMGBF Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework LMA Locally Managed Area (the Federated States of Micronesia) LMMA locally managed marine area MCS monitoring, control and surveillance MCSE monitoring, control, surveillance and enforcement MoU memorandum of understanding

xii | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific MPA marine protected area (the Federated States of Micronesia and Palau) NGO non-governmental organization nm nautical mile OECMs other effective area-based conservation measures PAA preferential access area PAN Protected Areas Network PICs Pacific Island countries PICTs Pacific Island countries and territories RFMM Regional Fisheries Ministers Meeting SDG Sustainable Development Goals SMA special management areas (Tonga) SPC Pacific Community SPREP Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme TEK traditional ecological knowledge TEKMS traditional ecological knowledge and management systems UN United Nations UNCLOS United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea VADE voluntary, assisted, directed, enforced WCPO Western and Central Pacific Ocean WDPA World Database on Protected Areas

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | xiii Executive summary T^he Pacific Islands region is extraordinarily diverse, spanning thousands of islands and vast ocean spaces. It comprises 14 independent nations and 8 territories collectively known as Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs).¹ This diversity is not only geographic, but also cultural, ecological and socioeconomic – populations of PICTs range from under 2 000 to over 10 million, development levels vary from medium to very high, and more than one thousand indigenous languages are spoken across the region. Such heterogeneity means that broad statements about the Pacific Islands region rarely capture the realities of individual PICTs or the communities that inhabit them. For fisheries management and conservation, this complexity presents both challenges and opportunities. The Pacific Islands region is renowned for the customary and community-based approaches to fisheries management which have been adapted and developed to address emerging challenges and support sustainable resource use, conservation, and the preservation of culture and livelihoods. Community-based fisheries management (CBFM) is a type of co-management where rights and decisions are largely delegated to communities with the support of governments and sometimes other external partners. The Pacific Islands region is at a critical juncture in the stewardship of its coastal fisheries. T^he Pacific Islands region is committed to scaling up CBFM by developing systems that provide adequate support to all coastal communities and help them play an active role in achieving healthy fisheries and maintaining their livelihoods. The Pacific Framework for Action on Scaling Up Community-based Fisheries Management: 2021–2030 (Framework for Action) stands as the principal roadmap for progress, offering strategic guidance for governments, partners and communities. This aligns well with the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) which support many aspects of the Framework, including participatory fisheries management with small-scale fishing communities. However, challenges are increasing and far greater investment in implementation is needed.

This report seeks to examine the status of efforts to scale up CBFM in the Pacific Islands region and outlines some of the key areas of progress. It also addresses major challenges, identifies opportunities and proposes potential ways forward. The status of CBFM implementation varies greatly across different Pacific Island countries (PICs) reflecting the diversity of contexts. In broad terms, these contexts range between larger countries that are challenged with providing services to a vast number of communities, and smaller countries where the governments are already working with most or all communities on CBFM. The Status section of the report concludes that the Pacific Islands region has made significant progress in developing and implementing CBFM. However, further action is needed to address persistent challenges, seize emerging opportunities and ensure CBFM is not marginalized or neglected in the face of external pressures. The Outlook section of this report is structured around four themes: (1) governance, tenure and traditional knowledge; (2) interactions and policy coherence with other ocean agendas; (3) sustainable resource management and fisheries administration; and (4) adaptation, livelihoods and resilience. 1 Throughout this report the 14 independent PICs are distinguished as appropriate from the larger grouping that includes the dependent territories (PICTs).

xiv | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific The opportunities identified lead to potential priority actions intended to guide policymakers, practitioners and partners working on advancing sustainable coastal fisheries management in the Pacific Islands. 1. Governance, tenure and traditional knowledge for scaling up community-based fisheries management Fisheries management in the Pacific Islands region is fundamentally shaped by systems of spatial and use rights, blending global frameworks like the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) with deeply rooted customary tenure systems. Most PICs recognize both modern legal and traditional customary rights, especially in coastal waters, where CBFM have long histories. Customary marine tenure (CMT) often provides the foundation for local governance, allowing communities to assert control over access, use and management of their coastal resources. These rights are often expressed through traditional practices such as tabu, tapu, mo, bul, lafu, sa or ra'ui, which regulate access and limit harvesting to some areas or species of the overall customary domains, and are increasingly being integrated into national fisheries policies and legislation. However, the co-existence of customary and statutory systems can be complex, with varying degrees of legal recognition and practical implementation across the Pacific Islands region. These tenure systems rely not only on legal frameworks but also on effective local governance and the strength of local and traditional ecological knowledge (TEK). Many communities continue to use traditional or local knowledge to set fishing rules, manage resources and adapt to changing conditions – even in the absence of support from governments or non-governmental organizations (NGOs). However, challenges remain in ensuring that these systems are adequately recognized, supported and adapted to contemporary needs, especially as new legislation or bureaucratic processes can sometimes undermine community autonomy or create barriers to effective management. The diversity of tenure arrangements, the need for indigenous-led research, dialogue and feedback mechanisms, and the importance of aligning rights with responsibilities are all critical considerations for scaling up and sustaining CBFM. Opportunities and potential priority actions Legal and policy frameworks, and support of customary tenure and community management rights Community-based fisheries management (CBFM) requires clear community user and management rights and PICs need to ensure that fisheries legislation and policy frameworks adequately support user and management rights for coastal communities considering CMT and local marine tenure. These rights enable stewardship by those best placed and most affected, but should be balanced with responsibilities (including for national food security) and adapted to local contexts to avoiding rigid systems that undermine the flexibility of customary practices. ● Strengthen legal and policy frameworks to support CBFM. Where CMT exists, appropriate legal recognition of CMT should be integrated into fisheries legislations, and in all cases clarity should be provided on the rights and roles expected of communities and government agencies in achieving co-management without excessive bureaucratic burden. ● Build on local and traditional ecological knowledge. Traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) of indigenous peoples and local communities is widely recognized but surprisingly undervalued in efforts to scale up CBFM. Communities should be encouraged and supported to apply their own knowledge systems, which often

provide locally relevant and effective solutions. Guidance on prioritizing TEK in CBFM planning and implementation should emphasize respectful engagement, including appropriate free, prior and informed consent processes before documenting and sharing knowledge. It should also avoid undermining traditional governance structures.

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | xv ● Promote indigenous-led dialogue on customary marine tenure. Indigenous-led discussions on CMT and resource governance should be encouraged at national and subnational levels not constrained by modern silos (e.g. fisheries, conservation and climate change) to seek culturally appropriate solutions and ways of interacting with these modern sectors to shape resilient solutions that reflect their values and world views. ● Improve research, monitoring and assessment of tenure and governance. User rights and tenure security are deemed essential to CBFM but there are gaps in assessing the quality and implementation of such rights. Community rights of access, use, management, exclusion and transferability need to be sufficiently assessed to ensure they are adequate to the context – the bundle of rights approach can be a useful tool. ● Safeguard against market-based transfers of user rights. Transfer of user rights such as through marketable quotas, commonly used in offshore fisheries, should be treated with caution (e.g. licensing or permitting) especially with regard to permanent rights. Allowing rights to be traded can lead to loss of community control, and negative impacts on stewardship and rural livelihoods. Advance integrated climatesmart inshore fisheries and biodiversity governance mechanisms The region is a frontrunner in the innovative implementation of ocean rights. Most PICTs have defined preferential access areas (PAAs) that place limitations on the access that industrial offshore fishing is granted to inshore waters. Already proposed in essence by several PICTs, the emerging concept of artisanal stewardship areas (ASAs) that secure exclusive fishing rights for small-scale fishers and communities and improve co-management in inshore waters, is becoming particularly relevant to buffer coastal fisheries from industrial pressures, support sustainable management and contribute to achieving global commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF). ● Improve and enforce PAAs. Preferential access areas that exclude or greatly reduce industrial fishing in inshore zones, should be strengthened and better enforced, if necessary, as a frontline to reduce pressure on critical habitats and avoid competition of industrial fisheries with local community fisheries. The frequency of legal or illegal incursions into coastal waters and the potential impact of extraction of shared stocks by industrial fishers should be investigated. Assessments should also cover enforcement of PAAs and ASAs and evaluate their effectiveness in supporting livelihoods and conservation. ● Explore a transition of PAAs towards ASAs. Moving towards ASAs would provide co-managed zones where small-scale fishers and coastal communities oversee management and conservation efforts and potentially evolve new fishing regimes in the face of climate change. Pacific Island countries (PICs) should consider opportunities that ASAs provide to meet biological and enforcement criteria, exclude industrial fishing entirely, and contribute to SDGs, scaling up CBFM and biodiversity targets. 2. Interactions and policy coherence of scaling up community-based fisheries management with conservation and ocean agendas, including 30x30 Rooted in traditional governance and supported by fisheries agencies and NGOs, CBFM has proven to be the most culturally appropriate and effective approach in a region where coastal areas are largely under CMT and top-down conservation efforts have often failed. Over the past 25 years, PICTs have developed a diverse array of locally managed marine areas (LMMAs) and other community-led initiatives that blend conservation with sustainable use, reflecting both local priorities and evolving regional frameworks. These CBFM approaches have been widely adopted and are now central to regional and national fisheries policies as well as conservation strategies and sustainable development policy, including the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent. Meanwhile, global definitions and targets, such as the push for 30 percent marine protection by 2030 (30x30) under the KMGBF, continue to evolve but are often out of step with the Pacific.

xvi | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific The growing influence of global conservation agendas has raised concerns among Pacific leaders and technical experts. While these targets seem to offer simple strategic guidance and potential funding, they risk overshadowing or

undermining homegrown successes if applied without regard for local realities. Analysis shows that CBFM sites already constitute the majority of officially reported coastal marine protected areas (MPAs) in the Pacific Islands region, and that PICs are wellpositioned to meet global commitments through their existing systems including national progress on scaling up CBFM to their entire coastal populations. The challenge moving forwards is to ensure that global policy coherence supports rather than supplants CBFM, and that new initiatives are integrated with support and build upon the extensive experience and achievements of CBFM to protect coastal fisheries and habitats. This requires ongoing institutional support, careful alignment of funding and priorities, and recognition of the unique governance context of the Pacific Islands region. Opportunities and potential priority actions

Strengthen and showcase Pacific community-based fisheries management leadership Despite the increasing complexity of global conservation and climate agendas, PICs have already demonstrated substantial progress through longestablished, culturally grounded CBFM systems that deliver effective conservation outcomes and resilience at scale.

- Ensure that scaling up and sustaining CBFM is prioritized in national and regional ocean governance investments. The opportunities and challenges generally associated with scaling up CBFM and management of coastal areas have been extensively discussed and the way forward charted for many years. The vital need for adequate and secure budgetary support to maximize coastal resource management, including CBFM efforts, needs to be better reflected in the ocean policy environment. There are risks to biodiversity-rich coastal waters if governments further stretch their limited budgets to cover ambitious, costly and untested new commitments.
- Embrace expertise from the climate change and biodiversity sectors. Community-based fisheries management (CBFM) intersects with food security, biodiversity conservation, environmental management, and climate adaptation and resilience. Better dialogue and coordination between fisheries and environment sectors will enhance the contribution and effectiveness of CBFM approaches at site, subnational and national levels, to achieve community-driven conservation, resource management, climate adaptation and resilience, and enhance livelihood benefits.
- Secure investments from other sectors for ongoing costs of management and enforcement – consider trust funds and sector budget support. The “donor” commitment to increase funding for marine protection risks distracting governments from consolidating the establishment of coastal fisheries management systems based on CBFM that aim to ensure both sustainable livelihoods and healthy ecosystems. However, this also represents a major opportunity as there is an urgent need to explore how aid, as well as donor funding, could most effectively supplement annual government operational budgets in the long term. This includes recurrent costs of implementation of monitoring, control, surveillance and enforcement (MCSE) so that scaling up CBFM can truly secure its potential for stewardship of coastal biodiversity. Trust funds or direct sector support could be starting points for discussion, and the regional and subregional policies would be the logical framework for their design.
- Consider ASAs as fishery and conservation tools. The potential impacts on environmental management, conservation, and climate adaptation and resilience of the lead taken by several PICs to incorporate territorial waters into their conservation commitments, as well as the encouragement provided by the Fisheries Ministers of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States should be more broadly considered. Artisanal stewardship areas (ASAs) offer winwin opportunities for improving coastal livelihoods, strengthening governance and management of critical ecosystems, meeting conservation commitments and accessing philanthropic and donor funding earmarked for Target 3 of the KMGBF (30x30).
- Improve tracking of CBFM, community conservation and protected areas. Tracking and reporting on protected areas and community conservation sites in PICTs should be integrated collaboratively across sectors to ensure the key role of CBFM is reflected and appropriately reported.

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | xvii Ensure global policy agendas align with Pacific realities As global frameworks on biodiversity, climate change and ocean governance continue to expand, it is increasingly important for these agendas to align with Pacific governance systems and strengthen, rather than reshape, the region’s proven, community-driven approaches.

- Promote and facilitate neutral evidence-based discussions of Pacific Island appropriate management and conservation approaches. Experience and evidence in achieving sustainable and productive coastal fisheries as well as

national priorities and their fiscal realities should drive discussions on how best to achieve Target 3 of the KMGBF, other global and regional conservation commitments, and other priorities under the SDGs and the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent. A starting point for strategies should be the experience of CBFM from PICTs, rather than the abstract promotion of expensive tools such as large-scale offshore or fully-protected MPAs. Fisheries ministers have called for further advice and regional agencies should facilitate evidence-based debate – particularly between fisheries and environment agencies. If this is politically sensitive there could be a role for other agencies to act as facilitators. • Caution should be exercised in response to pressures to align Pacific CBFM with new definitions of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs). Most PICs consider CBFM as a legitimate Pacific-appropriate contribution to protected area targets and CBFM comprises the majority of coastal site-based conservation in PICs. While recent definitions of protected areas and OECMs may offer new opportunities, the risks of modifying existing practices may outweigh benefits, therefore, PICs should exercise caution before sacrificing the unique approaches best suited to their special context under pressure from global agendas. Ultimately the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) operates under the national sovereignty principle, with parties deciding what counts as a protected area or OECM within their jurisdiction and reporting accordingly. This is the approach adopted by many developed countries.

3. Sustainable resource management and fisheries administration for successful scaling up of community-based fisheries management Sustainable resource management and particularly fisheries administration are challenged by chronic underfunding, limited staffing and logistical constraints – especially for managing coastal fisheries and supporting CBFM. While national strategies for scaling up and sustaining CBFM have advanced, their implementation is hampered by inadequate operational budgets at both national and subnational levels, with provincial and island offices often lacking the resources to reach remote communities. The reliance on short-term, donor-funded projects which are implemented by NGOs further undermines long-term sustainability, as maintaining support for CBFM frequently competes with other showcase or short-term priorities. Additionally, there is limited financial autonomy, insufficient budget tracking, and a disconnect between policy ambitions and the recurrent funding required to achieve them. Management effectiveness can be improved by selecting and adequately implementing the appropriate fisheries management tools. At the community level, more efforts may be made to ensure that fishery issues are properly diagnosed and that the most appropriate management tools are selected (e.g. gear restrictions, size limits, seasonal closures, etc.). The highest value commercial fisheries such as sea cucumber require government management plans to be strongly enforced as communities are less able to manage these fisheries. Effective management also depends on robust MCSE systems and a commitment to transparency as CBFM aims to foster voluntary compliance through community participation and awareness. Offshore fisheries monitoring and enforcement often receive more attention, but coastal fisheries urgently require adequate budget allocation and dedicated staff, along with tailored approaches that reflect local contexts and relationships. Transparency and accountability are fundamental for building public trust, improving governance, preventing corruption, and ensuring fair and legal use of coastal fisheries. Strategies such as public disclosure of licensing processes, participatory surveillance and accessible information campaigns are essential for improving governance. Enhanced transparency in high-value fisheries, such as sea cucumbers, has the potential to significantly increase economic returns for communities and governments, supporting broader goals of food security, sustainable livelihoods, poverty reduction and resilient fisheries management.

xviii | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific Opportunities and potential priority actions Sustainable financing for community-based fisheries management and coastal fisheries A sustainable, scaled and enforced CBFM system and coastal fisheries management depends on reliable, long-term budgets and staffing arrangements that move beyond short project cycles and ensure resources flow to where they are most needed to sustain ongoing management and services. • Secure long-term budgetary support for coastal fisheries and CBFM. Governments must ensure adequate recurrent budgets and not rely on short-term, donor-driven project cycles. They must establish sustainable financing mechanisms for coastal fisheries management and support CBFM. Dedicated recurrent budgets, flexible

funding frameworks and mechanisms to channel resources to subnational offices are essential to ensure continuity, operational capacity and resilience in fisheries governance. • Embed CBFM in national and subnational institutions. Institutionalizing CBFM within government structures is critical for long-term sustainability. This includes creating permanent positions, absorbing project-funded staff, and ensuring operational budgets for provincial and island offices. Successful examples from Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu demonstrate that embedding CBFM roles in government systems secures continuity and signals commitment. Multi-community or district-level planning models, such as the model envisaged for Tonga's special management areas (SMAs), should be explored to optimize resources and reduce duplication. • Develop strategic scaling up plans with cost-effective criteria. Scaling up CBFM requires clear provincial or national strategies that define staffing needs, roles and budget allocations based on transparent criteria, particularly where only some communities may be selected to benefit. These plans should include workforce development, tailored training programmes aligned to local contexts, and systematic tracking of investments and outcomes. Assessments of cost-effectiveness will strengthen the case for increased government and donor investment and help prioritize resources where they deliver the greatest impact. • Allocate offshore fisheries revenue to support coastal management. Pacific Island countries (PICs) should consider earmarking a proportion (e.g. 3–10 percent) of offshore fisheries revenues, such as tuna access fees, to fund CBFM and the wider functions of coastal fisheries management. Examples from Kiribati and Tuvalu show that reinvesting these revenues can support local governance, compliance activities, poverty reduction and livelihood diversification. Formalizing such allocations would provide predictable funding streams, more equitable or transparent distribution and reduce reliance on external donors. An alignment of offshore and coastal fisheries management objectives would underline PICTs commitment to stewardship of their ocean in line with increasing global recognition, especially if ASAs are adopted. • Leverage community strengths by providing local financing mechanisms. Community financing mechanisms, such as small grants programmes and trust funds, have proven effective in catalysing grassroots action and should be scaled up. These approaches empower local actors, improve ownership and provide flexible, low-cost models for expanding CBFM. Strengthening management effectiveness, institutions and systems Scaling up CBFM requires strong institutions and effective management systems that support fair enforcement, informed decision-making and accountable, communitycentred governance. • Integrate CBFM processes across government sectors and budgets. Integrating CBFM into broader government planning and budgeting – such as environment, disaster preparedness, climate mitigation and agriculture – can unlock new resources and foster cross-sectoral collaboration and cost effectiveness. Shared outreach and transport strategies across ministries can reduce costs and improve service delivery to remote communities. Innovative models, such as Vanuatu's integrated ministry, and Palau's tourism green fee and protected area network, illustrate possible opportunities for cross-sector financing. • Build and fund robust coastal fisheries MCSE systems as an operational backbone for scaling up CBFM. Strengthen coastal MCSE by ensuring sustained funding for dedicated MCSE teams, supporting participatory surveillance, and establishing clear legal authority, safety provisions and training for authorized officers. Monitoring, control, surveillance and enforcement (MCSE) strategies should reinforce voluntary compliance through communications, awareness and fisher participation (including the VADE [voluntary,

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | ix assisted, directed, enforced] model of graduated responses). They should also distinguish between community and non-community rule-breakers to ensure fair and context-appropriate enforcement. Effective MCSE must integrate community involvement, place-based insights and consistent operational capacity to protect coastal ecosystems, sustain livelihoods and underpin successful scaling up of CBFM. • Institutionalize cross-agency enforcement to address external threats. Institutionalize coordinated cross-agency enforcement mechanisms, formalized through mandated, time-bound memorandums of understanding (MOUs) and supported by clear legal mandates, to address major external pressures such as logging, mining, pollution and coastal development that fall outside fisheries or community jurisdiction. Whole-of-government collaboration and highlevel political commitment are essential to ensure that

progress in CBFM is not undermined by unmanaged and severe external threats, to secure coherent protection of coastal fisheries and to support ecosystems across all relevant sectors. • Strengthen community networks and feedback mechanisms. Robust community networks are vital for scaling up CBFM and ensuring that local voices inform policy. Governments and partners should invest in sustaining these networks and institutionalizing two-way communication channels, including national and subnational forums. These systems enhance transparency, accountability and trust, aligning with the SSF Guidelines and human rights-based approaches. • Improve community issue diagnosis and use of appropriate fishery management tools. Community-based fisheries management (CBFM) requires ensuring that communities correctly diagnose their fisheries challenges and select management tools that directly address the issues identified. Governments and partners should ensure clear, accessible guidance and simple diagnostic steps. This would help communities link observed problems – such as declining catches, habitat damage or increased effort – to the most suitable responses, such as gear rules, size limits, seasonal closures, habitat protection or other measures to increase management effectiveness. • Enhance information access, transparency and accountability. National and subnational information strategies should ensure communities receive practical, culturally relevant guidance on fisheries management through cost-effective channels such as radio, social media and community champions. Transparency in licensing, revenue allocation and decision-making processes is essential to reduce corruption risks and build public confidence. Encouraging countries to adopt international standards such as the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI) and embedding anti-corruption measures in governance frameworks will maximize economic returns and strengthen accountability. 4. Scaling up community-based fisheries management for climate change adaptation, sustainable livelihoods and community resilience Climate change has become the most significant force shaping the future of coastal fisheries in the Pacific Islands region, compounding pressures from overfishing and Land-based threats. Communities have shown remarkable resilience in the face of disasters and global shocks, and this should be recognized as a major asset to protect and strengthen. Assisting communities may require addressing both external challenges (including climate change, extreme weather events and global market disruptions) and internal factors (such as social capital, equity and inclusion). The impacts of climate change are projected to be severe, with substantial declines in coastal fish biomass expected by 2050, particularly in areas where fisheries are already overexploited or poorly managed. This underscores the urgent need for climate-ready coastal fisheries management including ecosystem and precautionary approaches, with CBFM recognized as one of the most effective adaptation tools available. Building true resilience means ensuring that all members of society – women, youth and people with disabilities – are meaningfully included in decision-making and equitably benefit from adaptation strategies. Historically, these and some other groups have been marginalized in fisheries governance despite their active roles in fishing, processing and marketing. Recent efforts, guided by regional frameworks and handbooks, are working to embed gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) into national policies and CBFM frameworks. Climate change disproportionately affects those who rely most on vulnerable coastal habitats and face heightened socioeconomic susceptibility, making inclusive adaptation strategies that support diversified and accessible livelihoods essential to

xx | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific ensure that no one is left behind. The new Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture Climate Change Strategy of the Pacific Community (SPC), the Framework for Action and regional GEDSI handbooks provide important guidance. Governments, communities and NGOs have experimented with a wide range of livelihood diversification and income-generating initiatives. These efforts have included promoting alternative fisheries, introducing new fishing techniques, developing aquaculture, installing fish aggregating devices (FADs) and supporting market access and value chain improvements. While some efforts have shown promise, particularly those closely linked to fisheries and local market realities, many have struggled to deliver lasting economic benefits or prove scalable without ongoing external support. The experiences to date highlight the importance of context-specific planning and realistic market assessments. They also underline the vital role of sustained collaboration between communities, government agencies and the private sector to

ensure that new livelihood opportunities genuinely contribute to both household incomes and the sustainable management of coastal resources – and that any long-term support requirements are addressed. Opportunities and potential priority actions

Climate-ready coastal fisheries management and habitat stewardship Building climate resilience begins with strengthening the management systems and ecological foundations that support coastal fisheries.

- Accelerate implementation of the Framework for Action as a key response to climate change. Establishing robust, sustainable management systems that can function under climate stress, and ensuring communities have the authority, support and tools to manage emerging challenges form the basis for climate adaptation and resilient communities.
- Emphasize the protection and restoration of coastal habitats. The ecosystems that underpin coastal fisheries – coral reefs, mangroves and seagrass meadows – and the societal benefits they provide are increasingly vulnerable to climate change. Community-based fisheries management (CBFM) approaches should place increased emphasis on experiences piloted as “ridge to reef ” or integrated coastal management. They must integrate stewardship of entire habitats, include greater government efforts, where feasible, to reduce land-based pressures, prevent destructive practices and support habitat restoration in order to sustain coastal fisheries and provide natural buffers against climate impacts.
- Improve cost-effective data, monitoring and evidence-informed decision-making. Tracking and monitoring the outcomes of management is important for informing both communities and government on the effectiveness of their chosen strategies but also vital to detect emerging climate vulnerability and impacts. Community-based fisheries management (CBFM) monitoring approaches should be selected based on feasibility and simplicity to ensure they can be maintained. Outcomes should not focus only on the biological, but also on the intended livelihood benefits and climate vulnerability. Climate change and other external shocks increase variability and uncertainty, increasing the need to track emerging issues. Community-based fisheries management (CBFM) provides the local ability needed for at least simple monitoring and reporting on emerging issues, which may not require scientific surveys. National systems need to be specifically developed to gain early warning of emerging issues and assess the effectiveness of local and national management strategies. Such systems need to provide practical, fit-for-purpose information that supports timely decisions.
- Invest in interinstitutional collaboration and networking. Climate change, disasters and global shocks challenge all sectors and segments of society alike. Better coordination and collaboration across agencies, communities and civil society, including through networks and partnerships, is important in preparing for and responding to disasters and other global shocks (e.g. the COVID-19 pandemic or the global financial crisis).
- Diversify climate-resilient food systems for communities. With the decline of coastal fisheries targeting coral reef species, some fishing effort should be shifted towards pelagic species through the deployment of inshore FADs. Improved post-harvest handling and value adding can further increase resilience by reducing losses and stabilizing supply, but the attraction of commercial activity should not distract from the fundamental food security and nutritional importance of sustainable coastal fisheries.

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | xxi Social inclusion and community resilience (Community-based fisheries management that is responsive to gender equality, disability and social inclusion) Resilient communities require inclusive governance systems that ensure all people can participate in and benefit from CBFM.

- Ensure social inclusion for equity and improved resilience. Improved involvement of women, youth, people with disabilities and marginalized groups – who are major participants in coastal fisheries and are often the most affected by climate change – will ensure equity, reduce potential conflict and likely strengthen resilient management. Gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) should be institutionalized in CBFM systems through information, awareness and feedback mechanisms, as well as through support networks or coalitions that amplify marginalized voices. Particular focus areas include MCSE and tracking CBFM coverage and disaster response to reduce the risk of disproportionate livelihood and food security risks for the most vulnerable groups. Sustainable and climate-resilient livelihoods and food systems Climate adaptation must support viable, locally appropriate livelihoods that strengthen food security without undermining coastal ecosystems.
- Focus on fisheries-linked livelihoods. Fisheries administrations and partners should play to their strengths and

expertise, prioritizing activities directly related to fisheries and the market chain. This may include activities normally associated with fisheries extension, like targeting new fishing activities, improving techniques and practices, enhancing market access and financial returns, strengthening value chains and management, and/or restoring productive fisheries. • Be cautious in approaches to livelihood diversification. Projects not linked to fisheries (e.g. agriculture and ecotourism) are often promoted to reduce pressure on coastal fisheries, but evidence of their long-term success is limited. Investment should be guided by realistic assessments of viability, scalability and community context. All livelihood initiatives should undergo strategic cost–benefit and value chain analyses to ensure realistic expectations about long-term costs, risks and the level of sustained support required. • Fully implement and sustain inshore fish aggregating devices (iFADs). Inshore fish aggregating devices (iFADs) are among the most promising innovations for food security and income generation, and the Pacific Islands region has now accumulated substantial experience in their deployment. It is important to ensure appropriate governance and policies at national and subnational levels and allocate regular operational budgets for deployment and maintenance. It is equally essential to integrate FAD programmes with CBFM and extension work, clarify roles and responsibilities between communities and agencies, partner with other rural development agencies for shared benefits and ensure ongoing monitoring, data collection and evaluation. • Undertake value chain approaches and assessments. Strengthening coastal fisheries value chains, from harvest to processing and marketing, can significantly improve local livelihood benefits. Value chain assessments should be used to identify bottlenecks and opportunities, and findings should be implemented to avoid pursuing unfeasible projects or impacting the sustainability of resources. Sea cucumber fisheries present many opportunities to increase value added through selective harvesting of species, improved product quality and more robust governance. • Assess aquaculture carefully and plan realistically. Aquaculture has consistently fallen short of its potential and remains high risk and demanding. Most community-level initiatives have not met expectations and may be considered overpromoted. Aquaculture and hatcheries should not be pursued at the expense of robust coastal fisheries management or technologies with a proven track record such as FADs. Aquaculture projects require impartial, context-specific assessment and planning, thorough market appraisals and cost-benefit analyses. They should also be integrated with broader economic development and coastal management plans and involve greater participation from the private sector as co-investing partners. Risks associated with community aquaculture such as deepening inequities, displacing traditional livelihoods, undermining customary tenure and weakening community cohesion should be assessed and mitigated. Success depends on early economic support, recognition of local traditions and social structures, and the creation of context-specific governance systems.

xxii | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific Image Lorenzo Catena, © SPC

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 1 1. Introduction 1.1 Purpose of the report The Pacific Islands region is renowned for its customary, community-based and fisheries co-management approaches that support sustainable resource use and conservation, while also preserving culture and livelihoods. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is supporting the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines),² and seeks to align policies at all levels and ensure the participation and empowerment of small-scale fishing actors and communities. Investing in the existing regional platform for community-based fisheries management (CBFM) and the Pacific Framework for Action on Scaling up Community-based Fisheries Management: 2021–2030 (the Framework for Action) is the region's designated approach to achieving coastal fisheries management and, at the same time, the most strategic means of advancing the SSF Guidelines. Through a partnership between FAO and the Pacific Community (SPC), this report seeks to examine the current status of scaling up CBFM in the Pacific Islands region. It outlines some of the key areas of progress and major challenges and identifies opportunities and potential ways forward. The report is intended to benefit national and regional fisheries stakeholders, global partners such as donors and philanthropic organizations, as well as the wider global community, as approaches may be replicated, adapted or scaled up in other regions. The report begins with an introduction that outlines key features of the region. This is followed by the Status

section which assesses progress, achievements and emerging challenges in relation to the Framework for Action. The Outlook section then examines major challenges and opportunities, and presents strategic priority actions. Specific examples are provided in boxes, and six more detailed experiences are presented as case studies. 2 <https://www.fao.org/voluntary-guidelines-small-scale-fisheries/en>

2 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific 1.2 The Pacific Islands The Pacific Islands region consists of 14 independent Pacific Islands countries (PICs)³ and 8 dependent territories, collectively known as Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs). These have jurisdiction over approximately 28 million square kilometres of ocean in their combined exclusive economic zones (EEZs), territorial seas and internal waters. In addition to being dispersed over a huge ocean area, the region's PICTs are both physically and sociopolitically highly diverse and dynamic. Recent population estimates indicate 14.3 million people in the PICTs; with 87 percent of the region's total population living in just three of the Melanesian PICs (75 percent in Papua New Guinea, 7 percent in Fiji and 6 percent in Solomon Islands). Of the 22 PICTs, 11 have a population of less than 50 000 (Table 1). Among the PICTs, some countries are still resolving basic human development needs and are classified by the United Nations as Least Developed Countries (including Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu), while others do not fall within this category but remain developing countries facing persistent development constraints (including the Federated States of Micronesia, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu) (United Nations Committee for Development Policy, 2019). This is reflected in limited access to basic services – with large proportions of the Pacific population lacking access to basic sanitation and drinking water – and progress towards universal access remaining offtrack across much of the region (UNICEF, 2023). Other countries demonstrate comparatively stronger human development outcomes and fall within the high human development category (e.g. Fiji, the Marshall Islands, Samoa and Tonga), as measured by the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2025). The dependent territories are supported by the very highly developed metropolitan states (Australia, France, New Zealand, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America) (United Nations Committee for Development Policy, 2019). Population growth rates vary from some of the highest in the world (above 2 percent in the larger countries), to negative Figure 1. The Pacific Islands region showing the exclusive economic zone for each Pacific Island country and territory, and the cultural subregions Note: Depictions are illustrative only and without prejudice to maritime boundaries or State claims. Source: Johnson J.E. & Wabnitz C.C.C., eds. 2025. Climate change implications for fisheries and aquaculture in the Pacific Islands region. Noumea, SPC <https://www.spc.int/digitalibrary/get/aj7sx> 3 The FAO Subregional Office for the Pacific Islands (SAP) serves 13 of these; the Cook Islands, Fiji, the Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. The territory of Tokelau is an Associate Member. Membership of the SPC is broader, including the Pacific Island nation of Papua New Guinea and eight territories.

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 3 in the more developed and smaller countries and territories. With the exception of Papua New Guinea, more than 90 percent of the population lives within 5 km of the coast (Andrew et al., 2019). The Pacific Islands region is renowned for its exceptionally rich and biodiverse marine life, encompassing a high percentage of endemic species and globally important coral reef and mangrove habitats (Jupiter et al., 2014). This biological richness is more than matched by the cultural and human diversity evidenced by over one thousand different ethnic groups and languages. This high ethnic and biological diversity is contributed in large part by the Melanesian countries which rank among the most bioculturally diverse in the world (Harmon and Loh 2004; Loh and Harmon 2005). The heterogeneity of the Pacific Islands means that statements about the region taken as a whole do not accurately reflect the realities of individual islands or countries (Table 1). Table 1. Pacific Island countries and territories showing population, land area, rural population, proximity to the coast, development status, languages and biocultural diversity

Country or territory	2025 est. population ⁱ	Land area (km ²)	Rural population % ⁱⁱ	% 5km [†] , ⁱⁱⁱ	Human Development Index ^{iv}	Development category	No. languages ^v	Biocultural diversity ranking ^{vi}
Melanesia	931024	18333	40.8	76	0.731	High	3	101
Fiji*	931024	18333	40.8	76	0.731	High	3	101
New Caledonia~	294010	18576	26.9	90	Very high	28	22	Papua New Guinea
	10669942	462840	86.1	21	0.576			

Medium 750 1 Solomon Islands* 828857 28230 73.5 91 0.584 Medium 63 6 Vanuatu* 331470 12281 73.9 94 0.621 Medium 105 17 Micronesia Micronesia (Federated States of)* 113428 701 76.4 100 0.615 Medium 11 55 Guam~ 168399 541 4.8 97 Very high 2 183 Kiribati* 135509 811 41.6 100 0.644 Medium 1 208 Marshall Islands* 36914 181 20.8 100 0.733 High 1 211 Nauru* 11988 21 0.0 100 0.703 High 1 167 Northern Mariana Islands~ 43887 457 7.8 100 Very high 2 - Palau* 17684 444 17.2 100 0.786 High 1 58 Polynesia American Samoa~ 46389 199 12.7 100 Very high 1 - Cook Islands 13491 237 n/a 100 Very high 3 106 French Polynesia~ 282147 3521 37.6 100 Very high 5 - Niue* 1822 259 n/a 83 Very high 1 - Pitcairn~ n/a 47 n/a 100 Very high 1 - Samoa* 218697 2934 82.6 97 0.708 High 1 170 Tokelau*~ 2560 12 n/a 100 Very high 1 - Tonga* 103972 749 76.8 100 0.769 High 2 129 Tuvalu* 9564 26 33.1 100 0.689 Medium 2 156 Wallis and Futuna~ 11235 142 n/a 100 Very high 2 - Total 14272989 551542 47 987 Notes: *Served by the FAO Subregional Office for the Pacific Islands (SAP); ~ territories and dependencies; and †proportion of population living within 5 km of the coast Sources: iSPC pocket summary. 2025. Pocket Book Summary 2025. [Accessed on 31 October 2025]. <https://pacificdata.org/data/fr/dataset/pocket-summary-latest>; iiWorld Bank. 2025. World Development Indicators. [Accessed on 7 July 2025]. <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators>; iiiAndrew, N.L., Bright, P., De La Rua, L., Teoh, S.J. & Vickers, M. 2019. Coastal proximity of populations in 22 Pacific Island Countries and Territories. *PLoS One*, 14(9): 0223249; ivUNDP. 2025. Human Development Report 2025: A matter of choice: People and possibilities in the age of AI. New York, USA. <https://hdr.undp.org/content/human-development-report-2025>; vLynch, J. 1998. Pacific languages: An introduction. Honolulu, USA, University of Hawaii Press. <https://manifold.uhpress.hawaii.edu/projects/pacific-languages>; viHarmon D. & Loh. J. 2004. A Global Index of Biocultural Diversity. Discussion Paper for the International Congress on Ethnobiology. Kent, UK, University of Kent. https://terralingua.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/IBCD_ICE1.pdf

4 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific Pacific Island countries (PICs) are some of the most remote from global centres of economic activity. This has a significant bearing on their economic characteristics and on the vulnerability profile of households. Very small, relatively low-income populations are insufficient for the development and growth of many domestic industries, with small markets impeding economies of scale and leading to a higher price environment. Extreme geographical remoteness elevates the costs of international trade which highly constrains the engagement of local businesses in competitive export markets for local produce (Cororaton and Knight, 2014). Pacific Island countries (PICs) are also ranked among the most distant from financing sources and cultural-political centres, and are the least digitally and politically connected of all Small Island Developing States (CantuBazaldua, 2021). The origins of the thriving populations of the Pacific Islands can be traced to a masterful use of the ocean for transport, as well as to the development of cultures and economies in which the ocean is central to island life. Global surveys indicate that PICs are among the most dependent on oceans and marine ecosystems in the world (Selig et al., 2019). Interaction with the world's largest ocean is integral to nutrition, revenue, jobs and national economies (Table 2). Atoll countries have some of the highest seafood consumption rates in the world, and together with rural areas in general, have limited access to alternative protein sources. This source of "healthy protein", compared with nutritionally poor imported foods that are increasingly present in PICT diets, is critical to addressing the growing health burden posed by noncommunicable diseases in the region (Charlton et al., 2016).

1.3 The Pacific Ocean and fisheries Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs) have jurisdiction over approximately 28 million square kilometres of ocean in their combined EEZs. This area comprises 8 percent of the global ocean, 20 percent of the global EEZs and 25 percent of the world's coral reefs (Burke et al., 2011). This vast ocean domain contrasts markedly with the small, combined land mass of just over half a million square kilometres (Table 3, Figure 5). The fisheries sector, followed by tourism in some PICTs, are the two major blue economy sectors in the Pacific Islands. Two major categories of fishing are usually distinguished: offshore and coastal (Gillett and Tauati, 2018).

a. Offshore fishing. Mainly carried out by large, industrial-scale vessels targeting tuna. It constitutes most of the volume and a very large share of the

value of total fisheries catches. Although often operating more than 12 nautical miles from shore, these fisheries are managed at two complementary scales: (1) the regional scale of the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) – which includes both the EEZs of all coastal states and the high Overall dependence Nutrition Economy Jobs Revenues Kiribati 2 2 2 1 4 Tuvalu 5 8 1 n/d 1 Palau 6 6 7 2 13 Marshall Islands 8 n/d 4 3 3 Micronesia (Federated States of) 10 16 8 52 6 Nauru 12 9 5 4 5 Solomon Islands 15 3 24 29 20 Vanuatu 25 15 23 38 16 Fiji 35 33 13 9 15 Samoa 40 32 29 22 36 Cook Islands 59 23 46 n/d 40 Tonga 62 n/d 34 39 29 Niue n/d n/d n/d n/d n/d Notes: ranking includes 200 countries; n/d=no data Source: Selig, E.R., Hole, D.G., Allison, E.H., Arkema, K.K., McKinnon, M.C., Chu, J., de Sherbinin, A., Fisher, B., Glew, L., Holland, M.B. & Ingram, J.C. 2019. Mapping global human dependence on marine ecosystems. *Conservation Letters*, 12(2): 12617. Table 2. Global ranking of Pacific Island countries' dependence on marine ecosystems in relation to nutrition, the economy, jobs and revenue

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 5 Source: Johnson J.E., Wabnitz C.C.C. (Eds). (2025) *Climate change implications for fisheries and aquaculture in the Pacific Islands region*. Noumea, New Caledonia, Pacific Community (SPC). 626 p. <https://www.spc.int/digitalibrary/get/aj7sx> CMZ 123 Skipjack tuna Yellow n tuna Albacore tuna Bigeye tuna Dolphin sh Broadbill sword sh Marlin Purse-seining Fisheries species Harvesting methods Longlining Sharks Pole-and-line shing Drifting sh aggregating device CMZ 123 seas – under the framework of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission; and (2) the level of national jurisdiction within the EEZs of PICTs, where coastal states exercise sovereign control over access. Importantly, most WCPO tuna catch occurs inside the EEZs of PICTs, not on the high seas. This makes offshore fisheries a major revenue source for Pacific Island governments through licence fees and access payments, especially via the Vessel Day Scheme. Offshore fishery is carried out principally by two industrial vessel types (Vidal and Ruaia, 2025):

- Purse seine fisheries are the most important offshore fishery and dominate tuna catches within the EEZs of PICTs. In 2024, purse seine vessels caught about 71 percent of all tuna in the WCPO, most inside the EEZs of PICTs, which contain the most productive skipjack fishing grounds in the world. Purse seine fleets primarily target skipjack (~83 percent of their catch), with yellowfin (~15 percent) and bigeye (~2 percent) contributing smaller shares. The regional purse seine fleet comprised approximately 247 vessels, of which 142 vessels were Pacific-Island-flagged. These domestically flagged fleets now catch roughly half of the entire WCPO purse seine catch – almost all of it inside the EEZs of PICTs. This is a dramatic shift from earlier decades when distant-water fishing nations dominated purse seine activity. The concentration of effort inside the EEZs of PICTs makes this fishery the most significant source of government revenue for many Pacific Island states through licence fees and access arrangements.
- Longline fisheries. While far more numerous, the vessels contribute much smaller volumes inside the EEZs of PICTs. In 2024, the WCPO longline fleet consisted of around 2 308 vessels, which caught about 8 percent of total WCPO tuna catch. Longliners target highvalue species, particularly albacore, yellowfin and bigeye, destined for sashimi and freshfrozen export markets. A smaller subset of this large WCPO fleet regularly operates inside the EEZs of PICTs, and where they do, the amount of tuna landed can be significant. Pacific Island domestic longline fleets, now account for approximately 50–60 percent of all South Pacific albacore longline catch, nearly all taken inside the EEZs of PICTs. This marks a substantial and sustained expansion of locally-based longline industries, and brings increasing economic benefits, port development and employment for PICTs. Figure 2. Offshore fishing: purse-seining, longlining, pole and-line fishing and FAD.

6 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific Land area (km²) Coastline (km) Exclusive economic zone (km²) ‡ Inshore fishing area (km²) § Melanesia Fiji* 18333 4638 1300509 43299 New Caledonia† 18576 3624 1197584 36464 Papua New Guinea 462840 20197 2862319 146204 Solomon Islands* 28230 9880 1630895 29701 Vanuatu* 12281 3132 638577 8233 Micronesia Micronesia (Federated States of)* 701 1295 3009802 16587 Guam† 541 126 208784 216 Kiribati* 811 1961 3440952 6809 Marshall Islands* 181 2106 2002933 20561 Nauru* 21 30 308952 13 Northern Mariana Islands† 457 1482 764064 825 Palau* 444 1519 616021 2990 Polynesia American Samoa† 199 116 406072 490 Cook Islands 237 120 1969961 1213 French Polynesia† 3521 5830 4775042 26469 Niue* 259 64 321018 70

Pitcairn† 47 51 842381 27 Samoa* 2934 463 133348 2004 Tokelau*† 12 101 320647 279 Tonga* 749 909 664453 7760 Tuvalu* 26 24 753139 1414 Wallis and Futuna Islands† 142 129 262823 483 Total 551542 57797 28430276 352112 Notes: Figures are indicative only and without prejudice to maritime boundaries or State claims. *Served by the FAO Subregional Office for the Pacific Islands; †territories and dependencies; ‡ exclusive economic zone: 200 nm from the baseline; and §an estimate of the area available for coastal fishing, inshore fishing area is defined as the area up to 50 km from shore or 200 m depth, whichever comes first and occur only along inhabited coastlines or islands – the resolution is ½° x ½° grid cells. Sources: Authors' own elaboration based on data from: SPC. 2025. Pacific Maritime Boundaries Dashboard. [Accessed in November 2025]. <https://pacificdata.org/dashboard/maritime-boundaries>; Chuenpagdee, R., Liguori, L., Palomares, M.L. & Pauly, D. 2006. Bottom-up, global estimates of small-scale marine fisheries catches. Fisheries Centre Research Reports, 14(8). Vancouver, Canada, University of British Columbia; and Pauly, D. Zeller, D. & Palomares, M.L.D., eds. 2020. Sea Around Us Concepts, Design and Data. [Data provided 15 January 2015]. <http://searoundus.org/> Table 3. Pacific Island countries and territories, and ocean domain: land area, coastline, exclusive economic zone and inshore fishing area •Other offshore gears play relatively small roles inside the EEZs of PICTs. The once-important pole-and-line fishery is today almost entirely limited to Japanese and Indonesian fleets, with negligible Pacific Island domestic participation in 2024 and limited operations inside PICT waters. b. Coastal fishing. This category encompasses artisanal or small-scale fisheries in the PICTs. Fishing activities are generally conducted between the shoreline and the outer reefs. Coastal fishers harvest multiple species i.e. a very diverse range of finfish, invertebrates and algae across a variety of habitats. Unlike the tuna fishery, virtually all the coastal catch is taken by Pacific Islanders themselves, with very little access by foreign fishing vessels (Gillett and Fong, 2023). Coastal fishing is categorized as: • Coastal commercial fishing. Catches are sold from fishing operations in lagoon, reef, deepslope or shallow sea areas caught from small vessels, diving and hand capture for domestic or export markets. In descending order, valuable export fisheries include sea cucumbers, trochus, fish, pearl oysters and aquarium species.

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 7 • Coastal subsistence fishing. Catches are consumed by fishers, given to family or friends, or used to meet social obligations. This is very important in rural areas and often does not involve a vessel, however, catches can be sold on an opportunistic basis. This category also includes recreational fishing. The most recent estimates of total fishery production (offshore and coastal) suggest some 1.56 million tonnes, equating to approximately USD 2.50 billion, were caught in the 22 PICTs in 2021. Offshore industrial fisheries, mainly tuna, accounted for 87 percent of the volume and an estimated 82 percent of the value (Figure 6). Importantly, coastal fisheries provide the vast majority of fish for consumption by the population, while almost all the production from offshore fisheries in the region is shipped overseas (Gillett and Cartwright, 2023). The small-scale, labourintensive coastal fisheries of PICTs generate proportionally higher domestic value added than the largely foreignowned offshore tuna fleets and coastal fisheries, and thus make a bigger contribution to gross domestic product (GDP) than offshore fisheries. Nevertheless, offshore fisheries generate impressive figures in terms of volume and cash income. They attract the most attention largely because access fees from foreign tuna vessels make up a major share of government revenue – contributing half or more of total revenue in Kiribati, Tokelau and Tuvalu, and around 20–25 percent in the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, Palau and Solomon Islands, with Nauru somewhat higher at roughly one third (Gillett and Fong, 2023). Despite decades of investment in aquaculture across the Pacific Islands region, overall production value has declined since 2007, mainly due to falling international prices for black pearls – the commodity that historically accounts for most of the region's aquaculture value. Excluding the commercially significant shrimp and pearl industries in the French Figure 4. Relative area of land, ocean and inshore fishing areas of Pacific Island countries and territories Sources: Authors' own elaboration based on data from SPC. 2025. Pacific Maritime Boundaries Dashboard. [Accessed in November 2025]. <https://pacificdata.org/dashboard/maritime-boundaries>; Chuenpagdee, R., Liguori, L., Palomares, M.L. & Pauly, D. 2006. Bottom-up, global estimates of

small-scale marine fisheries catches. Fisheries Centre Research Reports, 14(8). Vancouver, Canada, University of British Columbia; and Pauly, D. Zeller, D. & Palomares, M.L.D., eds. 2020. Sea Around Us Concepts, Design and Data. [Data provided 15 January 2015]. <http://seararoundus.org/> Exclusive economic zone (EEZ) 28 millions km² Inshore shing area 0.35 millions km² Land area 0.55 millions km² ■ ■ ■ Fisheries species Reef and other demersal sh Sea cucumber Mangrove crab Nearshore pelagic sh Harvest methods Line shing Cast netting Spear shing Gleaning Hand collecting Source: Johnson J.E., Wabnitz C.C.C. (Eds). (2025) Climate change implications for fisheries and aquaculture in the Pacific Islands region. Noumea, New Caledonia, Pacific Community (SPC). 626 p. <https://www.spc.int/digitalibrary/get/aj7sx> Figure 3. Coastal fishing: line fishing, cast netting, spear fishing, gleaning, hand collecting.

8 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific territories, aquaculture in the independent PICTs remains largely small-scale and its total value is modest, at around USD 10 million per year (Gillett and Fong, 2023; Mori et al., 2023; Hambrey et al., 2011). Freshwater fisheries are much less important and constitute less than 2 percent of regional landings. They are only relatively important in Papua New Guinea – which accounts for 80 percent of regional freshwater fisheries value and volume – and are much less significant in Fiji and Solomon Islands (Gehrke et al., 2025).

1.4 Coastal fisheries and threats Dependence on coastal waters and resources for food, income and cultural identity is high across Pacific villages and communities in rural coastal areas where most of the population live (World Bank, 2025). Coastal fisheries themselves occur in a narrow fringe of coastal waters comprising less than 1.25 percent of the total ocean area (Figure 5) and within which most people interact and rely on for daily food (Govan et al., 2024). This narrow coastal fringe harbours the largest proportion of the region’s marine biodiversity, including highly productive habitats such as coral reefs, mangroves and seagrass beds (Section 3.4). Coastal fisheries (subsistence and commercial) provide nearly 60 percent of the fisheries contribution to GDP (Figure 6) and are particularly important for Pacific Island culture and social obligations. Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands are together responsible for 61 percent of all coastal fisheries production in the region (Figure 7). Around two thirds of coastal fisheries catches are for subsistence, though the more developed PICTs have proportionally less coastal subsistence than coastal commercial catch (Gillett and Fong, 2023). Fiji, French Polynesia, Samoa and Tonga report substantial commercial coastal fisheries. Some subsistence fishers are likely to sell fish if the opportunity arises, although transport and access to markets pose some of the major obstacles. Broadly speaking, coastal fisheries comprise around 55 percent demersal or reef fish, 28 percent pelagic fish and 17 percent seabeddwelling invertebrates. However, this varies greatly between countries and locations (SPC, 2013), with consolidated regional information on the composition of coastal fisheries landings out of date and challenging to collate. Fish from the following families tend to be most prevalent: emperors, surgeonfish, snappers, jacks/scads, groupers, mullets, parrotfish tuna/ mackerels, goatfish and rabbitfish. Invertebrate species of particular importance include holothurians (sea cucumbers), tridacnid clams, trochus, mangrove crabs, lobsters, octopus, various small gastropods and bivalves (Dalzell and Schug, 2002; SPC, 2013; Govan et al., 2011). For illustrative purposes, data from seven PICTs indicate that 64 percent of the households use hook and line, 35 percent use nets, 25 percent use gathering and 22 percent use spear. Sixty-six per cent of households fish inshore, Figure 5. Share of regional fishery production volume (left) and estimated contribution to gross domestic product (right) for the various fishery categories in 2021 Source: Adapted from Gillett, R.E. & Fong, M. 2023. Fisheries in the economies of Pacific Island countries and territories (Benefish Study 4). Noumea, SPC. <https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/ppizh>

Category	Production Volume (t)	Contribution to GDP (%)
O shore	1 351 932	87%
O shore locally based	USD187 824 793	30%
Coastal commercial	49 963	3%
Coastal commercial	USD 111 398 570	18%
Freshwater	29 723	2%
Freshwater	USD 42 524 588	7%
Aquaculture	USD 37 879 957	2%
Coastal subsistence	123 961	8%
Coastal subsistence	USD 242 141 517	39%

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 9 33 percent offshore and 6 percent make use of anchored nearshore fish aggregating devices (FADs) (SPC, 2024b). Coastal fishing contributes most locally consumed fish (though in some places there are contributions from offshore fishing including tinned fish, fish discards and bycatch). Most of the PICTs are reported to exceed the

world average per capita fishery product consumption rate of 20.5 kg by a considerable margin (Figure 8). Fish consumption varies greatly, being generally much higher in atoll nations (up to 150–200 kg per capita per year) and lower in more affluent or larger countries with significant inland populations (Gillett and Fong, 2023). Estimates suggest that fish rich in protein, essential fatty acids, vitamins and minerals provide 50–90 percent of dietary animal protein in rural areas across many PICTs (Bell et al., 2011). Considering the high prevalence of noncommunicable diseases in the region (Charlton et al., 2016), it is important to maintain this source of “healthy protein” as an alternative to nutritionally poor imported foods, which increasingly form part of PICT diets. Coastal fisheries also proved their importance as a vital safety net for many remote communities during the COVID-19 restrictions (Section 3.3). Up to three quarters of rural households participate in coastal fishing, although the proportion varies greatly across PICTs. Coastal fishing is primarily a subsistence activity to provide fish and invertebrates for household consumption. However, up to 30 percent of households may sell fish domestically (SPC, 2024b), and some coastal invertebrates (e.g. sea cucumbers and trochus) and fish (e.g. groupers and snappers) may also be exported. Other important activities, such as tourism and cultural obligations that contribute to social cohesion, rely on the availability of coastal fisheries and are linked to the healthy functioning of the ecosystems on which they depend. This importance may be increasingly undervalued given the difficulty in placing a monetary value on subsistence fisheries due to the nonsubstitutability of fishing activities (Hoegh-Guldberg et al., 2016) and their centrality to Pacific Island worldviews (Hau’ofa, 2008).

Production (tonnes) Coastal commercial Coastal subsistence

	Papua New Guinea	Fiji	Solomon Islands	Kiribati	Samoa	Tonga	French Polynesia	New Caledonia	Fed. States of Micronesia	Vanuatu	Marshall Islands	Palau	Tuvalu	Cook Islands	Northern Mariana Isl.	Tokelau	Wallis and Futuna	Nauru	Niue	American Samoa	Guam	Pitcairn
50,000	45,000	40,000	35,000	30,000	25,000	20,000	15,000	10,000	5,000	0												

Source: Adapted from Gillett, R.E. & Cartwright, I. 2023. The coastal fisheries findings and policy implications of the Benefish Study 4. Noumea, SPC. <https://www.spc.int/digitalibrary/get/wmzhb> Figure 6. The volume of coastal commercial and subsistence catches in 2021 in each Pacific Island country and territory

10 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific Coastal fisheries resources may become particularly important in remote Pacific Island communities in the aftermath of disasters such as increasingly destructive cyclones (Eriksson et al., 2017). The overall status of coastal fisheries resources is difficult to determine at both regional and national levels, largely because of the diversity of species, fisheries and countries, as well as the challenges of monitoring and assessment (SPC, 2025; SPC CFAP, 2024). There are mixed or no reports for most species, but a clear trend is that commercially valuable coastal fishery resources – such as sea cucumbers, giant clams, live aquarium species, trochuses, green snails and pearl oysters – have in most localities been heavily or completely overfished (SPC, 2022; CFWG, 2019). Overfishing is attributed to population growth, need for cash income in coastal communities, greater demand for export commodities, increased access to modern fishing gear and a lack of alternative livelihoods (Welch et al., 2025). Gillett and Fong (2023) note that overall, an increase in population over recent decades has not been matched by coastal fisheries production and the resulting notable decline in consumption rate (per capita) suggests fisheries are at their limits. In addition to overfishing, regional practitioners identify sewage, pollution, siltation from land-based activities (logging, mining and agriculture), excessive coastal development, land reclamation, mangrove clearing and beach mining as major threats to coastal fisheries. Emerging threats include ocean warming and acidification which may exacerbate existing threats (SPC, 2025). The most comprehensive recent review also highlighted that these threats are compounded by local destructive fishing practices and larger-scale disturbances caused by “natural” events, such as cyclones and outbreaks of the coral feeding crownofthorns starfish – as well the increasing frequency of massbleaching of hard corals which is expected to rise further as a result of global warming (Welch et al., 2025). While the complete overfishing of commercial species has clear local economic impacts, other ecosystem threats have serious implications for the resource base and food security, but are much harder to track.

	Low estimate	High estimate	Papua New Guinea	Fiji	Solomon Islands	Kiribati	Samoa	Tonga	French Polynesia	New Caledonia	Fed. States of Micronesia	Vanuatu	Marshall Islands
Kilograms/person/year	250	200	150	100	50	0							

Palau Tuvalu Cook Islands Northern Mariana Isl. Tokelau Wallis and Futuna Nauru Niue American Samoa Guam Source: Adapted from Gillett, R.E. & Fong, M. 2023. Fisheries in the economies of Pacific Island countries and territories (Benefish Study 4). Noumea. SPC. <https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/ppizh> Figure 7. Ranges in estimates of annual per capita fish consumption for Pacific Island countries and territories

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 11 1.5 Institutional and policy context for small-scale and coastal fisheries The global, regional and national policy context affecting coastal fisheries has evolved rapidly and has been the subject of several reviews, notably by FAO (Govan, 2018), SPC (Govan, 2015; Adams, 2022; Govan and Lalavanua, 2023; Govan et al., 2024) and academic authors (Gourlie et al., 2017; Karcher et al., 2020). This section draws particularly on the SPC and FAO reviews. The Pacific Islands region has prominent regional intergovernmental organizations, most of which have a technical and policymaking role, with one organization playing a primarily political role. The four main bodies involved in fisheries are: (i) The SPC division of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Marine Ecosystems (FAME) provides the 22 PICTs with scientific information (both for offshore and inshore/coastal fisheries) and supports the management and development (specifically for coastal fisheries) of their aquatic resources. The Fisheries, Aquaculture and Marine Ecosystems (FAME) division of SPC is the only regional intergovernmental organization that provides specific permanent support for coastal fisheries. The Committee of Representatives of Governments and Administrations is the governing body of SPC. Within this structure, FAME is governed by the Heads of Fisheries Meeting which brings together national fisheries directors and senior officials and receives technical inputs, including from Regional Technical Meetings on Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture. Endorsed by the Pacific Fisheries Ministers, the community-based fisheries dialogue (CBFD) started in 2021 to serve as a platform for civil society organizations (CSOs) and other non-state actors involved in community-based fisheries to provide advice to Regional Technical Meetings on Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture with a view to informing the Heads of Fisheries Meeting and subsequently the Regional Fisheries Ministers Meeting (RFMM) (SPC, 2025). (ii) Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) assists its 17 member countries and 1 territory in matters dealing exclusively with the management of their offshore fishery resources, including economic, surveillance and legal aspects. The FFA is governed by the Forum Fisheries Committee, which holds meetings attended by officials and ministers. (iii) The Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission provides its members, including 21 (iv) PICTs and several distant water fishing nations, with a framework under the Convention on the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks for the cooperative agreement and implementation of conservation and management measures for highly migratory fish stocks, particularly in the areas between and beyond Pacific Island jurisdictions. (v) The Office of the Parties to the Nauru Agreement directly helps its nine PICT members to achieve ownership, and to manage and optimize the value of their tuna fisheries, particularly the purse seine fisheries within their waters. While regional collaboration strongly supports management of the major offshore tuna fisheries (Gillett and Tauati, 2018), management of coastal fisheries rests almost exclusively in the national or PIFS Regional Technical Meeting on Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture (RTMCF) CBF Dialogue (CBFD) SPC / FAME FFA / SPC Heads of Fisheries (HOF) Regional Fisheries Minister Meeting (RFMM) Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting (PIFLM) Figure 8. Governance of the Pacific Community's Fisheries, Aquaculture and Marine Ecosystems division and relations between regional technical bodies and political bodies in relation to coastal fisheries

local community domains, despite occasional subregional calls for cooperation on key species such as managing sea cucumber fisheries and the bêche-de-mer trade (Govan et al., 2024). Global and regional policy relevant to coastal fisheries is outlined below, while national policy and institutions are described in Section 2.2. 1.5.1 Global policy in support of small-scale fisheries The global policy landscape for small-scale and artisanal, inshore or coastal fisheries (as termed in the Pacific Islands region) has evolved significantly over the past four decades, moving from a primary focus on resource exploitation and state sovereignty to a more nuanced, rights-based and participatory approach. Foundational instruments such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UN, 1982) established the legal basis for EEZs, granting coastal states sovereign rights over marine resources up to 200 nm from shore. This legal

framework was particularly transformative for PICTs, which collectively gained jurisdiction over approximately 28 million square kilometres of ocean – an area vastly exceeding their combined land mass (Burke et al., 2011). The Convention on Biological Diversity (UNEP, 1992), the UN Fish Stocks Agreement (UN, 1995) and the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (FAO, 1995) further advanced the international agenda by emphasizing the sustainable use and conservation of marine biodiversity, and promoting ecosystem-based management and the precautionary principle (Table 4). A major milestone in global fisheries policy was the adoption of the SSF Guidelines in 2014. These guidelines were developed through an extensive global consultation process, explicitly recognized the rights, roles and vulnerabilities of small-scale fishers and called for their meaningful inclusion in decision-making and management (FAO, 2015). The SSF Guidelines have become a touchstone for integrating human rights, gender and social inclusion into fisheries policy worldwide. However, the actual participation of Pacific Island governments, small-scale fishers, and regional and national CSOs in the development of these guidelines was relatively limited (Nisa, 2014; FAO, 2012; Govan 2018). As a result, stakeholders in Pacific Island fisheries are generally more familiar with, and exhibit stronger ownership of, regionally developed policies and frameworks which they may have participated in producing (Song et al., 2019; Ernst and Young, 2025). Nevertheless, the SSF Guidelines are increasingly being referenced in regional and national policy dialogues, particularly in areas related to human rights, gender and disaster risk management (Graham and D'Andrea, 2021; Govan, 2018).

Year International instrument
1973 Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)
1992 Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)
United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED)
1995 Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF)
Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks (UNFSA)
2005 Voluntary guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security (CFS-Right to Food Guidelines)
2010 Aichi Biodiversity Targets
2012 Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (Tenure Guidelines)
2013 Global action plan for the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases 2013–2020 (World Health Organization)
2014 Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Accelerated Modalities of Action Pathway (Samoa Pathway)
Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines)
2015 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
Global Strategic Framework for Food Security and Nutrition (GSF UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS)
2022 Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF). UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

Source: Adapted from Govan, H., Lalavanua, W. & Steenbergen, D.J. 2024. Coastal Fisheries Governance in the Pacific Islands: The Evolution of Policy and the Progress of Management-at-Scale. In: Nakamura, J., Chuenpagdee, R. & Jentoft, S. eds. Implementation of the Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines. MARE Publication Series, vol 28. Cham, Switzerland, Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-56716-2_11

Table 4. Global instruments relevant to coastal fisheries management in the Pacific region

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1.5.2 Regional coastal fisheries policy

The Pacific Islands region has demonstrated a remarkable capacity for policy innovation and collective action. The evolution of regional policy over the past three decades reflects a shift from a focus on fisheries development and increased production to a more holistic approach centred on sustainability, community rights and co-management. The Strategic plan for fisheries management and sustainable coastal fisheries in Pacific islands, endorsed in 2003, was the first regional policy to explicitly address coastal overfishing and the need for management (King et al., 2003). This was followed by the Vava'u Declaration in 2007, which elevated coastal fisheries to a high political priority and linked them to food security, livelihoods and economic growth (PIFS, 2007). A watershed moment in regional policy was the adoption of A New Song for coastal fisheries – pathways to change: The Noumea Strategy in 2015. Developed through broad consultation with fisheries agencies, communities, NGOs and regional

organizations, the Noumea Strategy centred on CBFM, user rights and the inclusion of women, youth and marginalized groups (SPC, 2015; Ernst and Young, 2025). A Regional Roadmap for Sustainable Pacific Fisheries covering offshore fisheries was then drafted using a summary of the Noumea Strategy as the basis for a section on coastal fisheries. The Future of Fisheries: A regional roadmap for sustainable Pacific fisheries 2015 (FFA and SPC, 2015) was endorsed by Pacific Island Forum Leaders in 2015, ensuring that inputs from non-state and community actors into the Noumea Strategy informed higher-level coastal fisheries policies. The Noumea Strategy became the foundation for donor coordination and subsequent regional action. In 2016, FAO and SPC commissioned a report to identify the links between the various regional and global instruments (the SSF Guidelines and Noumea Strategy in particular) and potential synergies between SPC and FAO. Govan (2018) found strong alignment and compatibility between the regional frameworks and FAO's SSF Guidelines. The regional policy framework is especially well-suited to support practical implementation at the level of PICTs, given its strategic and contextual relevance. Areas that FAO could consider supporting include some that are given greater prominence in the SSF Guidelines than they were given in regional policies up to that time. These areas include safety at sea, transparency, post-harvest or value addition and social protection, as well as other areas that are better addressed in regional strategies such as gender equality, disaster risk management and climate change adaptation. A notable gap in regional policies was also identified: the need to build and strengthen both existing and new forms of fisher organizations and stakeholder representation at all decision-making levels, as well as throughout the market chain and across different geographical scales (Govan et al., 2024; Song et al., 2017). The SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting in 2020 urged FAME to assist in implementing the regional coastal fisheries policies by integrating CBFM. The Framework for Action was developed in response, addressing some of the gaps noted in previous regional policies, particularly by enhancing mechanisms for fisher representation, inclusivity and human rights. The Framework for Action provides a common planning and assessment tool for scaling up CBFM, offering strategic guidance to governments, partners and donors, while aiming to remain nationally relevant. Its objectives encompass information and awareness, joint action at the site level, strong and up-to-date management policy and legislation, organizational and individual capacity, and ecosystem-based and inclusive approaches (SPC, 2024a). The leaders of PICs at the Pacific Islands Forum in 2016 tasked SPC "to coordinate with National Fisheries Agencies, CROP agencies and regional and national community groups, to strengthen support and resourcing for coastal fisheries management"⁴ (PIFS, 2016) and further endorsed fisheries and climate change to be standing agenda items for leaders, requiring a whole-of-government approach. Coastal fisheries management is therefore tracked by leaders at their annual meetings and the CBFM was created. 4 CROP – Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific

14 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific Table 5. Regional instruments relevant to coastal fisheries in the Pacific region

Year	Regional policy
1976	Apia Convention on Conservation of Nature in the South Pacific
1979	South Pacific Forum Fisheries Agency Convention – Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) and subsidiary agreements
1986	Noumea Convention – Convention for the Protection of the Natural Resources and Environment of the South Pacific – Secretariat of the Pacific Region Environmental Programme (SPREP)
	Protocol Concerning Co-operation in Combating Pollution Emergencies in the South Pacific Region
	Protocol for the Prevention of Pollution of the South Pacific Region by Dumping
2000	Commission for the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPFC)
2002	Pacific Islands Regional Ocean Policy
2003	Strategic plan for fisheries management and sustainable coastal fisheries in Pacific islands
2006	Pacific Islands Framework for Action to Climate Change
2006–2015	2007 Vava'u Declaration on Pacific Fisheries Resources
2008	Pacific Islands Regional Coastal Fisheries Management Policy and Strategic Actions
2008–2013	(Apia Policy)
2009	Convention on the Conservation and Management of the High Seas Fishery Resources in the South Pacific Ocean – South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation
2010	Our Sea of Islands, Our Livelihoods, Our Oceania: Framework for a Pacific Oceanscape
2011	Pacific Regional Environment Program Strategic Plan, 2011–2015
2013	Action Strategy for Nature Conservation in the Pacific Islands
2014–2020	Western Pacific Regional Action Plan

for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases (2014–2020) 2014 Pacific NonCommunicable Diseases (NCD) Roadmap, Joint Forum Economic and Pacific Health Ministers Meeting 2015 Pacific Community Strategic Plan 2016–2020 Melanesian Spearhead Group roadmap for inshore fisheries management and sustainable development 2015–2024 A New Song for coastal fisheries – pathways to change: The Noumea strategy Future of Fisheries: A regional roadmap for sustainable Pacific fisheries 2015–2025 2017 Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific. 2017–2030 2021 Pacific Islands Framework for Nature Conservation and Protected Areas 2021–2025 Pacific Framework for Action on Scaling up Community-based Fisheries Management: 2021–2025, extended to 2030 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent Note: The instruments most relevant to community-based fisheries management are displayed in bold. Source: Adapted from Govan, H., Lalavanua, W. & Steenbergen, D.J. 2024. Coastal Fisheries Governance in the Pacific Islands: The Evolution of Policy and the Progress of Management-at-Scale. In: Nakamura, J., Chuenpagdee, R. & Jentoft, S. eds. Implementation of the Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines. MARE Publication Series, vol 28. Cham, Switzerland, Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-56716-2_11

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2. Status of coastal fisheries management with communities Most PICs have limited government capacity to implement effective, centralized long-term coastal fisheries management. Yet strong community linkages and a rich history of community marine resource use and management mean that all PICTs hold valuable traditional knowledge to help guide management arrangements and monitor management effectiveness (Bergsson, 2025). Fisheries administrations historically focused on fisheries development through increased production, improvement of technical capacity and improvements in fish marketing. Passive management tools, such as size limits for commercially valuable species (e.g. trochus), gear restrictions and protection of customary fishing rights were sometimes included (Govan et al., 2024). However, by 2003, increasing concerns over coastal overfishing influenced the development of the regional Strategic plan for fisheries management and sustainable coastal fisheries in Pacific Islands (King et al., 2003), which underscored the need for stronger management measures and highlighted the central role of communities.

2.1 Community-based fisheries management as the backbone of management Pacific Island peoples have a long tradition of managing and protecting their local marine resources (Johannes 1978). Their local marine tenure arrangements over the inshore area, whether legally recognized or not, continue to provide the local basis to restrict or control fishing effort by both community members and external users. With the arrival of modern pressures and challenges, government-led resource management has developed, building on the strengths of communities and their local knowledge. Since the 1990s, a number of village and community fisheries management approaches have emerged. These approaches involve supporting individual communities by providing information and, in some cases, a legal basis for implementing natural resource management to reduce threats to marine resources and/or restore fishery stocks. This village-by-village approach to resource management and conservation has been expanded widely and successfully implemented by governments, civil society and NGOs (Johannes, 2002; Govan et al., 2009). The variety of approaches (Table 6) are encompassed by the term community-based fisheries management (CBFM) (see Box 1). Community-based fisheries management (CBFM) in the Pacific Islands context captures the highlevel guidance to empower communities; “communities will drive local management regimes with clear user rights”, while acknowledging the important role of Box 1. Community-based fisheries management Community-based fisheries management (CBFM) is understood as fisheries management approaches that are community-driven and encompass an ecosystem approach that will sustain livelihoods and ensure resilient island communities. Source: SPC. 2025. Regional Community-Based Fisheries Management (CBFM) Workshop: Implementation of the Pacific Framework for Action on Scaling up CBFM. Noumea <https://www.spc.int/digitallibrary/get/4eycj>

16 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific Table 6. Acronyms used to describe Community-based fisheries management processes, the sites where they are implemented and the community plans Processes of community-based management CBAM: Community-based adaptive management (LMMA Network) CBFM: Community-based fisheries management (Papua New Guinea)

CBNRM: Community-based natural resource management (historically Fiji and Papua New Guinea)
 CBRM: Community-based resource management (Solomon Islands) CEAFM: community-based ecosystem approach to fisheries management (Pacific Community) VBRMA: village-based resource management areas (Vanuatu) Names of areas where community-based approaches are practised CCA: community conserved area (Vanuatu) LMA: locally managed area (Micronesia [Federated States of]) LMMA: locally managed marine area (Fiji and others) MPA: marine protected area (Micronesia [Federated States of], Palau) SMA: special management areas (Tonga) ZPR: regulated fishing zones (Rahui) (French Polynesia) Community-based fisheries management plans CCMP: coastal community management plan (Tonga) CFMP: community fisheries management plans (American Samoa, Samoa) VFMP: village fisheries management plans (Samoa, Fiji) Figure 9. Diagram of a Community-based fisheries management area and potential resource management actions within the designated management area Note: The example corresponds with a locally managed marine area (Fiji). Source: Adapted from Govan, H. & Jupiter, S. 2013. Can the IUCN 2008 Protected Areas Management Categories support Pacific Island approaches to conservation? *Parks*, 19(1): 73–80. DOI: 10.2305/IUCN.CH.2013.PARKS-19-1.en Open LMMA Conditional closure with periodic harvests (No-take area occasionally opened for sociocultural needs) Permanent closure (Complete prohibition on resource extraction and sometimes limits on access in perpetuity) Community shing area (Area within LMMA outside of closures with marine management actions in place, such as spawning season bans, minimum sizes, catch and effort limits, gear restrictions, species bans, etc.) Rotational closure (No-take closure moved between two or more sites to alternate shing pressure between areas; designed for sustainable harvests of resources) Locally managed marine area (LMMA) boundary Closure boundary Island Beach Reef

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 17 governments (e.g. in placing controls on export commodities, ensuring scientific information reaches communities and enforcing national regulations) as described in the *Future of Fisheries: A regional roadmap for sustainable Pacific fisheries 2015–2025* (FFA and SPC, 2015). Community-based fisheries management (CBFM) is a form of co-management which is globally recommended for managing small-scale fisheries (SSF Guidelines). Co-management is defined as a partnership between fishers and governments (and sometimes other additional stakeholders) where the responsibility and authority for the management of the fishery is shared. The partnership arrangements in co-management are extremely varied. They range from models in which governments maintain most of the power and authority – instructing fishers on the decisions they take (instructive) – and more formal consultations in which governments still take the decisions (consultative), to arrangements in which governments and fishing communities cooperate equally in decision-making (cooperative) or in which rights and decisions are largely delegated to, or held by, communities (delegated). Community-based fisheries management (CBFM) as described in the Pacific Islands context of empowered communities and strong user rights corresponds to a type of delegated co-management (Sen and Nielsen, 1996; Pomeroy et al., 2022; Charles 2013; 2023), however, in some national contexts this remains aspirational within current legal or tenure frameworks (Figure 10). The area in which CBFM is practised often consists of a managed sustainable-use area (Figure 9) that may correspond to tenure rights or traditional fishing grounds (Fiji) or be specifically established for the purpose of fisheries co-management (Tonga). Within this sustainable-use area various management rules may be implemented by the local community, including permanent or temporarily closed areas – often based on traditional closures such as tabu, tapu, ra'ui, bul, sa, mo, lafu, or rahui (Govan et al., 2009; SPC, 2025). However, despite the prominence of area closures in popular conceptions of CBFM, using other management tools in the wider community fishing area (such as gear restrictions, species bans, seasonal closures or minimum size limits) can be more effective in addressing threats to the fishery and other resources. For instance, special management areas (SMA) in Tonga implement no-take or closed areas (fish habitat reserves). However, there are also some established additional fisheries management measures based on local or traditional knowledge e.g. the Atata SMA has a size limit on ark clams and the Eueiki SMA has a size limit for octopus. Fishing rules set out in national legislation also apply in CBFM sites and are sometimes specifically reinforced e.g. some Fiji CBFM plans (Govan et al., 2009). Regional

partners work to ensure that communities are adequately informed of the appropriate fisheries management tools to address their fishery challenges (Box 2). Figure 10. Types of fisheries co-management Note: Figure illustrates possible partnerships between government and fishers depending on the level of power or rights delegated to fishers or communities on an increasing scale left to right. Source: Adapted from Pomeroy, R.S., Oh, K., Martone, E., Westlund, L., Josupeit, H. & Son, Y. 2022. Guidebook for evaluating fisheries co-management effectiveness. Rome, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc2228en> INSTRUCTIVE CONSULTATIVE DELEGATED COOPERATIVE Top down/ government fisheries management Community-based fisheries management Box 2. Fishery management tools as used by communities practising Community-based fisheries management in the Pacific • Permanent closures: no-take areas (common at most sites) • Temporary closures: spawning season bans • Minimum size limits • Protecting or restoring key habitats • Limits on time or people fishing • Quotas: catch limits • Banning or limiting certain gear • No-take of breeding crabs or lobsters Note: Available at Fish smart rules <https://cbfm.spc.int/fish-smart-rules> Sources: SPC. 2017. Guide and Information sheets for fishing communities. Third edition. Noumea. <https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/x9znz>; and SPC. 2023. Fish smart rules – Tips and tools for community-based fisheries management practitioners to revive fishing grounds. Noumea. <https://www.spc.int/digitalibrary/get/4z3s5>

18 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific 2.1.1 The need for scaling up community-based fisheries management Site-based CBFM approaches were promoted throughout the Pacific Islands region from the early 2000s, however, uptake was uneven. Regional surveys found that at least 90 percent of communities received little to no direct support for the management of their coastal resources. This led to calls for approaches that would be more likely to achieve management of all coastal fisheries and not just a few pockets of successful management and conservation. The first policies to reflect this were the Noumea strategy (2015) and the Framework for Action developed to serve as a guide for the strategy's implementation (SPC, 2024a). The Framework for Action aims to support different PICTs, at very different stages of implementation, in scaling up CBFM by providing: (i) a common planning and assessment tool to identify CBFM status, gaps and priorities; (ii) strategic guidance to governments, partners, donors and the SPC on how and where to assist; and (iii) an overarching structure for evaluating progress in scaling up CBFM. In the Pacific context, scaling up CBFM is understood to be the result of priorities, actions and investments that are geared towards ensuring widespread community-based management capacity (Box 3). These priorities, actions and investments span multiple governance levels, engage multiple stakeholder groups and are linked under a common, coherent framework (Govan et al., 2024). Strategic objectives and outcomes were clustered into two main streams: actions towards establishing "direct support to communities" and actions that provide "enabling conditions for scaling up CBFM" (SPC, 2024a). Direct community-based fisheries management actions • Objective one. Information, awareness and communication. Coastal communities and relevant stakeholders regularly receive information that supports resource management and helps them to provide feedback and raise concerns through appropriate and effective communication mechanisms. • Objective two. Joint action at site level. Prioritized communities are supported in fisheries management planning, implementation, monitoring and/or enforcement, as appropriate. Enabling community-based fisheries management actions • Objective three. Strong and up-to-date management policy, legislation, planning and operational guidance. The effort to scale up CBFM is adequately supported in policy and legislation. • Objective four. Organizational and individual capacity. Fisheries agencies develop the organizational and individual capacity to adequately support CBFM at both national and subnational levels, as appropriate • Objective five. Ecosystem and inclusive approaches. Cross-agency and multistakeholder collaboration helps reduce threats to the environment, enhance adaptation to climate change, improve human well-being, strengthen disaster risk management and ensure equitable access to benefits. 2.2 Status of community-based fisheries management: progress and challenges The most recent progress update was carried out in 2024, culminating in a regional workshop to examine progress made and priorities for action (SPC, 2025). Progress was assessed using the Framework for Action and its above-mentioned five objectives. Box 3. Scaling up Community-based fisheries management Community-based fisheries management (CBFM)

moves beyond working with a limited number of communities and towards developing systems that provide adequate support to ALL coastal communities, enabling healthy fisheries and livelihoods. This corresponds to the call from civil society and other stakeholders for management support to reach 100 percent of coastal communities. Source: SPC. 2025. Regional Community-Based Fisheries Management (CBFM) Workshop: Implementation of the Pacific Framework for Action on Scaling up CBFM. Noumea. <https://www.spc.int/digitalibrary/get/4eycj>

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 19 2.2.1 Information, awareness and communication Provision of information, increasing awareness and enabling communication are key actions required for scaling up CBFM and correspond to Chapter 11 of the SSF Guidelines. Coastal communities and relevant stakeholders require regular information to support resource management and should be able to provide feedback and raise concerns through appropriate and effective communication mechanisms. Experience in the region is increasing and includes cost-effective information tools that most often leverage a combination of broadcasting activities, social media and mobile phone engagement, distribution of widespread information materials, and direct engagement through networks and community champions. Countries are encouraged to produce government strategies that will ensure timely, regular and relevant information and feedback. In all countries, some level of outreach and engagement is taking place. By 2024 information and awareness plans had been developed in one country (Solomon Islands – see Section 3.2.3) and were in process or partially provided in 5 others out of 14 PICTs. Feedback mechanisms were considered adequate in 6 out of 14 PICTs (SPC, 2025). The impact of information and feedback mechanisms is difficult to assess and requires tracking the implementation against baseline levels. Some progress has been made in assessing baseline information availability in several countries (Govan and Vieux, 2025) and this is discussed further in Section 3. 2.2.2 Status of site support for community-based fisheries management: joint action at site level The Framework for Action contemplates support for joint action between government and communities at site level, providing support in fisheries management planning, implementation, monitoring and/or enforcement, as appropriate. This site-based approach may need to focus on a reduced list of prioritized communities (in larger countries) guided by criteria in national scaling up strategies. These activities address Chapter 5 of the SSF Guidelines which calls for co-management, community-based approaches and local stewardship. The latest regional inventory (SPC, 2025) registered nearly 700 CBFM sites encompassing 1 057 communities (Table 7). The increase in coverage seems to have slowed over recent years in comparison to the 936 communities covered in 2014 (Govan, 2015) and approximately 600 covered in 2008 (Govan et al., 2009). A number of sites (particularly in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands) seem to have lapsed and been removed from inventories (country respondents have been encouraged to remove sites for which no activity has been recorded in the last 3 years). Current coverage represents 11 percent of the estimated 10 000 coastal communities in PICTs after approximately 25 years of regional implementation. The situation varies greatly across countries, but three broad groupings which require distinct future strategies can be distinguished (SPC, 2025): 1. Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs) that already support most communities with direct CBFM or are feasibly able to reach most communities with site-based CBFM. These have built on a strong foundation of enabling legislation, policy and strategies tailored to their specific circumstances (e.g. Samoa, Tonga and Tuvalu). These PICs propose that future priorities include networking, information provision and feedback, as well as a variety of specific priorities such as monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS). 2. Pacific Island countries (PICs) with little coverage of CBFM sites. Larger or more geographically dispersed PICs (e.g. Kiribati, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands) which are highly unlikely to be able to serve a significant proportion of communities with site-based CBFM. Broader scale support is required, less reliant on external inputs to individual sites. These countries prioritize future work on provincial or subnational support as well as information and awareness, networking and partnerships. 3. Mixed or unclear. In some PICTS, the approach is unclear or insufficiently specified (including previous regional leaders in CBFM such as Fiji). These PICTs prioritize future efforts on supportive legislation, policy and/or improved strategies to implement CBFM (the Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji and Palau). The major challenges in all countries for

scaling up CBFM remain inadequate budgets and staffing of fisheries agencies for coastal fisheries management, especially for CBFM, and poorly supported subnational approaches to CBFM, particularly in the more populous larger countries.

20 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific The large number of CBFM sites and initiatives across the Pacific Islands region has proven challenging to track in regional studies since the early 2000s. Few countries have adequate national tracking systems and in several PICs it is not clear whether sites remain active or should remain on national databases. 2.2.2.1 Impacts and outcomes of community-based fisheries management Progress in creating the enabling environment, implementing supporting actions and number of sites reached are assessed using the Framework for Action. Monitoring the effectiveness of CBFM at each specific site has proven more challenging partly as a result of site remoteness and the logistics involved in long-term monitoring and research. A large number of distinct benefits have been identified in studies at some specific sites, but these data and the few large-scale surveys carried out do not support broader generalization of these impacts and highlight potentially confounding factors. The demand from communities for support in initiating or maintaining CBFM far exceeds government or partner capacity in most PICs, highlighting that CBFM is clearly perceived as desirable. Community perceptions that CBFM “works” for them contrasts with the capacity of scientific studies to quantify what it is that “works” as studies tend to be relatively narrow in scope or timeframe. The multiple objectives set by communities, and even members within each community (Govan et al., 2009; Jupiter et al., 2014), means that “successful” CBFM may vary from observer to observer (i.e. different community members). However, external evaluations and research may focus on very specific indicators such as reef health or status of a particular fish species that are more explicitly of interest to external organizations. For example, Tonga’s SMA has received substantial monitoring over the years. While monitoring and assessments show that some SMAs have resulted in larger and more abundant fish, others showed no impact. The limited available ecological data supports increased fish size and abundance in some SMAs (Ford-Learner et al., 2024). Table 7. Inventory of directly supported Community-based fisheries management sites Notes: Data reported from 14 Pacific Island countries and territories and Tokelau, including the number of coastal communities covered by these 14 sites and the proportion that these communities covered represent of the estimated total coastal communities. Some sites may cover multiple communities; 2024 updates shown in bold type; “communities” refers to coastal communities; *Fiji government data provided in 2024; †Vanuatu recent estimates highlight that 527 of an estimated 600 communities implement at least one fisheries rule. Sources: Data for 2022 from Govan, H. & Lalavanua, W. 2023. The “Pacific Way” of coastal fisheries management: Status and progress of community-based fisheries management. SPC Fisheries Newsletter, 169: 33–47. <https://www.spc.int/digitalibrary/get/svtsz>; and data for 2024 from SPC. 2025. Regional Community-Based Fisheries Management (CBFM) Workshop: Implementation of the Pacific Framework for Action on Scaling up CBFM. Noumea. <https://www.spc.int/digitalibrary/get/4eycj>

Name of model or programme	Number of sites	Communities covered	Total communities	Community cover (%)
Melanesia				
Fiji LMMA/FLMMA (gaztted protected areas)	89	437	850	51
*11 Papua New Guina (not FAO SAP) Community, ward or customary plans	32	37	4000	1
Solomon Islands Community-based resources management programme	223	223	3000	7
Vanuatu Community-based resources management programme	65	65	1400	11
†88 Polynesia Cook Islands Ra’ui and formal closures and regulations	28	34	41	83
Niue Village plans, rules or fonos	0	14	0	
Samoa Community-based fisheries management programme	115	115	253	50
Tokelau Traditional and village rules	3	3	3	100
Tonga Special management areas	61	64	111	58
Tuvalu Tuvalu LMMA strategy	9	9	9	100
Micronesia Micronesia (Fed. States of) Marine protected area (MAP) locally managed area	20	21	75	28
Kiribati Nei Tengarengare (The Mermaid)	33	33	183	18
Marshall Islands Reimaanlok (Looking to the Future)	14	14	31	45
Nauru Community-based fisheries management programme	0	13	0	
Palau Protected area network (MPAs with a marine component)	1	2	16	13
TOTAL	693	1057	9999	11
excluding Papua New Guinea	661	1020	5999	17

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 21 Perhaps the most comprehensive study over one of the region’s largest and longest-running initiatives, that of Fiji’s locally managed marine

areas (LMMAs) (through the FLMMA Network), illustrates the generally positive community perceptions that may well apply elsewhere (O'Garra et al., 2023; Jagadish et al., 2024; Ferguson Irlanda et al., 2025; Roxburgh et al., 2025). Communities (three representatives from five different groups across 146 villages) across Fiji were assessed and those that had formally engaged in CBFM as members of the FLMMA Network (53 percent) reported: • improved access to financial and infrastructure support, some of which is likely to have been provided by their partner organizations; • increased implementation of the basic tools needed to manage the traditional fishing grounds (iqoliqoli), including the regulation of fisheries, monitoring by fish wardens and the enforcement of penalties; • decreased dependence on fisheries for income, likely because some partner organizations actively encourage villages to reduce their fisheries dependence and pursue other livelihoods; • greater subjective well-being; • improved perception of the benefits of managing the customary fishing grounds, such as increased fish catch or improved livelihoods; and • greater perceived knowledge about marine resources – people believe they have more knowledge about marine resources, particularly among women and youth. Leaders also reported village-level participation in creating management rules but this view was not shared by fishers, women and youth. However, no objective changes were measured in village wealth, household wealth, diversity of livelihood activities, fish catch, satisfaction with food from the sea, or perceived condition of the reef or mangroves. Women's participation in fisheries management was examined in more depth (Ferguson Irlanda et al., 2025) and reported to yield multiple benefits: • ecological benefits – increase in the abundance of fish and other marine life, improved coral reef habitat; • greater perceptions of benefits from fisheries management if women believe that decision-making is fair; • more support among women for fisheries regulations when women perceive benefits from fisheries regulations and participate in creating them; and • continued access to their fishing areas. Where women are not included in closed area design, they lose access to fishing areas, threatening food security and ultimately, conservation outcomes and management practices. Robertson et al., (2020) independently found similar results: improvements in economic activity and diet, but little difference in overall income and wealth. Villages with an active tabu area had more positive social outcomes in terms of perceptions of LMMAs, but also perceptions of increased conflict around the management of marine resources. Communities juggle a range of livelihood and cultural activities. For many, marine resources play only one part in a suite that includes agriculture, forestry, handicrafts, paid employment, cultural exchange and social obligations. Within this context a reactive or “as needed” drive may better explain community approaches to CBFM. In other words, communities only develop sufficient consensus and collaboration to actively address threats to marine resources and livelihoods when these threats are sufficiently critical and effective actions are clear. This explains how the development of CBFM actions in communities, both with and without external support, as described by Abernethy et al., (2014), are often triggered by the need to address clear threats. This approach to management is not so distinct from other top-down resource management. However, threat reduction may not be so easily detected by occasional scientific monitoring, especially if the threats and thresholds prioritized by communities are not clearly understood and the desired outcome is reduced threats or more stable and predictable resources. This is in line with the resource provisioning functions sometimes ascribed to tabu systems (e.g. Vave, 2021) and may not result in increased or improved resources as assumed by outside observers. The difficulties faced by researchers in quantifying the impacts of CBFM are compounded by the intrinsic and intangible values (at least for the researchers) that communities ascribe to a healthy (marine) environment. Economic studies have remarked on the high value that communities have been observed to

22 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific attach to preserving ecosystems for use by future generations, independent of their needs for the ecosystem (known as bequest value). This reflects a “duty of care” underpinning the relationship between the people and land/sea (O'Garra, 2012; Govan et al., 2009, Hoegh-Guldberg et al., 2016, Lau et al., 2019). In biodiversity conservation, coral reefs, community-managed areas e.g. LMMAs and periodic fishery closures (tabu) in Fiji, have been found to play a vital role in supporting coral reefs by increasing herbivorous fish grazing rates, helping to control macroalgae and promote coral dominance. The benefits of these interventions are amplified across entire reef networks through the dispersal of coral larvae, meaning that improved management at a subset of

reefs can enhance coral cover throughout the wider system (Greiner et al., 2025). This suggests that empowering large proportions of local communities to manage their marine resources results in sufficient numbers of these communities contributing to healthier, more resilient coral reefs, with positive effects that extend well beyond the boundaries of individual effectively managed areas. The increasing proportions of communities at the national level that play a frontline role in resource management should be particularly valued given the persistent challenges that some governments face (especially in the larger countries) to establish effective state-driven resource management (Govan, 2015; Govan et al., 2024). Communities that are better prepared to address and resolve emerging threats will benefit across many sectors and livelihood facets – achieving this across large numbers of communities has significantly positive implications for adaptation and resilience. Strategies for scaling up CBFM include ensuring technically solid information and advice are widely available and relevant, while there is also likely considerable room for improvement in the selection of appropriate fisheries management responses.

2.2.3 Management policy, legislation, planning and operational guidance

The Framework for Action calls for strong and up-to-date management policy, legislation, planning and operational guidance so that CBFM scaling up is adequately supported, including tenure rights and enforcement (FFA and SPC, 2015) or as laid out in the Framework itself: “... put in place policies and legislation that provide for the involvement of coastal communities in the management of their fisheries resources. Supported by national controls on export commodities, communities will drive local management regimes with clear user rights.” This is a strong commitment to aspects of Chapter 5 and Chapter 10 of the SSF Guidelines which call for secure tenure and supportive policy and legislation. At the national level, there has been significant progress in updating coastal fisheries legislation and developing supportive policies. Most PICTs already have CBFM arrangements in place, but at least five require clearer or improved legislation in order to become CBFM-supportive (Govan et al., 2024; O’Connor et al., 2023). According to SPC (2024b) 15 PICTs currently have coastal fisheries management policies in place, while 8 PICTs have policies in need of drafting or revision. The Framework for Action suggests PICTs should ensure viable strategies for supporting and scaling up CBFM, three countries have developed national strategies for scaling up CBFM and a further four have strategies either in process or partially included in other fisheries policies (SPC, 2025). Customary marine tenure (CMT) arrangements remain a defining feature of coastal fisheries governance in many PICTs, providing de facto access and management rights that are generally respected and form the basis for negotiation with non-rights holders (Pulea, 1993; Kuemlangan, 2004; Govan et al., 2009). National legislation often overlays these systems, creating legal pluralism and, at times, confusion (Rohe et al., 2019). Table 8 presents an overview of national fisheries legislation in the Pacific, all PICs have updated primary fisheries legislation over the last two decades. These updates and the progressions of policy presented in Table 9 indicate a steady growth and recognition of coastal fisheries management in the region. However, the existence of legislation or policy is not in itself sufficient evidence to suggest that coastal fisheries or CBFM are adequately supported. Regional reviews and benchmarking of legislation and policy note that the content of these policies varies greatly and their support for CBFM cannot be assessed on the basis of name or how recently they have been developed (Gourlie et al., 2017; Davis et al., 2017; Govan and Lalavanua, 2023; O’Connor et al., 2023). In most PICTs the greatest challenge is inadequate implementation of the law or policy. In some PICTs the most supportive legislation is from the Environment sector – though the same issue applies.

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Country or territory	agency responsible for coastal fisheries and fisheries management	Main legislation supporting coastal fisheries co-management*	Year effective/last update
1. American Samoa	Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources	Regulations Title 24 – Chapter 10 (Community-based fisheries management program)	2008
2. Cook Islands	Ministry of Marine Resources	Marine Resources Act	2005
3. Fiji	Ministry of Fisheries	Fisheries Act 1941 and Regulations (and amendments) 1941	2012 and Regulations (2014) 2012/ 2014
4. French Polynesia	La Direction des Ressources Marines†	Territory Law on Marine	1905

and Freshwater Species 2022 amending the Marine and Freshwater Species Regulations 1988 Fisheries Regulations 1988, including regulated fishing zones 1988/ 2022 Public Domain Regulations 2004. 2004 French Polynesia Environment Code: Territory Law 2017 and Order 2018 2017/ 2022 Order approving the Moorea Marine Spatial Plan 2004 2004 Order declaring the Exclusive Economic Zone as Marine Managed Area 2018, as amended by Order on Natural Protected Areas and Regulated Fishing Zones 2025 2018/ 2025 5. Micronesia (Federated States of) State level: Division of Marine Resources, Office of Fisheries and Aquaculture, Division of Fisheries and Marine Resources, Department of Resources and Development, Marine Resources Management Division, Kosrae Island Resource Management Authority Marine Resources (Amendment) Act 2017 (Micronesia [Federated States of]) 2017 Chuuk State Constitution Chuuk State Protected Area Network (PAN) Act 2017 2017 Kosrae State Protected Area Act 2010 2010 Kosrae State Resource Royalty Act 2016 2016 Pohnpei State Constitution Pohnpei State Marine Sanctuary Act 1999 1999 Pohnpei Environmental Protection Act 1992 1992 Yap State Constitution Yap State Code, Title 18 6. Guam Department of Agriculture – Division of Aquatic and Wildlife Resources U.S. Code 48 CAP.15, §1705(a) 7. Kiribati Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resource Development Local Government Act 1984 1984 Fisheries Act 2010, as amended 2015, 2017, 2021 2010 Fisheries (Conservation and Management of Coastal of Marine Resources) Regulations 2019 2019 8. Marshall Islands Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority Constitution of the Republic of Marshall Islands Protected Areas Network Act 2015 2015 Management and Development of Local Fisheries Act 1997 1997 9. Nauru Nauru Fisheries and Marine Resources Authority Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture Act 2020 2020 Fisheries Management Act 2024 2024 Table 8. National fisheries legislation relevant to Community-based fisheries management or coastal fisheries co-management in 22 Pacific Island countries or territories and agencies responsible for coastal fisheries

Note: *All laws mentioned, those they repeal and subsequent updates may be found at <https://www.spc.int/CoastalFisheries/Legislation/countries>; † Please see Annex 3 for original French title of laws included in this table. Sources: Ariella D’Andrea, personal communication, 2025; Govan, H., Lalavanua, W. & Steenbergen, D.J. 2024. Coastal Fisheries Governance in the Pacific Islands: The Evolution of Policy and the Progress of Management-at-Scale. In: Nakamura, J., Chuenpagdee, R. & Jentoft, S. eds. Implementation of the Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines. MARE Publication Series, vol 28. Cham, Switzerland, Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-56716-2_11; and Govan, H. & Lalavanua, W. 2023. The “Pacific Way” of coastal fisheries management: Status and progress of community-based fisheries management. SPC Fisheries Newsletter, 169: 33–47. <https://www.spc.int/digitalibrary/get/svtsz> 10. New Caledonia Direction des affaires maritimes de Nouvelle-Calédonie and Provincial authorities† Organic Law No. 99–209 of New Caledonia 1999 Territorial Law on Marine Protected Areas 2022 2022 North Province Regulations on the Kan-Gunu Marine Protected Area 2014 2014 North Province Environment Code 2008 2022 South Province Environment Code 2008 2022 Loyalty Islands Province Environment Code 2016, including customary protected areas 2016 11. Niue Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Fisheries Division Domestic Fishing Act 1995 1995 Village Council Act 2016 2016 Niue Moana Mahu Marine Protected Area Regulations 2020 12. Northern Mariana Islands Department of Lands and Natural Resources Commonwealth Code. Title 2 The Fair Fishing Act of 2000 and amendments 2000 13. Palau Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and the Environment, Bureau of Fisheries, Bureau of Environment – Protected Areas Network Constitution of the Republic of Palau 1981 Palau National Code 27 (Fishing) 1990 Palau National Code 24 (Environmental Protection) 2017 Palau National Marine Sanctuary Amendment Act 2019 Palau National Marine Sanctuary Regulations 2019 14. Papua New Guinea National Fisheries Agency, provincial fisheries departments Fisheries Management Act 1998 2004 Fisheries Management (Amendment) Act 2015 2015 Organic Laws: on Provincial Boundaries 1998/on Provincial Governments and Local-level Governments 1995 1998/1995 15. Pitcairn Government of Pitcairn Islands, Environmental, Conservation and Natural Resources Division Local Government Ordinance 1964 1964 Pitcairn Islands Marine Protected Area Ordinance 2016 2016 16. Samoa Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries – Fisheries Division Fisheries Management Act 2016 2016 Village Fono Act 1990 1990 17. Solomon Islands Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources and Provincial Fisheries

Departments Local Government Act 1964 1964 Provincial Government Act 1997 1997 Fisheries Management Act 2015 2015 18. Tokelau Fisheries Management Agency Tokelau Village Incorporation Regulations 1986 1986 Atafu Village Rules 2009 2009 19. Tonga Ministry of Fisheries, Community Development and Advisory Section Fisheries Management Act 2002 2002 Fisheries (Coastal Community) Regulations 2009 2009 Fisheries (Coastal Communities) (Amendment) Regulations 2022 20. Tuvalu Tuvalu Fisheries Department Fisheries Management Act 2025 2025 Falekaupule Act 1997 (up to 12 nm) 1997 Conservation Area Act 1999 1999 21. Vanuatu Vanuatu Fisheries Department Fisheries Act 2014 2014 Decentralization Act 1994 1994 Environmental Management and Conservation Act 2002 2002 22. Wallis and Futuna Islands Direction du Service de l’Agriculture, de la Forêt et de la Pêche† Basic Law of Wallis-and-Futuna 1961 Commercial Fishing Regulations 2005 1961 Customary Marine Protected Area Regulations 2024 2024

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 25 Country or territory Main fisheries policy/coastal fisheries policy Year

1. American Samoa Regulations Title 24 – Chapter 10 (Community-based fisheries management [CBFM] program)* 2008
2. Cook Islands Policy for Coastal Fisheries Resources (an update is in progress) 2014
3. Fiji Ministry of Fisheries Strategic Development Plan Fiji National Fisheries Policy 2019–29 2024–28
4. French Polynesia† French Polynesia Offshore Fisheries Policy 2018–2022 2018–22
5. Micronesia (Federated States of) National Protected Areas Network Policy Framework 2015 2015
6. Guam None
7. Kiribati Kiribati National Fisheries Policy Kiribati National Coastal Fisheries Roadmap* 2013–25 2019–36
8. Marshall Islands Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) Fisheries Policy Protected Area Network (PAN) Strategic Action Plan Reimaanlok: Looking to the Future. National Conservation Area Plan 2020–25 2008
9. Nauru Nauru Fisheries and Marine Resources Authority Corporate Plan 2015–20 2015–20
10. New Caledonia† Strategy for Sustainable Coastal Fisheries 2023–2033 New Caledonia Fisheries Policy 2011 2023–33
11. Niue National Coastal Fisheries Management and Development Plan 2017–22 2017–22
12. Northern Mariana Islands Marine Conservation Plan (draft) 2020 2020
13. Palau Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Environment (MAFE) Strategic Plan 2021–24 2021–24
14. Papua New Guinea Fisheries Strategic Plan A Roadmap for coastal fisheries and marine aquaculture for Papua New Guinea 2021–30 2017–26
15. Pitcairn The Pitcairn Islands Marine Protected Area Management Plan 2021–26 2021–26
16. Samoa Coastal Fisheries and Development Plan 2013–16 2013–16
17. Solomon Islands Solomon Islands National Fisheries Policy Solomon Islands Community-based Coastal and Marine Resource Management Strategy Solomon Islands National Information Strategy to Empower All Communities to Better Manage their Marine Resources Community-based resource management standard operating procedures (CBRM SOP). Community expression of interest and CBRM procedure 2019–29 2021–25 2021
18. Tokelau None
19. Tonga Tonga Fisheries Sector Plan Tonga National Fisheries Policy Special Management Area Compliance: Standard Operating Procedures Special Management Area Manual Tonga Special Management Area Strategy 2025–2030 2016–24 2018 2021 2022 2025
20. Tuvalu Third Corporate Plan Funafuti Reef Fisheries Stewardship Plan (main island) (2020–22) 2018–22 2018–22
21. Vanuatu Vanuatu National Fisheries Sector Policy Vanuatu National Roadmap for Coastal Fisheries National strategy for scaling up CBFM in Vanuatu 2016–30 2019–30 2022–30
22. Wallis and Futuna Islands† Sustainable Development Policy for Fisheries and Aquaculture of Wallis and Futuna Islands 2024–2028 2024–28

Table 9. Coastal fisheries policies and instruments of Pacific Island countries and territories

Notes: All policies mentioned may be found at <https://www.spc.int/CoastalFisheries/Legislation/countries> or <https://www.spc.int/DigitalLibrary/FAME>; the policies and instruments that are supportive of coastal fisheries are italicized. *Specifically supports Community-based fisheries management; †Please see Annex 3 for original French title of laws included in this table. Sources: Ariella D’Andrea, personal communication, 2025; Govan, H., Lalavanua, W. & Steenbergen, D.J. 2024. Coastal Fisheries Governance in the Pacific Islands: The Evolution of Policy and the Progress of Management-at-Scale. In: Nakamura, J., Chuenpagdee, R. & Jentoft, S. eds. Implementation of the Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines. MARE Publication Series, vol 28. Cham, Switzerland, Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-56716-2_11; and Govan, H. & Lalavanua, W. 2023. The “Pacific Way” of coastal fisheries management: Status and progress of community-based

fisheries management. SPC Fisheries Newsletter, 169: 33–47. <https://www.spc.int/digitalibrary/get/svtsz>

26 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific There are numerous policies and plans for different fisheries and specific issues, those most relevant to aspects of coastal fisheries management and scaling up CBFM are listed in Table 9. For instance, management plans have been recently approved in all the major bêche-de-mer exporting PICTs (except Fiji), noting that the major challenges with these and other plans tend to relate to implementation and enforcement, rather than the drafting of legislation or policy (Barclay et al., 2017; Davis et al., 2017; Govan 2018; CFWG, 2019; Lee et al., 2020). The emergence of coastal fisheries policy at the national level represents notable progress. It also increasingly highlights the need to move to action through more strategic or detailed implementation plans, appropriate staff terms of reference and operating procedures, and increased allocation of resources. The Framework for Action’s call for the development of short-term implementation strategies for scaling up operations and allocation of resources is therefore important. The Framework for Action also calls for support of community user and management rights which in many countries is afforded through CMT arrangements. There is an apparent need for more in-depth assessment of access, user and management rights in the present-day context, just as there is the need for increased emphasis on appropriate forms of monitoring, control, surveillance and enforcement (MCSE) in the CBFM context (Graham and D’Andrea, 2021; Govan and Lalavanua, 2023; SPC, 2025).

2.2.4 Organizational and individual capacity

The Framework for Action promotes organizational and individual capacity to adequately support CBFM at both the national and subnational level. The SSF Guidelines focus on capacity development, institutional strengthening and ensuring adequate financial resources (Chapter 12 and Chapter 13). Traditional and other village institutions and governance provide the basic organization for natural resource governance, which may be supplemented by committees or groups specifically identified to carry out roles in CBFM. Information and awareness strategies usually aim to improve the capacity of such decision makers (e.g. MFMR and cChange, 2022) as do site-based interventions (e.g. Tonga MoF et al., 2022). Formal and informal small-scale fisher groups, such as cooperatives in Fiji, the Tautai Association in Samoa and various fisher organizations in Vanuatu have shown they produce substantial benefits but also require more capacity-building (Albert et al., 2024). Fisheries agencies are generally government departments or ministries dependent on national government budget allocations and priorities. As exceptions, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands and Papua New Guinea have statutory authorities with some of their revenue generated from fisheries levies (Govan et al., 2024). Tuvalu completed the transition towards statutory authority in July 2025 (Tuvalu Fisheries Authority Act 2023). The Framework for Action elevates the issue of inadequate budgets and staffing for coastal fisheries management, especially for CBFM, to the national and subnational level. Operational (as opposed to project or development) budgets are an indication of the long-term commitment by governments to their respective fisheries agencies. Data from between 2012 and 2013 suggested that PIC fisheries agencies were underfunded compared to global averages and to those of more affluent Pacific Island territories, particularly in relation to coastal fisheries management and associated regulatory or enforcement functions (Govan, 2015a). At the subnational scale (i.e. through decentralized governance in larger countries), fisheries agencies are usually severely underfunded and understaffed (Govan, 2015b; Marre et al., 2021). Consistently reviewing and tracking government fisheries budgets and staffing for coastal fisheries, and specifically for CBFM, has proven challenging for a number of reasons (Marre et al., 2021):

- Not all governments release detailed budget data – although this has been improving over the past decade.
- Fisheries budgets may not disaggregate to a sufficient level of detail i.e. distinguish between offshore and coastal fisheries.
- Fisheries agency and staff functions in the smaller PICTs may cover CBFM among many other duties (such as offshore fisheries) on an “as needed” basis. The proportion of time staff spend on CBFM or coastal fisheries may need to be estimated.

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 27 • Fisheries management, CBFM support and extension require regular and predictable operational budgets (that is finance for yearly activities or operations). However, budgets may be inconsistent and allocations may not be disbursed in a timely manner (or at all).

- Fisheries budgets may prioritize large capital or development investments, such

as buildings and other infrastructure. However, these may not contribute to CBFM or may even increase pressure on resources (e.g. by facilitating fishing), and should therefore not be considered fisheries management. • Consistent and comparable methods for surveying coastal fisheries budgets have yet to be developed. Despite these challenges, counting the number of staff involved (full-time and part-time) in coastal fisheries or specifically in CBFM is considerably easier than analysing budgets, and is therefore proposed as an indicator of government investment in coastal fisheries (Marre et al., 2021). The weakness of this indicator is that staff often lack funds from operational budgets for regular and expected activities (e.g. to visit communities on request, carry out enforcement or maintain FADs). This is particularly the case at the subnational level. A survey carried out in 2015 (Govan, 2015a) estimated that fisheries agencies from 13 PICTs (excluding Papua New Guinea) employed 836 members of staff overall and were assigned a budget of USD 15 600 000 for operations. However, the proportion supporting coastal fisheries consisted of 399 members of staff (not all full-time) and a budget of USD 3 500 000 for operations (22 percent). Updates of the surveys in 2021 (Marre et al., 2021) suggested that staff and budgets allocated to coastal fisheries remain low in comparison to the total staff and fisheries budgets for most countries. They also concluded that most countries may be severely underinvesting in resource management at a time when greater investment in managing of coastal fisheries is called for (Gillett and Fong, 2023). It is worth noting that CBFM coverage increased between 2015 and 2021 in the eight countries in which coastal fisheries staff also increased (SPC, 2025). National environmental agencies have functional roles relating to fisheries, including environmental impact assessment, management and protection of aquatic endangered species, and implementation of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. They may also support CBFM in some cases (e.g. the Federated States of Micronesia). However, these agencies face similar or more serious staffing and budget challenges, and are often more centralized, as are the environmental sections that some other ministries may have (e.g. forestry, mineral resources) (SPREP, 2016; Govan, 2015b). Update of fisheries agency staffing for coastal fisheries and community-based fisheries management in Pacific Island countries and territories The regional survey and practitioner workshop in 2024 (SPC, 2025) provides more recent staff details for some PICTs (Table 10) though these data should be regarded as indicative as unlike previous surveys, they were not separately validated (e.g. Govan and Lalavanua, 2022). Four out of the eight PICTs that responded to the survey showed increases in staff dedicated full time to CBFM, while two showed decreases or a shift to part-time staffing. Of potential concern is an apparently prevailing decrease (six out of eight) in full-time coastal fisheries staff and in MCSE staff (four out of eight) at a time when greater government enforcement efforts are needed. Estimating the required number of staff to support CBFM is considerably more difficult than counting the number of staff currently available. The diversity across PICTs, community contexts and approaches to CBFM are major factors. A key consideration influencing how many staff may be required is how well qualified they are, meaning that information on staff training, experience and qualifications is also required. Comparison of staff numbers in relation to distinguishing features of the PIC or fishery may provide a rough indication of relative staffing levels which could be used in discussions of potential targets or minimum thresholds. Table 11 shows comparisons between the importance of the fishery (as estimated value), the length of coastline and coastal population (that staff need to serve). Staffing seems relatively high in well-funded the Cook Islands and Nauru. Tuvalu also has a low population and comparatively significant numbers of staff, notably boosted by the assignation of staff to each island community. The low availability of fisheries officers in Fiji, Samoa, Solomon

Total coastal full-time staff Female staff (%) CBFM full-time staff Female staff (%) CBFM part-time staff Female staff (%) Subnational staff Female staff (%) MCS staff Cook Islands V 28 29 0 n/a ^ 19 0 14 21 V 14 Fiji 50 0 5 Micronesia (Federated States of) 4 4 12 10 Kiribati ^ 91 46 ^ 7 71 0 n/a 10 30 ^ 12 Marshall Islands V 56 16 ^ 2 50 ^ 10 60 0 n/a ^ 2 Nauru 22 22 10 Niue Palau 10 0 Samoa V 23 52 V 10 50 ^ 18 0 4 50 V 4 Solomon Islands V 19 74 ^ 8 50 V 11 27 34 15 ^ 3 Tokelau 4 Tonga V 12 42 8 38 ^ 4 50 5 0 ^ 20 Tuvalu V 14 21 V 9 33 ^ 5 0 7 0 ^ 8 Vanuatu ^ 39 38 ^ 6 50 ^ 32 34 14 7 V 6 Notes: CBFM: Community-based fisheries management; MCS: monitoring, control and surveillance. ^ represents an increase or improvement since 2022; v represents a reduction since 2022. Data only available in 2022 is

shown in italics. Sources: Data for 2022 from Govan, H. & Lalavanua, W. 2023. The “Pacific Way” of coastal fisheries management: Status and progress of community-based fisheries management. SPC Fisheries Newsletter, 169: 33–47. <https://www.spc.int/digitallibrary/get/svtsz>; and 2024 data from SPC. 2025. Regional Community-Based Fisheries Management (CBFM) Workshop: Implementation of the Pacific Framework for Action on Scaling up CBFM. Noumea. <https://www.spc.int/digitallibrary/get/4eycj>

Table 10. Coastal fisheries staff, staff dedicated to Community-based fisheries management, subnational staff, and monitoring, control and surveillance staff Table 11. Comparison of total number of coastal staff to estimated value of coastal fishery, length of the coastline and population within 1 km of the coast Notes: Green shading represents high ratios and red represents lower ratios; *including subnational coastal fisheries staff; and †population within 1 km of coast. Sources: iSPC. 2025. Regional Community-Based Fisheries Management (CBFM) Workshop: Implementation of the Pacific Framework for Action on Scaling up CBFM. Noumea. <https://www.spc.int/digitallibrary/get/4eycj>; iiGillett, R.E. & Fong, M. 2023. Fisheries in the economies of Pacific Island countries and territories (Benefish Study 4). Noumea, SPC. <https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/ppizh>; and iiiSPC. 2017. Guide and Information sheets for fishing communities. Third edition. Noumea. <https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/x9znz>

No.	coastal fisheries staff,*	Staff/fisheries value (USD million)	ii Staff/1000km coastline	iii Staff/1000 population	† Cook Islands
15.8	350.0	3.1	Fiji	50	0.8
10.8	0.2	Micronesia (Federated States of)	4	0.2	3.1
0.0	Kiribati	101	2.3	51.5	0.9
56	6.0	26.6	1.1	Nauru	22
13.1	733.3	2.4	Niue	n/a	Palau
10	0.9	6.6	0.6	Samoa	27
0.7	58.3	0.2	Solomon Islands	53	1.1
5.4	0.2	Tokelau	4	39.6	2.8
Tonga	17	0.7	18.7	0.2	Tuvalu
21	6.6	875.0	2.0	Vanuatu	53
3.2	16.9	0.4			

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 29 Islands and Tonga is notable compared to their potential responsibilities in terms of their area and population. The low values shown in the Federated States of Micronesia and Palau may be significant, but this probably does not account for the contribution of other government agencies, subnational or state authorities and NGOs in these countries, such as through the Protected Areas Networks (PAN). Project funding and NGO staff support much of the CBFM work in the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, and Solomon Islands with the associated risks of short-term and unpredictable funding not always aligned to national policy that can limit community coverage. Female representation varies widely. Kiribati, Samoa and Solomon Islands report relatively high percentages of women in coastal fisheries roles, while many PICTs show low or no female participation in CBFM and MCS roles (Table 10). A recent survey (SPC, 2025) showed that nearly a third of staff working in coastal fisheries were female (of the 11 PICTs that responded to the questionnaire), with higher proportions working in CBFM (45 percent) and lowest in subnational positions (16 percent). The rate of change is unclear, but the use of disaggregated data should allow this to be tracked in future (Table 12). Table 12. Proportion of female staff working in the fisheries agencies of 11 Pacific Island countries and territories* Note: *PICs: the Cook Islands, Fiji, the Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Territories: American Samoa, French Polynesia, the Wallis and Futuna Islands. Source: SPC. 2025. Regional Community-Based Fisheries Management (CBFM) Workshop: Implementation of the Pacific Framework for Action on Scaling up CBFM. Noumea. <https://www.spc.int/digitallibrary/get/4eycj>

Staff type	Total No.	No. of females	Female (%)
National coastal fisheries staff (full-time)	311	114	37
National Community-based fisheries management staff (full-time)	55	25	45
National Community-based fisheries management staff (part-time)	104	24	23
Subnational coastal fisheries staff	96	15	16

30 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific 2.2.5 Ecosystem and inclusive approaches The Framework for Action calls for broader ecosystem approaches through cross agency and multistakeholder collaboration to reduce threats to the environment, enhance adaptation to climate change, improve human well-being, strengthen disaster risk management and ensure equitable access to benefits. This wide range of issues is reflected in the SSF Guidelines across Chapters 5, 6, 8, 9, 10 and 13. Community-based fisheries management (CBFM) is appropriate for managing pressures and threats directly under community control. However, communities and their fisheries resources are often affected by external threats which are beyond their immediate control. These threats have been described

by fisheries agencies in 2003 and 2008 and again in 2024 (SPC, 2025). Land-based and human-induced non-fishery threats The non-specific impacts of climate change is the most frequently mentioned threat to coastal fisheries in surveys of fisheries officers, followed by overfishing. Other important threats to coastal fisheries which have been reported in fisheries officer surveys in 2003, 2008 and 2024 highlight sewage, pollution and silt (including from logging and mining). These have remained major concerns over the years, as has excessive coastal development, land reclamation and beach mining (Table 13). Concerns relating to destructive fishing have fallen, while interactions with offshore fishing continues to be mentioned by some countries. The ranking and incidence of different threats varies across countries. Almost all PICTs rank sewage, nutrients from land, run-off, silt and mud from land-based activities as the highest threats. In the higher islands or larger countries these land-based activities are specified as logging and mining. Pacific Island countries or territories (PICTs) also consistently cite concerns relating to garbage, loss of material taken for construction and destruction of habitats. Some PICTs have major concerns with development and land reclamation, alien and invasive species, pollution, and commercial fishing offshore that impacts coastal fisheries (Table 13). Four PICTs also raised the issue of political “interventions” in fisheries management and wider concerns with sea cucumber fisheries. Table 13. External and non-fisheries threats identified by coastal fisheries staff over the past two decades Notes: PICTs: Pacific Island countries or territories; higher threats are highlighted in red and progressively lower threats are highlighted from yellow to green; overfishing and the general “climate change” threat are not included; *mentioned but not scored. Sources: iKing, M., Fa’asili, U., Fakahau, S. & Vunisea, A. 2003. Strategic plan for fisheries management and sustainable coastal fisheries in Pacific Islands. Working Paper 7. Noumea, SPC. <https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/2ywgd>; iiSouth Pacific Commission, Commonwealth Secretariat. 2008. Pacific islands regional coastal fisheries management policy and strategic actions: (Apia policy) (2008-2013). Noumea, SPC. <https://www.spc.int/digitallibrary/get/fmc3e>; and iiiSPC. 2025. Regional Community-Based Fisheries Management (CBFM) Workshop: Implementation of the Pacific Framework for Action on Scaling up CBFM. Noumea. <https://www.spc.int/digitallibrary/get/4eycj> External and non-fisheries threats 2003 (percentage of 18PICTs)i 2008 (score 1–5 by 21PICTs)ii 2024 (score 1–5 by 16PICTs)iii Sewage and nutrients entering coastal waters 22 3.6 4.2 Garbage dumps at the edge of the sea 17 3.2 Silt entering coastal waters/lagoons 33 3 4.1 Excessive coastal development; hotels, etc. 17 2.9 2.9 Loss of beaches through sand mining 2.9 3.4 Pollutants, including oil, from boats 6 2.6 2.7 Loss of corals – people on reef (gleaning etc.) 2.5 3.4 Pollutants, oil, entering the sea from industry 17 2.4 2.7 Destructive fishing methods (dynamite etc.) * 2.4 Pollutant and fertilizers from agriculture 17 2.4 2.7 Loss of corals through coral bleaching 2.3 * Reclamation of land; loss of marine habitats 11 2.3 2.9 Presence of alien and invasive species 6 2.2 2.8 Loss of corals – cement, buildings etc. 1.7 * Commercial fishing offshore – coastal impact 6 2.1

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 31 Natural disasters, geohazards and climate-related events Coastal communities reliant on fishing face specific threats brought by cyclones or typhoons, drought and flooding and these threats are expected to intensify as a result of climate change. Coastal communities are also highly vulnerable to geohazards such as volcanoes, earthquakes and tsunamis – the region has been affected by all too many of these hazards (SPC, 2025). Disaster preparedness and disaster response are areas in which fisheries agencies and stakeholders have experience. However, there is little sign that cross-agency/multistakeholder collaboration is being actively improved – a type of collaboration that should be actively encouraged and harnessed to face the predicted increasing impacts of climate change. Cross-agency and multistakeholder collaboration The assessment of challenges relating to climate change and also wider environmental issues suggests a serious gap (persistent siloes) in terms of cross-agency collaboration. Fisheries agencies usually lack the mandate or power to address external threats (environment, disaster, climate, forestry, mining), and communities lack the authority to address them (e.g. pollution, logging, mining) without broader government support. There is generally a lack of institutionalized, systematic cross-agency mechanisms, especially at the subnational level and in larger countries (SPC, 2025). Gender equality, disability and social inclusion The Framework for Action integrates a people-centred approach which is supported consistently at ministerial and leader

level as broader commitments towards progressing gender equality and respect for human rights. Gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) in Pacific Island coastal fisheries management shows growing recognition and positive steps, such as increased gender assessments, the formation of women's and youth groups, GEDSI instruments in some national fisheries agencies, more inclusive policy language and increased inclusion of women and youth in village committees. Nonetheless, significant gaps remain. Women, youth, people with disabilities, migrants and those without assets or titles are still often marginalized in decision-making and benefit-sharing. Persistent barriers include entrenched cultural norms, limited access to information, underrepresentation in leadership and a lack of systematic data collection on GEDSI outcomes. While regional frameworks and recent initiatives have begun to address these issues, progress is uneven and often project-dependent rather than institutionalized. Major gaps that have been identified and need addressing include mainstreaming GEDSI across all fisheries policies, institutions, agencies and programmes; ensuring accessible and disaggregated data; building capacity for inclusive participation; and securing sustained resources and political will to move beyond tokenism and towards genuine empowerment and equitable benefit for all community members (SPC, 2025).

2.3 Regionally identified priorities and key issues The preceding section independently reviews progress and highlights key challenges. Priorities have also been identified by regional stakeholders in at least three important processes at the political, civil society and practitioner levels: RFMMs, CBFDs and a regional meeting and questionnaire evaluating progress of CBFM in 2024. These priorities are summarized below to refine the selection of main topics addressed in Section 3 – the Outlook.

2.3.1 Regional Fisheries Ministers Meeting: outcomes of the fifth and sixth meetings The RFMM is a joint event launched in 2020, following the 2018 decision by Pacific Island Forum Leaders for an “annual Regional Fisheries Ministers meeting, on the margins of the Forum Fisheries Committee Ministerial Meeting, to report to Leaders on all fisheries related matters” (PIFS, 2018). The Meeting aims to provide more comprehensive updates on fisheries-related work from the FFA, SPC, the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and the Parties to the Nauru Agreement. The outcomes of the fifth and sixth RFMMs in 2024 and 2025 respectively⁵ relating to coastal fisheries and community-based approaches may be summarized under the following key areas: ⁵ Statement of Outcomes from the fifth Regional Fisheries Ministers Meeting (RFMM5), 24–25 July 2024, Honiara, Solomon Islands. Noumea, SPC. <https://www.spc.int/digitalibrary/get/czt2z> and Communique from the sixth Regional Fisheries Ministers Meeting (RFMM6), Niue, 23 July 2025. <https://fame.spc.int/events/rfmm6>

32 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific • Governance, tenure, legal frameworks and traditional knowledge and practices. Fisheries management in the Pacific Islands needs to build on and adapt to the diverse and unique situations. This requires appropriate use of traditional knowledge, practices and values fundamental to culture, and improved legislation and policies adapted to the local context. • Sustaining resource management through scaling up CBFM. Ministers reaffirmed the critical importance of scaling up CBFM as a foundation for sustaining coastal resources, supporting food security, livelihoods, health and cultural identity. The Framework for Action was re-endorsed and extended to 2030 in order to continue offering technical support, address emerging demands and provide more tailored, country-specific CBFM approaches. • Sustainable financing, staffing and capacity. Ministers emphasized the critical and urgent resourcing needs for coastal fisheries noting the risk to CBFM success if resourcing is not sustained. Greater and more predictable financing needs to be sustained and nationally accessible in order to support staff at regional, subnational and national levels, including dedicated CBFM staff within national ministries. Enhanced and targeted capacity-building is needed to assist coastal fisheries. The critical role of grassroots networks, local CSOs and youth groups in expanding reach and building local ownership of fisheries governance was particularly noted. • Environmental and social drivers, inclusion, ecosystem approaches and climate change. Ministers called for accelerating progress on GEDSI in CBFM that is appropriate to local traditional and cultural practices. Collaboration is encouraged to ensure inclusive, ecosystem-based approaches that promote climate resilience and disaster preparedness. The threat of climate change on coastal fisheries calls for strengthened coastal fisheries management, a regional scientific approach and sustainable financing to address climate-induced

declines. The process towards achieving the target of 30 percent of the ocean to be protected by 2030 must be member-driven, informed by scientific and technical guidance, and coordinated across regional agencies – taking into account national contexts and aspirations. Table 14. Prioritized non-fishery threats to coastal fisheries ranked by participants from 16 Pacific Island countries and territories

Threat	American Samoa	Cook Islands	Fiji	Micronesia (Federated States of)	Kiribati	Marshall Islands	Nauru	Palau	Papua New Guinea†	French Polynesia	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Wallis and Futuna Islands	Average
Sewage, nutrients from land	4	5	4	5	5	1	5	5	3	5	3	5	5	4	3	4.2
Run-off, silt, mud from land-based activities‡	4	4	5	4	1	4	4	4	5	5	4	3	5	5	4	5
Garbage/ rubbish entering sea	4	4	4	4	3	5	4	5	4	5	4	1	4	2	3	4.1
Loss of material taken for construction	4	2	4	5	4	3	2	5	2	3	2	4	5	5	4	3.7
Destruction of habitats	3	2	4	5	4	4	3	2	5	4	3	2	5	4	1	3.4
Development, building, land reclamation	4	2	5	1	2	3	5	2	3	3	2	1	5	4	1	2.9
Alien and invasive species	2	4	3	2	2	4	2	2	1	4	2	3	5	5	2	2.8
Pollution (inc. oil, pesticides, fertilizer)	3	3	5	1	2	3	3	2	2	1	2	4	3	4	1	2.7
Commercial fishing offshore – coastal impact	1	1	5	1	2	2	1	5	1	1	2	2	1	1	2	2.1

Notes: Scale: 1=low priority to 5=very high priority; higher threats are highlighted in red and progressively lower threats are highlighted from yellow to green; overfishing and the general “climate change” threat are not included; *respondents from Kosrae; †scores from South Papua New Guinea – Central Province; and ‡ logging and mining in Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands

Source: SPC. 2025. Regional Community-Based Fisheries Management (CBFM) Workshop: Implementation of the Pacific Framework for Action on Scaling up CBFM. Noumea. <https://www.spc.int/digitallibrary/get/4eycj>

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 33 • Monitoring, control, surveillance and enforcement, and data gaps. Ministers called for investment in community-linked MCSE systems and highlighted the persistent challenges in closing critical data gaps in coastal fisheries. The focus is on strengthening regional science infrastructure and supporting targeted investment in digital tools, expanded surveys and monitoring, and enhanced indicators.

2.3.2 Community-based fisheries dialogues: priorities from meetings one to five

Community-based fisheries dialogues (CBFDs) have been held five times since 2021, led by CSOs and other non-state actors actively involved in community-based fisheries and nationally selected from each country in the Pacific Islands region. The outcomes of the first four meetings⁶ were used to inform the topics addressed in the current report, and a first draft of the main topics included in this report was discussed at the fifth CBFD (CBFD5)⁷. The main priorities can be summarized as follows:

- Strengthening recognition of traditional governance and knowledge. Integrating traditional systems of governance in national legal frameworks; strengthening rights, including tenure and their alignment with legislation; and addressing the loss of traditional and local knowledge, as well as the urgent need to transfer knowledge to younger generations.
- Improving enforcement. Enhancing MCSE through local and government collaboration. Recognizing that communities’ ways of dealing with conflicts and compliance are the critical first line of enforcement.
- Enhancing dialogue. Building stronger, two-way communications and partnerships between government agencies and communities, including national mechanisms to ensure the meaningful participation of fishers in developing and reviewing national regulations and rules.
- Ensuring inclusion. Promoting the participation of women and marginalized groups in local governance and decision-making processes.
- Securing resources and building capacity. Establishing long-term funding and increasing technical capacity for local initiatives, including data for management.

2.3.3 Pacific Community Regional Community-Based Fisheries Management Workshop

Practitioners from PICTS at the 2024 regional CBFM workshop (SPC, 2025) alongside information gathered from a country questionnaire identified distinct priorities and needs for scaling up CBFM according to their contexts and national priorities. The highlighted themes included:

- Two-way communications
- Information and awareness
- Networks and coordination mechanisms
- Supporting CBFM in policy and legislation, and appropriate CBFM scaling strategies
- Mitigation of external threats
- Inclusive and equitable participation

Government representatives highlighted capacity needs in the areas of MCSE and information and awareness. Countries that do not already have clear strategies for increased coverage of site-based support generally require clarification of legislation or strategies to be able to support CBFM. In contrast, countries with high coverage of site-based CBFM, or potentially good chances

of high coverage, emphasized networking, information and awareness. Larger or geographically dispersed countries prioritized information, provincial support, as well as networking and partnerships. Two areas were proposed for increased attention and additional support from regional agencies, donors and partners:

6 <https://cbfm.spc.int/community-based-fisheries-dialogue> 7
<https://www.fao.org/voluntary-guidelines-small-scale-fisheries/news/news-detail/fao-supports-5th-cbdf/en>

34 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific • Sustainable financing. Government agencies urgently require adequate and predictable operational budgets. Communities also need access to finance for a variety of CBFM and alternative livelihood activities. Mechanisms for this need to be developed. • Traditional ecological knowledge and management systems. Despite the widespread recognition of the value of local knowledge and governance systems, this does not seem adequately integrated into CBFM or the broader coastal fisheries management and conservation approaches. 2.4 Priority themes The regional priorities and needs align well with global intergovernmental priorities, such as those captured in FAO's SSF Guidelines, and with priorities set out at the global civil society level by the Call to Action from small-scale fishers.⁸ Accordingly, the Outlook section of this report (Section 3) is structured around themes that are based on the Pacific Islands regional context and the above-mentioned community fisheries management needs identified by PICTs. It draws on lessons learned from experiences and progress to date in order to examine the current situation and explore potential ways forward for each theme. The themes for the Outlook section, and corresponding chapters of the SSF Guidelines, are: 1. Governance, local knowledge, tenure, access and use rights, including traditional knowledge and practices (Chapter 5a). 2. Interactions and policy coherence with other ocean agendas, including conservation (Chapter 10). 3. Sustainable resource management and fisheries administration for scaling up CBFM, including information and awareness and enhancing MCSE, sustainable financing, staffing and capacity (Chapters 5b, 11, 12 and 13). 4. Adaptation, livelihoods and resilience, including climate change, disasters and resilience to global shocks, sustainable livelihoods and social inclusion (Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9). ⁸ <https://www.ssfcalltoaction.org/>

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 35 3. Outlook for achieving sustainable coastal fisheries through scaling up community-based fisheries management The preceding section summarizes the status of scaling up CBFM for coastal fisheries management. Much of the analysis (SPC, 2025) informed the decision to extend the Framework for Action, the region's implementation plan, to continue to provide overall guidance until 2030 (SPC, 2025). The Framework for Action remains the appropriate and relevant focus of implementation support. This Outlook section further explores issues identified across four main themes, examines opportunities and offers potential ways forward and priority actions. 3.1 Governance, tenure and traditional knowledge Fisheries management in the Pacific Islands region is built on systems of spatial and use rights. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) defines the rights and responsibilities of nations with respect to their use of the world's oceans, establishing guidelines for use and management of marine natural resources. All PICs are parties to UNCLOS, but the region is unique in that most countries have systems of customary tenure, most clearly defined on land but also applying to coastal waters (Kuemlangan, 2004). The co-existence of customary law and rights with modern legal systems is a fact of life for many PICs (Rohe et al., 2019). The basis in both systems of spatial rights is recognized at the highest regional policy level (the regional roadmap for sustainable Pacific fisheries endorsed at the forty-sixth Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting in 2015) in the form of inshore fisheries management driven by clear user rights. Offshore fisheries make innovative use of modern rights over the EEZ in the form of zone-based management of offshore fisheries. In the context of regional fisheries management organizations, this supersedes the concept of flag-based management whereby offshore fishing rights, capacity limits and catch shares have long been allocated among established distant-water fishing nations, despite the entry into force of UNCLOS and the establishment of EEZs. The SSF Guidelines call on states to recognize and accommodate legitimate tenure rights including customary tenure and grant preferential access for small-scale fisheries – creating and enforcing exclusive zones for small-scale fisheries where appropriate. This section examines the salient issues and outlook for tenure rights such as the UNCLOS-derived approaches to management of

coastal fisheries using preferential access for small-scale fisheries. 3.1.1 Tenure and community access to resources Traditional Pacific Island indigenous relationships with land and sea are characterized by an in-depth understanding of natural resources, collective memory of events and ancestral practices, as well as an ability to adapt to historical circumstances and more contemporary imperatives. These relationships continue to shape physical, social and spiritual landscapes including the duty of care and stewardship. Embedded in them are complex systems of rights governing ownership, access and management rights over marine areas and resources, termed CMT (Johannes, 1978; Hviding, 1988; Ruddle et al., 1992).

36 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific Communities set customary rules in areas over which they claim rights for a variety of reasons, which may include resource management intent. Regardless of the motives, such rules may have positive impacts on marine resources, such as allowing depleted resources to recover, protecting important biological events and banning certain harvesting practices. The enforcement of such tenure rights and implementation of specific tools or rules in these areas may be very widespread as reflected by Johannes and Hickey (2004) in Vanuatu or Brewer (2013) in Solomon Islands. The principles involved may also apply to offshore or deep-sea areas (D'Arcy, 2013) and may be invoked due to encroachment of commercial fishing or other uses (Ruddle et al., 1992; Kinch, 2024). Arguably, the more recent development and proliferation of CBFM sites in the Pacific Islands region has been made possible by building on the existing CMT systems and other local tenure arrangements, or, in the case of Tonga, by creating adequate statutory rights systems. Tenure rights in particular areas may not appear overt to outsiders or be easy for locals to explain as part of daily life, becoming most noticeable when rights are infringed (e.g. extraction of valuable resources) or when the rights holders assert rules over use – such as permanently or temporarily banning access to particular, usually small, areas (Govan et al., 2009). Examples include establishing tabu (Fiji), tapu (Tuvalu), ra'ui (the Cook Islands), bul (Palau), sa (Samoa), mo (the Marshall Islands), lafu (Tokelau) and rahui (French Polynesia). Vave (2021; 2022) warns that these cultural practices have a variety of ceremonial purposes (e.g. relating to death, conception, circumcision) as well as food provisioning. They do not necessarily have explicit biodiversity conservation functions, meaning that their function may be misconstrued by conservation practitioners (or locals) or undervalued – which may contribute to erosion of traditional practices. Most jurisdictions in the Pacific Islands region, apart from Tonga, have legislation in place which recognizes customary rights to land (over 81–98 percent of land in the various PICTs). The situation regarding extent and use of marine tenure is not so clear (Govan et al., 2009; Fitzpatrick, 2023) and is becoming increasingly complex with the addition of new layers of legislation. Customary and local land tenure has received growing attention regarding climate change adaptation, relocation and mobility, while less attention has been paid to aspects of marine tenure (e.g. Fitzpatrick, 2023; Newport et al., 2024). There is a need to address the limited understanding of the ways in which diverse communities view tenure in their local contexts and how these ways can interact with modern fisheries (Bambridge, 2016; Cripe, 2025) or climate change adaptation (Newport et al., 2024). Customary marine tenure (CMT) has often been poorly integrated with CBFM projects, for instance the marine tenure rights may be vested in families or tribes who are not part of the local community that is expected to practice CBFM (Govan et al., 2015). Such complexities will increase when communities are relocated as a result of climate change unless greater care is taken over the existing systems of tenure and what rights relocated populations may require to sustain their culture and marine resource practices and livelihoods. Customary marine tenure (CMT) is vital to local stewardship of marine resources and therefore to CBFM. However, it is diverse and varies across local contexts, encompassing ancestral practices, physical, social and spiritual elements that can dynamically change over time or according to circumstances and local systems of interpretation. Caution is required when interpreting and codifying such systems (Ruddle and Johannes, 1989; Bambridge, 2016; Newport et al., 2024; Cripe, 2025). The role of modern marine spatial planning approaches will need particular attention and precaution in the context of traditional tenure and spatial planning (Hickey and Robinson, 2024; de Waegh et al., 2024; Singh, 2025). Although there is increasing and relevant literature, it is not appropriate for this report to explore in depth traditional or cultural perspectives on CMT, as these concepts require indigenous-led studies that represent the diversity of

contexts, tenures and worldviews in each of the countries or tribes of the Pacific Islands region. Such discussions may have to deconstruct or at least re-examine many assumptions (e.g. Vave, 2021). Encouraging such indigenous-led and non-sectoral discussions on CMT and interactions with emerging pressures in the conservation and fisheries arenas, as well as in other sectors, is a key recommendation.

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 37 The legal basis for customary marine tenure as a tool to underpin community-based fisheries management This report examines the practical interaction of tenure rights with modern fisheries administration and management at the fisheries policy level. The Framework for Action, following prior accepted terminology which acknowledges that some PICs may not have or may not recognize customary tenure, calls for communities to support clear “user and management rights”. Some PICs have established legal mechanisms to ensure that coastal fishing communities have modern frameworks to strengthen management control over coastal resources (e.g. Samoa and Tonga) or to specifically regulate interactions between coastal fisheries management and CMT, such as commercial licensing (Fiji) or management plans (Solomon Islands). Graham and D’Andrea (2021) provide initial considerations regarding human rights or the allocation of user rights and what requires further exploration in each PICT. These include the rights of individuals who are not members of or indigenous to the particular rights-holding community, such as migrants or individuals from neighbouring landlocked communities (e.g. Crosman et al., 2022), noting that land and marine boundary issues and access to the foreshore are among the most common source of conflict between communities (Newport et al., 2024). Customary laws are constitutionally recognized in most PICs (in some cases at the subnational level, such as in Yap State). However, the way in which such broad provisions are applied to specific issues in land and marine tenure or natural resource management seems more challenging to interpret. A common complication is that the legislation may derive from colonial legacies of countries with very different tenure systems, such as the United Kingdom or the United States (Fitzpatrick, 2005; Cripe, 2025). The status of legal support for tenure and therefore CBFM in fisheries legislation has been reviewed by O’Connor et al. (2023) and Cohen et al. (2024). The fisheries legislation has been updated in most PICs and legislation increasingly requires consultation with customary owners (Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu) or recognition of traditional rights (Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands) – but this may still pose considerable challenges (Box 4 and Box 5). It can also provide for community-based management in various forms (Samoa and Solomon Islands). In some PICs, for example Palau and Vanuatu, land ownership may extend to the reef area, including its marine resources. However, in other PICs, where the recognition of customary rights on land does not extend to the reef, the foreshore or marine waters, the state retains ownership while often recognizing community access and user rights. These rights may be allocated to local communities either preferentially (e.g. American Samoa and Kiribati) or exclusively (e.g. Fiji and Solomon Islands) based on CMT arrangements. While rights may apply to all coastal indigenous communities in some countries, certain types of rights may also be granted through statutory law, either through existing traditional processes (e.g. Samoa) or by request through statutory approaches to co-management (e.g. Tonga). Box 4. Disentangling customary tenure rights for Community-based fisheries management: the case of Papua New Guinea The Papua New Guinea Constitution recognizes customary law as part of the underlying law, and the Fisheries Management Act 1998 acknowledges customary fishing rights, particularly recognizing them in relation to subsistence fishing and Community-based management. However, the State exerts ultimate ownership and regulatory authority over marine resources, especially for commercial and conservation purposes. A number of laws assert the State’s jurisdiction over waters below the low tide mark (Organic Law on Provincial and Local Level Governments 1997, Bougainville Peace Agreement 2001b, Maritime Zones Act 2015, Mining Act 1992). While communities retain important roles in subsistence fishing and local management, and implement Community-based fisheries management in practice, their legal rights are not as strong as many believe, especially when these conflict with State interests.

38 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific Unpacking tenure rights: a bundle of rights Use rights often refer to the rights to access and harvest resources but CMT has many other dimensions. In terms of contemporary fisheries co-management, these other dimensions may be

considered important or even necessary depending on the role expected of the community or fishers (Charles, 2013). To better assess these matters, tenure rights may be examined as a series of different rights, known as the bundle of rights approach developed from Schlager and Ostrom (1992) and subsequent authors (Basurto et al., 2023; Cohen et al., 2024; Tholan et al., 2024). The bundle of rights includes rights to access, withdrawal, management, exclusion, enforcement, transfer and transformation. A subset or all of these may be experienced in different contexts by groups and individuals (Table 15). Global research into management of small-scale fisheries suggests that responsible management and sustainable use of resources by local and small-scale fishers are more likely if the tenure system is adequately devolved and provides users with sufficient control over decision-making and management. A minimum basis for just and effective small-scale fisheries management is considered to be secure rights to access and withdrawal. When fishers are also granted rights to management, exclusion and transferability, they are considered significantly more empowered to manage their fisheries. Supportive institutional structures that are tailored to local contexts lead to empowered fishers that are more likely to develop processes that reflect their local values around stewardship of the aquatic environment, sustainable fisheries and/or equitable livelihoods (Basurto et al., 2023; 2025). Other rights, powers or attributes sometimes listed as necessary for delegated co-management include the unlimited duration of rights and right to due process and compensation. Tenure security is an important dimension, and the more complete the bundle of rights, the higher the tenure security (Courtney and Jhaveri, 2017). It is important to consider who holds the rights and how these are allocated. In the case of private property, the rights holders may be private individuals or corporate bodies which can freely trade the Box 5. Solomon Islands Fisheries Act 2015. Legal basis for Community-based fisheries management – from promise to stagnation? The development of legislative support for customary marine tenure as a conservation or fisheries management tool is frequently called for. However, such legislation may not improve outcomes or may introduce additional challenges. One frequent criticism is that customary systems need to be flexible and capable of rapidly responding to change or being quickly renegotiated depending on the circumstances. These characteristics are hard to accommodate in statutory laws and legal systems. Implementation and enforcement usually present major hurdles, and legislation needs to better align with the existing or foreseeable capacity of government and fisheries administrations. This may be to meet demand and process applications for Community-based fishery management (CBFM) sites, or to subsequently support or enforce them. The addition of bureaucratic burden, outside the control or expertise of communities can slow down the adoption of community management measures or undermine community autonomy and empowerment. The Solomon Islands Fisheries Act 2015 recognizes customary tenure of coastal fishery resources, including their management for subsistence purposes. The Act provides mechanisms for the legal establishment of CBFM. However, at least in the understanding of communities and other main stakeholders, it requires provincial and national government staff to process and approve applications before any level of enforcement is provided. Developing a community plan can require technical expertise (though minimal) and lead to potentially fraught discussions with neighbouring communities regarding boundaries. Communities are unable to meet the requirements without external support, such as from a non-governmental organization, and government administrations can become overburdened. These issues may well account for the fact that no CBFM plans have been gazetted in Solomon Islands 10 years after the Act entered into force.ⁱ A situation that certain commentators had identified as a risk, even though the original intention was to recognize, support and strengthen existing community practices.ⁱⁱ Sources: i van Der Ploeg, J., Sukulu, M., Govan, H. & Eriksson, H. 2024. Scaling-up community-based resource management in Solomon Islands. *Conservation Science and Practice*, 6(12): 13264. <https://doi.org/10.1111/csp2.13264>; and iiSchwarz, A.M., Gordon, J. & Ramofafia, C. 2020. Nudging statutory law to make space for customary processes and community-based fisheries management in Solomon Islands. *Maritime Studies*, 19(4): 475–487. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40152-020-00176-0>

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 39 property governed by markets and the relevant law. In customary or community tenure, the collective or communal rights are held by groups such as community organizations, tribes or clans. Here, the transfer of rights may relate to other criteria,

possibly but not necessarily defined in law, such as kinship, inheritance, historical use, residence or occupation. A person or body may be designated as the decision maker relating to these rights and different members of the community may have more influence or be affected by the rights differently (Cohen et al., 2024) – the latter being more frequently associated with customary tenure (Cohen et al., 2024). Transferring rights through inheritance or other forms of community-embedded succession can reinforce community stability, foster a long-term stewardship ethic and maintain intergenerational equity in small-scale fisheries (Charles, 2011, 2023). In contrast, allowing rights to be permanently transferred through market mechanisms, such as transferable quotas, has repeatedly been shown to generate overconcentration of rights, displacement of small-scale fishers and the loss of rights from local communities to external or corporate actors. These outcomes undermine community stability, weaken resource stewardship and produce substantial negative impacts on rural livelihoods, as extensively documented in individual transferrable quota fisheries (Copes and Charles, 2004). The Framework for Action and the regional roadmap emphasize user rights and community-based management, but the terminology used, if left unspecified, can be misinterpreted as supporting individual, market-based and permanently transferable rights systems such as individual transferrable quotas. For the above reasons, and to ensure that communities maintain sufficiently secure communal rights to “drive” CBFM (e.g. the regional roadmap), it is preferable for CBFM systems to constrain or prohibit the permanent transfer of use rights, ensuring that community-held access cannot be alienated through market trading (Charles, 2025). Instead, rights should remain embedded within communities – transferrable only through mechanisms such as inheritance, internal community processes or structured community quota/rights banks – to safeguard community well-being and sustain the integrity of CBFM. These considerations may also apply to discussions on the duration of commercial fisher access to customary grounds through permits or licensing.

Table 15. Types of right comprising the bundle of tenure rights and how these rights are applied

Note: * The way in which tenure rights are applied can be grouped into three broad categories of tenure: government administered, co-managed (designated for local communities) and indigenous or private (local) ownership. Source: Authors own elaboration based on Cohen, P.J., Tholan, B., Dean Fitz, K., Pradhan, S.K., Solis Rivera, V., Govan, H. 2024. Marine, Coastal and Shoreline Tenure. Zenodo. doi:10.5281/zenodo.11515141

Type of right (from the bundle of rights)	How tenure rights are applied
1. Access rights.	Grant authorization to an area and/or resources. Access and withdrawal rights are often referred to together as use rights. May include formal licences/permits and other permissions. Typical of government-administered rights systems. Some use rights may be allocated to fishers. Use rights are the minimum basis for co-management. Government administered
2. Withdrawal rights.	The right to harvest resources within the area – may include fisheries management measures such as catch limits and quotas. 3. Management rights. Grant decision-making power to create the rules about how areas and resources are used and maintained. Management rights can be used to define allowed and prohibited activities. Community-based fisheries management (CBFM): the above group of rights and at least one of the three types of rights from this group must be allocated to support CBFM. Designated for local communities
4. Exclusion rights.	Allow rights-holders to exclude or ban others from using certain resources and accessing areas. 5. Enforcement rights. The right to enforce established rules in the area and apply sanctions for non-compliance. 6. Transfer rights. The right to transfer existing rights to other individuals, groups or entities. Also known as alienation rights. Transfer may take place through selling, leasing, gifting, via customary payments and ceremony, or through descent systems or marriage. CBFM: all the rights from the two groups above, as well as these two types of rights constitute indigenous ownership or private property. Indigenous tenure usually restricts transfer to specific systems and recipients. Indigenous or local ownership
7. Transformation rights.	The right to repurpose the land (area and resources) for a different use. Rights included: Types 1 to 7

Rights included: Types 1 to 5
Rights included: Types 1&2

40 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific Tenure rights may also be tied to responsibilities and obligations – in some cases meeting these responsibilities (e.g. stewardship) may be a precondition for rights to continue (e.g. where governments devolve rights). In customary rights regimes,

failure to meet responsibilities or obligations (duty of care), may be subject to tribal or community critique (Cohen et al., 2024). The Framework for Action requires “recognising user and management rights of communities in marine inshore areas” and establishing “both rights and responsibilities of users as rights holders and the state as duty bearer” (SPC, 2024a). To date, it has not been possible to track the status of user rights for CBFM in sufficient detail. More in-depth assessment and monitoring are needed to ensure that rights are adequately supported (Graham and D’Andrea, 2021; Govan and Lalavanua, 2023). Issues relating to user rights or the interpretation of CMT in the context of national legislations and the development of CBFM have emerged. Examples include the undesired effects of unanticipated bureaucratic burden in Solomon Islands for communities wishing to formalize their local management through community fisheries management plans (Box 5); and the impacts on traditional community stewardship in Fiji when attempting to streamline consultation processes with traditional rights holders over commercial licensing in their traditional fishing grounds (Box 6). Where customary tenure does not exist (Tonga) or was perceived to be insufficient for CBFM (Samoa), legal mechanisms have been specifically created, but countries will need to assess how or whether CMT can support CBFM and what provisions may be necessary (e.g. Papua New Guinea [Box 4]). Local and national discussion of customary marine tenure. Indigenous-led, non-sectoral study and debate should be encouraged, particularly at the national level where the diversity of contexts, tenures and worldviews in each of the countries or tribes of the Pacific Islands region can be reflected. Such discussions need to deconstruct or at least re-examine many assumptions (e.g. Vave, 2021). Some of the practical issues that could also be considered in these forums include:

- The extent seaward of customary marine tenure claims and knowledge. Legislation often applies the same (e.g. 3 nm seaward of reefs) to all communities but this may be inconsistent with different local community perceptions such as their rights extending to the horizon (e.g. Hickey and Robinson, 2024).

Box 6. Customary rights in the context of coastal fishing in Fiji

Customary rights over traditional fishing grounds in Fiji have long been a contentious issue. Community-based fisheries management (CBFM) in the form of locally managed marine areas (LMMAs) has proceeded mainly under customary protocols. Legal gazetting of LMMAs is not generally favoured by communities for fear of surrendering some power or flexibility and the difficulty of reversing such a process if desired. One of the few areas of support from modern legislation is offered by the coastal fisheries licence permitting system, which requires consultation with the customary rights holders. The licence permits may include an obligation to follow specific community rules, not following the provisions of the licence could lead to loss of the licence, giving communities sufficient “legal teeth” to enforce LMMA rules on commercial fishers. Attempts to avoid abuse of this process (e.g. illegal goodwill payments) and streamline consultation processes have been proposed in the past, as has the possibility of generating funds for the rights holders from licence fees. Discussion relating to extending the duration of licences does not appear to have included CBFM elements relating to the need for adaptive management. More recently, proposals to devolve full rights to rights holders are under discussion. Whether the outcomes of such discussions will improve CBFM or stewardship will partly depend on how rights to exclusion, withdrawal, management, transfer and enforcement are handled. Sources: FELA (Environmental Law Association of Fiji), Environmental Defender’s Office & David & Lucile Packard Foundation. 2017. *Regulating Fiji’s Coastal Fisheries: policy and law discussion paper* / Fiji Environmental Law Association and EDO NSW. Suva, USP Press. <https://nla.gov.au/nla.cat-vn7504808>; Sloan, J. & Chand, K. 2014. *A review of near shore fisheries law & governance in Fiji*. Suva, Siwatibau & Sloan. <https://macbio-pacific.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/SS-Fisheries-Review-09-2.pdf>; and Bainimarama, V. 2020. Only govt fees and proposed access fees should be paid in the customary fishing right license and permit process – Protect ordinary Fijians who depend on small-scale fishing income – PM. *Fijivillage News*, 26 August 2020. Fiji. [Cited on 30 December 2025]. <https://www.fijivillage.com/news/Only-govt-fees-and-proposed-access-fees-should-be-paid-in-the-customary-fishing-right-license-and-permit-process-5x8rf4/>

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 41 • Desirability of the legal designation of CBFM sites. Some PICs require CBFM sites to be legally gazetted while others offer no mechanism to

do so. Each country or local context is different, and a uniform approach cannot be applied. Countries and communities will need to consider the potential advantages (e.g. increased legal enforceability) and disadvantages (loss of flexibility or power), the ease with which the legal process may be accomplished by communities and whether the government in question has the capacity to process applications or assume an increased enforcement burden. • Interaction of customary rights with modern uses, cash economies and industrial fisheries, and the blue economy. Seeking implementable approaches rather than legally perfect ones and a deeper understanding of the governance context, including the role of CMT and traditional practices in marine spatial planning. • The impact of licence fees or payments for use. Licensing and licence fees need to be considered as a management mechanism to restrict fishing effort to a sustainable level and not just for raising revenue. The payment of licence fees grants access to resources which are stewarded i.e. managed to be available in harvestable quantities, and the costs of stewardship may be in part covered by such fees. How the fees are distributed equitably and what they should be used for become key questions. Analysis and tracking of user rights in CBFM with the bundle of rights approach. Use of the bundle of rights approach is recommended to assess the impact of sometimes apparently unrelated legislation or administrative procedures (fisheries as well as other sectors) on CBFM. Examples of indices or assessment tools to assess tenure security have been developed (Basurto et al., 2023; Govan et al., 2024) and could be further adapted for the Pacific Islands context. A test of the bundle of rights approach and a preliminary assessment is provided in Annex 1. Nadya Vaa, © FAO

42 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific 3.1.2 Building on traditional ecological knowledge for community-based fisheries management The original rationale for community-based approaches to natural resource management in the Pacific Islands region was for communities to utilize and build on their own local and traditional knowledge and governance systems (e.g. LMMA [Govan et al., 2008]). Although communities do use their traditional or local knowledge, practices and management systems – including identification of issues and potential solutions (Johannes and Hickey, 2004; Abernethy et al., 2014) – there are increasing concerns that traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) and traditional ecological knowledge management systems (TEKMS) are not being adequately considered or supported and that far greater consideration is needed (SPC, 2025; CBF5).9 Traditional ecological knowledge and management systems (TEKMS) may be undervalued or forgotten as new initiatives are introduced in communities where conservation or even CBFM projects in place. This is of concern as traditional knowledge provides some of the most locally useful, accepted and relevant solutions to inform and sustain management – if ignored it may fall into disuse or be lost. community-based fisheries management (CBFM) stakeholders have agreed to develop guidance relating to the role of local and traditional knowledge in CBFM (SPC, 2025) – some preliminary guidance is shown in Box 7. Recent large-scale surveys suggest that a significant proportion of communities in Melanesia implement fisheries management rules of their own. In Vanuatu, 527 communities out of 586 (90 percent) knew of at least one community-established rule affecting their fisheries resources even in the absence of government or NGO support (VFD and UOW, 2024). In New Ireland Province (Papua New Guinea) and Makira Province (Solomon Islands) surveys of more than 30 communities in each province found that even though government fisheries staff and NGOs are rarely seen in the villages, more than half the communities have set their own fishing rules – which tend to involve temporary bans and/or closed areas and be established by resource owners or leaders (Govan and Vieux, 2025). Other PICs report similar situations where many communities have established fishing rules with little if any outside support, for example, the Cook Islands, Tokelau, Solomon Islands (Brewer, 2013), and Vanuatu (Johannes and Hickey, 2004). Where communities can exert sufficiently strong tenure rights, they are able to establish their own fisheries management rules, drawing on local or traditional knowledge and management practices. The role of CMT and TEK and traditional management systems should be given higher priority as the fundamental core to CBFM (see Case Study 6. Traditional Knowledge). A major implication for scaling up CBFM is ensuring that communities have better access to information on detecting and resolving specific marine resource management problems within the context of secure tenure. 9 <https://cbfm.spc.int/community-based-fisheries-dialogue> Box 7. Considerations relating to traditional

knowledge systems and the promotion of Community-based fisheries management Communities and those supporting communities should be encouraged to highlight the importance of traditional knowledge in utilizing marine resources and managing both these resources and the environment sustainably. They should also be encouraged to underline its relevance to CBFM, including: • life and habits of species of interest (including seasons, spawning locations lunar cycles); • different ways of harvesting resources; • practices for sustainable use or resource management; • traditional governance and communal decision-making systems; • traditional stories about the resources and ecosystems; • links between resources, land-sea, material and spiritual dimensions; and • traditional and communal approaches to gender and social inclusion. Those visiting communities should respect that: • this kind of knowledge is passed on in traditional ways. Putting the knowledge “in print” (documenting, writing or publishing) is not usually one of those ways; • the community decides how, who or whether anyone else should access this knowledge; • in general, the information is not widely or easily shared outside the groups; • this sort of information or intellectual property belongs to the holders and should not be documented or shared without express permission from the rights holders; • new programmes or initiatives being brought to villages may appear attractive but may distract from communities exploring their existing strengths and solutions; and • free, prior and informed consent procedures and grievance and redress mechanisms, which offer the possibility of withdrawing consent, are now required by many organizations.

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 43 3.1.3 Protection through preferential access areas or inshore exclusion zones The FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (FAO, 1995) called for preferential access for small-scale fisheries to traditional fishing grounds and resources, a topic further detailed in the SSF Guidelines and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs [14b]). Many countries around the world, including some PICs, have placed restrictions on industrial fishing in inshore or coastal areas giving preference to small-scale fishers based on State UNCLOS rights within territorial waters under UNCLOS. These preferential access areas (PAAs) for small-scale fisheries (also termed inshore exclusion zones in some instances) give preference to small-scale fishers over larger-scale fishing, which may even be totally excluded (Symes and Phillipson, 2009; Steadman et al., 2021). Preferential access areas (PAAs) or inshore or industrial exclusion zones present some important opportunities for coastal fisheries and for scaling up CBFM in particular. Where CMT is not currently adequate for controlling access to nearshore areas, the enforcement of PAAs may afford a buffer to potentially much more destructive industrial fishing as well as an opportunity for further local or artisanal fisheries development within these tenure regimes. Creating a physical space for small-scale fishers to operate and potentially expand as conditions change (e.g. climate change-induced) may provide broader and more sustainable inputs to national economies that are easier to regulate (ELI, 2020). In addition, inshore areas also have a concentration of valuable biodiversity and ecosystems (see Section 3.2) which may be particularly sensitive to industrial fishing. Interactions with offshore fisheries have been noted as a potential threat to coastal fisheries by respondents from Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Tuvalu with concerns also noted by the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Tonga (see Section 2.2.5). Anecdotal reports from communities suggest that incursions from industrial fishing vessels into nearshore waters or interactions around nearshore FADs occur. Though inshore fisheries often target different stocks than industrial fishing there is also the potential that industrial fishing affects the availability of some stocks shared with coastal fishers. Status of preferential access areas in the Pacific Islands A recent global assessment of PAAs for small-scale fisheries documented 64 PAAs in 44 countries but only examined 4 PICs: Palau, Papua New Guinea, Tuvalu and Vanuatu (Basurto et al., 2024). This report investigates the various access regimes in the maritime zones of all PICs (subnational/ provincial CMT areas, territorial seas and other areas within the EEZs). Preferential access areas (PAAs) as defined by Basurto et al., (2024) constitute access rules to territorial waters that give preference to small-scale fishers over larger-scale fishing, based on operating characteristics such as vessel size or fishing method. To assist in interpreting PICs legislation, the following clarifications are made based on the original definition. The following features of PAAs are relevant to the Pacific Islands regional context: • Access rules to territorial waters or beyond are established (that is up to or part of the

12 nm from the baseline – in some PICTs a wider area has been defined, e.g. the contiguous zone or 50 nm). • The access rules apply to areas usually defined in terms of distance to shore and are based on operational characteristics such as vessel size or fishing method. • Preference is given to small-scale fishers over large-scale fishing (based on the national definitions of each). • The PAA designation is for a country's entire coastline or subnational coastline and PAAs are not local-area-based designations such as LMMAs, SMAs and territorial use rights for fisheries i.e. small and locally-bounded areas. Table 16 presents the summary of findings on PICs access rules for different categories of fishing activities across coastal zones including CMT areas. The implications for small-scale fishing vessels of the distances involved are illustrated in Table 17.

44 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific Pacific Island country or territory
 Zone in nm or customary marine tenure (CMT) designation Area covered Activities excluded
 Co-management (artisanal stewardship area) Cook Islands Ra'ui Reefs, lagoons and shores Ra'ui is a total closure as determined by Ui Ariki (chiefs) Yes <12 Up to 12 nm from baseline Inshore management determined by Island Council Potential 50 Up to 50 nm from baseline Seabed mineral activities and large-scale commercial fishing No Micronesia (Federated States of) Traditional CMT (2 of 4 states) Internal waters or traditional areas Commercial fishing Yes/no in 2 states <12 State jurisdiction Commercial fishing prohibited or permitted only under permit (depends on state) Potential 12–24 Contiguous zone fishing ban Ban on all fishing activities (unless for specifically exempted local companies) No Fiji Qoliqoli Traditional fishing grounds Industrial and large scale Yes 3 nm from reefs 3 nm from reefs and all internal waters All fishing vessels except licensed dropline method No 12 nm + archipelagic waters 12 nm and archipelagic waters All vessels other than Fiji longline vessels (size restricted)* No Kiribati CMT 3 nm from reefs and lagoons Under Island councils, Community-based fisheries management (CBFM) plans can be made in these areas. Potential 3 3 nm from reefs and lagoons Domestic industrial (and up to 12 nm) Potential 12–24 Contiguous zone Foreign fishing excluded up to 45 nm Domestic industrial excluded up to 24nm No 24–45 Foreign fishing excluded up to 45 nm No Marshall Islands CMT Varies according to atoll and tradition Any activity that does not protect or promote artisanal fisheries Yes (Reimaanlok) 5 5 nm – local councils and traditional owners Any activity that does not protect or promote artisanal fisheries Yes (Reimaanlok) 24 24 nm Exclusion of foreign fishing through licence conditions No Nauru CFMA (NN)† Community fishery management areas (CFMA) – no further than 12 nm CFMA management plan rules apply and foreign and commercial fishing only permitted with authorization Potential 12 Up to 12 nm Foreign and commercial fishing only permitted with authorization No Niue CMT Any part of the 12 nm zone designated by village Commercial fishing vessels Potential 12 Commercial fishing vessels unless specifically licensed Potential 24 No fishing in the Moana Mahu marine protected area (40 percent of exclusive economic zone) No Palau CMT Internal waters and submerged reefs Commercial and industrial activity not permitted Potential 12 Commercial and industrial activity not permitted ? 24 Commercial and industrial activity not permitted except certain pole-and-line fishing No Table 16. Preliminary review of access rules to territorial waters and exclusive economic zones of 14 Pacific Island countries and Tokelau

Pacific Island country or territory Zone in nm or customary marine tenure (CMT) designation Area covered
 Activities excluded Co-management (artisanal stewardship area) Papua New Guinea 3 From mean high watermark seaward by 3 miles Industrial trawling is prohibited No 6 Sea area within 6 miles of any land, island or declared reef Longline fishing is prohibited No 12 12 miles from the territorial sea baseline and any land, island or declared reef Purse seine fishing is strictly prohibited, unless stated otherwise in the terms of the licence No Samoa Village management areas (VMAs) (NN)† Potentially to 12 nm Rules set under VMAs Yes 24 up to 24 nm Vessels other than "alia" local longliners or any vessels longer than 11 m N? Solomon Islands CMT Reef edge or up to 3 nm – locally defined Outsiders without permission and commercial unlicensed fishing Yes 3 3 nm: provincial waters Commercial unlicensed fishing No 6 6 nm of low watermark Other restrictions for nonSolomon Islands fishing vessels No 30 30 nm main group archipelago and baselines Other restrictions except for Solomon Islands and other licensed fishing vessels No Tokelau Village rules Reef/nearshore Foreign fishing. Unlicensed commercial fishing and those

excluded by village rules Yes (village council) 12 12 nm Foreign fishing. Unlicensed commercial fishing Yes 25 25 nm from the coastline Unlicensed commercial fishing, i, ‡ food security is a priority Yes Tonga SMA (NN) † Less than 2 500 metres from the high watermark or a depth of 50 metres. Only fishing rights recognized in SMAs on application and approval. Artisanal is allowed Yes 12 Foreign fishing excluded (only licensed Tongan commercial fishing permitted) No Tuvalu Kaupule (possible locally managed marine area or CBFM) 12 nm from shore of outer islands Kaupule (council) sets rules that do not conflict with national rules (e.g. foreign ownership or greater than 16 m in length) Yes 12 12 nm Foreign fishing vessels, others greater than 16 m in length Yes 15 15 nm from seamounts Foreign fishing vessels, others greater than 16 m in length No Vanuatu CMT Seaward edge of reef or beyond Community chiefs set rules. No fishing other than local traditional/artisanal fishing Yes 6 6 nm Provincial waters: non-Vanuatu vessels and non-artisanal vessels ≥ 10 m excluded Potential 12 6–12 nm from baseline Artisanal vessels ≥ 10 m and all vessels > 15 m excluded; larger vessels fish beyond 12 nm No Notes: The distance from shore or customary marine tenure (CMT) area is given as well as the activities excluded in each zone. The area covered and the activities excluded are assessed against the definition of preferential access areas (PAAs). The existing local co-management regime is outlined and the legal opportunity to include small-scale fishers or communities is rated (potential for transition to artisanal stewardship areas (ASAs). The current compatibility with PAAs or future ASAs is indicated by colour codes: green = favourable; orange = potential; and pink = challenges). * Fish hold capacity less than 40 m³ targeting tuna and tuna-like species and utilizing no more than 2 500 hooks per set; † NN: not nationwide i.e. does not meet the definition of PAA; and ‡ no commercial fishing licences have been issued. Source: Authors own elaboration based on data from: SPC. 2025. REEFLEX: Pacific Law & Policy Database on Coastal Fisheries & Aquaculture. [Accessed on 13 August 2025]. <https://www.spc.int/CoastalFisheries/Legislation/main>

46 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific Note: Practical implications of the distances mentioned in the text in Table 16 compared to the speed of a lightly laden (20 knots) or heavily laden (12 knots) open boat with a 40 horsepower outboard motor. Table 17. Practical implications for fishers and boat users

Distance	Time at 20knots (37km/h)	Time at 12knots (22km/h)
3 nm (5.5 km)	~9 minutes	~15 minutes
6 nm (11 km)	~18 minutes	~30 minutes
12 nm (22 km)	~36 minutes	~60 minutes

Vessel type Height above waterline (m) Typical vessel length (m) Max. visibility from shore (1.7 m) in nm Max. visibility from 10 m elevation in nm

Vessel type	Height above waterline (m)	Typical vessel length (m)	Max. visibility from shore (1.7 m) in nm	Max. visibility from 10 m elevation in nm
Small skiff or canoe	1-2	3-7	~5.6	~7.4
Medium artisanal vessel	4	8-12	~6.8	~8.6
Small longliner	6	15-20	~7.7	~9.5
Typical longliner	8	22-28	~8.1	~9.9
Large commercial longliner	10	30-35	~8.6	~10.4
Tuna purse seiner	15	50-70	~9.5	~11.3

Table 18. Estimates of the maximum visibility in clear daylight of different vessel types from the shore at head height and from a ten-metre elevation 10 <https://www.ressources-marines.gov.pf/2025/09/26/la-polynesie-francaise-sengage-resolument-pour-la-protection-de-ses-oceans/> 11 <https://news.mongabay.com/2023/06/can-an-app-help-liberian-artisanal-fishers-fight-illegal-fishing/> At least 8 PICTs restrict all or a large proportion of industrial fishing from nearshore zones (Table 16). Tuvalu is a clear example of a PAA – vessels are excluded based on size and ownership out to 12 nm. Six other PICTs can claim relatively clear and significant PAAs: Niue (12 nm), Palau (24 nm), Samoa (24 nm), Tokelau (12 nm), the Marshall Islands (5 nm) and Kiribati (3 nm). The Cook Islands have extended PAA further (50 nm) and more recently the territory of French Polynesia has proposed 30 nm for some islands .10 In many instances national governments, or sometimes subnational governments, reserve the option to license certain larger commercial vessels within the PAAs. This is often intended to favour the development of domestic fishing industries, however, it is difficult to ascertain whether such licences have been approved. A blanket ban on industrial or large-scale inshore fishing would simplify opportunities for participatory enforcement and community involvement. Existing technologies used for monitoring offshore fisheries – automatic identification systems and vessel monitoring systems – can be combined with community observation and provision for easy reporting of suspicious activities. Participatory surveillance would be aided by the fact that if large-scale vessels are visible from shore, then they are likely within the PAA (Table 18). The emergence of mobile phone apps that combine photo and GPS capabilities also

provides an opportunity for citizen involvement in MCSE.¹¹ Blanket restrictions or fully transparent licensing would likely improve the function of PAAs for coastal fishers and conservation. They should be assessed along with investigations into the frequency of legal or illegal incursions into coastal waters and the potential impact of extraction of shared stocks by industrial fishers on coastal fisheries.

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<https://caopa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/DECLARATION-ENGLISH1.pdf> 13

<https://www.fao.org/voluntary-guidelines-small-scale-fisheries/en> 3.1.4 The potential for artisanal stewardship areas The designation of PAAs in the Pacific Islands region is relatively common, however, the benefit of PAAs to coastal fishers or fisheries is questioned in areas where rules are not effectively enforced or the fisheries are not appropriately managed (Basurto et al., 2024). This risk is evident in the Pacific Islands region where resourcing challenges and inadequate enforcement capacity combine with economic pressures to license some large-scale vessels in the PAAs. In response to these challenges, the Ministers responsible for Oceans, Inland Waters and Fisheries of the Organization of Africa, Caribbean and Pacific States called upon the 79 participating States to “promote the effective co-management of 100% of Artisanal Stewardship Areas (ASAs) with small-scale fishers, thereby improving the sustainable management of the small-scale fisheries sector, maintaining healthy fish stocks, securing livelihoods and substantially contributing to conservation targets, including Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework”.¹² The concept of ASAs or preferential stewardship areas (Basurto et al., 2024) better addresses some of the rationale and weaknesses of PAAs. In particular, ASAs call for “effectively closing inshore or wider shelf areas” to industrial fishing and industrial activity, co-management of these zones, clear objectives to achieve sustainable stocks, conservation and the participation of women. Ensuring stewardship by small-scale fishers and fishing communities by excluding industrial fishing from inshore areas (PAAs) and implementing appropriate co-management arrangements could ensure that coastal fisheries are well managed and that vital habitats are protected by or with those that depend on them (Charles et al., 2024). The approach provides a venue for appropriate participation of coastal communities and small-scale fishers with national or subnational authorities. Artisanal stewardship areas (ASAs) encourage governments to continue scaling up and sustaining CBFM in coastal areas and thereby simultaneously fulfil commitments to meeting the SDGs (SDG 1 and SDG 14 on poverty reduction and marine conservation respectively) and the KMGBF (targets 1–3 and target 10 on area-based management and marine protected areas [MPAs]). Such action could allow conservation funding to be aligned with, and supportive of, government agencies responsible for CBFM and would allow substantial areas to be reported against area-based targets (see dimensions of inshore fishing areas and territorial seas in Table 3). All of this would be consistent with the FAO SSF Guidelines (particularly Chapter 5A, “Responsible governance of tenure”).¹³ Further implications for, and interactions with conservation policies are discussed in Section 3.2. Moving from PAAs or industrial exclusion towards ASAs requires the following: 1. The nationally or subnationally designated area must be of an adequate size. This must include all the relevant artisanal or traditional fishery resources and include an adequate buffer zone to ensure industrial fishers cannot “fish the line” and extract the resources (Basurto et al., 2024). The size designated should therefore be chosen based on biological, fishery and enforcement capability criteria among others. 2. The zone must be effectively enforced. Industrial fishing vessels must be excluded from these zones, requiring effective monitoring, control and enforcement. Rules must be clear and participatory, practical surveillance involving coastal communities and artisanal fishers is recommended (Table 18). 3. The zone must be sustainably managed. Co-management arrangements must exist and guarantee the adequate participation of artisanal fishers and local communities. Management objectives must be developed, driven by small-scale fishers and rights holders, aiming to ensure suitable conservation outcomes (including fishing methods that minimize bycatch and habitat degradation or modification). There must be effective enforcement of management and co-management plans. For customary areas or site-based management the approaches are well known as part of CBFM practices. For ASAs further offshore, other processes will need to be developed involving communities, coastal fishers and national or subnational authorities – the latter will likely bear most responsibility. The

approaches may need to be more consultative and strategic as these areas may rarely or never be part of customary or regular community usage. Provincial management plans and ordinances have been developed in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands and may provide some useful experience.

48 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific Tuvalu is an example of a PAA which already meets the criteria of an ASA as it provides for local council (Kaupule) co-management. The other 7 PICTs that can claim relatively clear and significant PAAs would need to improve or clarify co-management arrangements for these to be classed as ASAs: the Cook Islands, Niue, Palau, Samoa, Tokelau, the Marshall Islands and Kiribati (Table 16). The potential extent of ASAs could include internal waters, territorial seas and even contiguous zones, which in themselves would constitute more than 10 percent of waters under PICT jurisdiction (Table 19). Table 19. Pacific Island countries and territories and ocean domain: territorial sea, contiguous zone and inshore fishing area Exclusive economic zone (km²) ‡ Territorial sea (km²) §,|| Contiguous zone (km²) §,# Inshore fishing area (km²) ** Melanesia Fiji* 1300509 45221 54601 43299 New Caledonia† 1197584 78864 97470 36464 Papua New Guinea 2862319 1303657 1432400 146204 Solomon Islands* 1630895 83289 105640 29701 Vanuatu* 638577 43565 46657 8233 Micronesia Micronesia (Federated States of) * 3009802 101854 491578 16587 Guam† 208784 0 0 216 Kiribati* 3440952 107786 245530 6809 Marshall Islands* 2002933 228650 359013 20561 Nauru* 308952 1983 7046 13 Northern Mariana Islands† 764064 25413 0 825 Palau* 616021 34083 37478 2990 Polynesia American Samoa† 406072 10196 0 490 Cook Islands 1969961 31468 66144 1213 French Polynesia† 4775042 236143 349720 26469 Niue* 321018 3231 9281 70 Pitcairn Islands† 842381 7500 0 27 Samoa* 133348 10070 12204 2004 Tokelau*,† 320647 6915 0 279 Tonga* 664453 35838 49232 7760 Tuvalu* 753139 27356 69742 1414 Wallis and Futuna Islands† 262823 0 0 483 Total 28430276 2423082 3433737 352112 Notes: Figures are indicative only and without prejudice to maritime boundaries or State claims. *Served by the FAO Subregional Office for the Pacific Islands; †territories and dependencies; ‡exclusive economic zone: 200 nm from the baseline; §Figures for territorial seas and contiguous zones for archipelagic countries (Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu) include internal waters within national baselines; || territorial sea (12 nm from the baseline); contiguous zone (12–24 nm from the baseline); and **an estimate of the area available for coastal fishing, inshore fishing area is defined as the area up to 50 km from shore or 200 m depth, whichever comes first and occur only along inhabited coastlines or islands – the resolution is ½° x ½° grid cells. Sources: Authors' own elaboration based on data from: SPC. 2025. Pacific Maritime Boundaries Dashboard. [Accessed in November 2025]. <https://pacificdata.org/dashboard/maritime-boundaries>; Chuenpagdee, R., Liguori, L., Palomares, M.L., Pauly, D. 2006. Bottom-up, global estimates of small-scale marine fisheries catches. Fisheries Centre Research Reports, 14(8). Vancouver, Canada, University of British Columbia; and Zeller, D., Palomares, M.L.D., Tavakolie, A., Ang, M., Belhabib, D., Cheung, W.W.L., Lam, V.W.Y., Sy, E., Tsui, G., Zylich, K. & Pauly, D. 2016. Still catching attention: Sea Around Us reconstructed global catch data, their spatial expression and public accessibility. Marine Policy, 70: 145–152. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2016.04.046>

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 49 3.1.5 Outlook for governance, tenure and traditional knowledge in relation to scaling up community-based fisheries management Fisheries management in the Pacific Islands region is fundamentally shaped by systems of spatial and use rights, blending global frameworks like UNCLOS with deeply rooted customary tenure systems. Most PICs recognize both modern legal and traditional customary rights, especially in coastal waters, where community-based management and stewardship have long histories. The innovative use in PICs of both traditional tenure and UNCLOS arrangements needs to be expanded and strengthened to meet community needs, national targets and also global commitments such as the SDGs and the KMGBF. Opportunities and potential priority actions: Strengthen legal and policy frameworks in support of customary tenure and community management rights. Pacific Island countries (PICs) need to ensure that fisheries legislation and policy frameworks clearly recognize user and management rights for coastal communities. These rights should be balanced with responsibilities and adapted to local contexts to avoid rigid systems that undermine the flexibility of customary practices. Legal recognition of CMT should be

integrated into fisheries law where CMT exists, while providing practical mechanisms for co-management that communities can implement without excessive bureaucratic burden. Build on traditional ecological knowledge. Traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) must be prioritized in CBFM planning and implementation. Communities should be encouraged and supported to apply their own knowledge systems, which often provide locally relevant and effective solutions. Guidance should emphasize respectful engagement, including free, prior and informed consent for documenting and sharing knowledge. It should also avoid undermining traditional governance structures. Promote indigenous-led dialogue and research on customary marine tenure. Indigenous-led, non-sectoral discussions on CMT and resource governance should be encouraged at national and subnational levels. These forums are essential to address gaps in the understanding of tenure diversity and its interaction with modern fisheries management and climate adaptation. Such dialogue should respect cultural perspectives and allow communities to shape solutions that reflect their values and worldviews. Improve research, monitoring and assessment of tenure and governance. User rights and tenure security are deemed essential to CBFM, but there are gaps in assessing the quality and implementation of such rights. Community rights of access, use, management, exclusion and transferability need to be sufficiently assessed to ensure they are sufficiently robust for the context – the bundle of rights approach can be a useful tool. Safeguard against market-based transfers. Permanent transfer of use rights, such as through marketable quotas, should be restricted or prohibited in the interests of securing community stewardship. Allowing rights to be traded can lead to overconcentration, loss of community control and negative impacts on rural livelihoods. Policies should favour tenure arrangements that maintain community stability and prevent rights from leaving the small-scale fisheries sector. Disentangle user rights for CBFM by applying the bundle of rights approach. The bundle of rights framework – covering access, withdrawal, management, exclusion, enforcement, transfer and transformation – has great potential for assessing tenure security and the impact of policy reforms on CBFM. Empowering communities with more than basic access rights, particularly management and exclusion rights, is critical for effective stewardship and sustainable resource use. Link rights to responsibilities. Tenure rights should be tied to stewardship obligations as these are fundamental for securing sustainable coastal fish supplies for national populations, including those without coastal rights. In both statutory and customary systems, maintaining rights should include responsibilities for sustainable resource management and food security for different members of the community, as well as ensuring national food security. This approach reinforces accountability and ensures that rights holders contribute to conservation and community well-being.

50 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific Improve and enforce PAAs. Preferential access areas (PAAs) that exclude industrial fishing, from inshore zones at least to some extent, already exist in most PICs. These should be strengthened and better enforced, if necessary, as a frontline to reduce pressure on critical habitats and avoid competition with local community fisheries. The frequency of legal or illegal incursions into coastal waters and the potential impact of extraction of shared stocks by industrial fishers should be investigated. Assessments should also cover enforcement of PAAs and ASAs and evaluate their effectiveness in supporting livelihoods and conservation. Explore a transition of PAAs towards ASAs. Moving towards ASAs would provide co-managed zones where small-scale fishers and communities lead management and conservation efforts and potentially adapt fishing regimes in the face of climate change. Artisanal stewardship areas (ASAs) would be designed to meet biological and enforcement criteria, exclude industrial fishing entirely and align with SDGs and biodiversity targets.

3.2 Interactions and policy coherence with other ocean agendas Pacific approaches to conservation are based on sustainable resource use as recognized in successive regional and conservation Frameworks for several decades (SPREP, 2003, 2014, 2021). The practical community-based conservation or resource management that has been developed in PICTs as the cornerstone of coastal conservation is encompassed by CBFM (Gigov et al., 2020; Nimwegen et al., 2022; Govan and Lalavanua, 2023). This community-led approach represents the most appropriate and sometimes only viable approach to coastal conservation and fisheries management in a region where coastal areas are de facto under community ownership and top-down conservation attempts have historically failed (Huber and McGregor, 2002). The

community-led initiatives that have stood the test of time, rooted in traditional governance and usually supported by fisheries agencies, seem to be the most functional and most culturally appropriate tools, reflecting the intrinsic cultural link between sustainable use and conservation. Such approaches are referred to by names that cover conservation and fisheries (Table 6) reflecting local appropriation of the concepts and attempts to align regionally unique approaches with global terminology and trends. While the regional approaches that originally intended to meet both national protected area and livelihood aspirations have slowly developed through iterative implementation, global definitions and proposed implementation strategies of MPAs have changed radically within a shorter time frame with little connection to the Pacific realities (Dudley, 2008; Govan and Jupiter, 2013; Charles et al., 2016). 3.2.1 30x30: the push towards 30 percent marine protected area coverage by 2030 Global attention is increasingly focusing on biodiversity conservation in the Pacific Ocean. Rather than concentrating on priorities originally identified in national and regional policies, countries are encouraged to declare 30 percent of all national waters MPAs by 2030 – in line with certain interpretations of Target 3 of the KMGBF (30x30). Regional and national conservation strategies are increasingly influenced by this and the philanthropic funding available to them (Bezos Earth Fund, 2022). Fisheries ministers and technical staff express concern as doing this could potentially cause countries' homegrown successes in sustainable marine management, conservation and protection across EEZs to be overlooked or even undermined (SPC FAME, 2025a; 2025b). The SPC and the Secretariat of SPREP prepared guidance for the seventeenth Heads of Fisheries Meeting (Pilling et al., 2025) in response to the increasing number of requests for sectoral assistance to support national discussions on marine spatial planning and the 30x30 target. The key points noted by Pilling et al., (2025) included: • The target is a global conservation and management target for at least 30 percent of terrestrial and marine areas by 2030. • The target provides a strategic guide for countries that are developing their own biodiversity conservation plans but it is not legally binding. • Four goals and 22 other interlinked targets are to be considered (and prioritized) when developing biodiversity conservation plans according to the KMGBF agreed at the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of Parties [COP 15] in 2022).

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 51 • The target is global, meaning that national targets may differ from 30 percent. • It is not a requirement to create no-take zones or MPAs containing a minimum of 30 percent of national ocean jurisdiction or land space. • There are effective alternatives to area-based management approaches for protecting biodiversity, especially when considering highly migratory species or marine genetic resources. • Regional targets set under the Unlocking Blue Pacific Prosperity aim at effective management and conservation of 100 percent of the Blue Pacific Continent. As the 30x30 initiative is a global target, SPC and SPREP members might take a regional approach to that target. The KMGBF provides the relevant policy guidance for PICTs. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the International Union for Conservation of Nature and various philanthropies provide advice and guidance of their own which may not necessarily be relevant or well suited to the reality of PICs (Govan and Jupiter, 2013). Protected areas as defined in the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) may impose strict protection or allow multiple uses, including traditional or sustainable fishing practices, provided they do not conflict with conservation objectives. Target 3 proposes the use of protected areas as well as “other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs)” (Box 8). Key features of these area-based approaches include: • Neither protected areas nor OECMs have to be legally established – which particularly suits the legal pluralism of PICs. • A protected area may have multiple objectives but biodiversity conservation must only take precedence where there is conflict between these objectives. • Provided the long-term outcomes include conservation, the area meets the definition of OECMs even when the objective is not primarily conservation. The World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA)¹⁴ is the key global dataset for tracking Target 3 and to which the PICs have been reporting progress on global targets for more than 20 years. The PICs have been implementing various types of CBFM and LMMAs for over 25 years with the intention of meeting both nature conservation and sustainable livelihood needs. These approaches have been considered as protected areas in the Pacific Island context. 3.2.2 Current Pacific Island approaches to meeting area-based

conservation targets This report provides a first analysis of CBFM's contribution to PIC reporting to the WDPA, which is used for measuring progress towards meeting global conservation targets. Community-based fisheries management (CBFM) contributes 68 percent of the coastal MPAs reported to the global database across the region, but for five countries it contributes between 80 percent and 100 percent (Table 20). Box 8. Definitions of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures Protected area A geographically defined area which is designated or regulated and managed to achieve specific conservation objectives.i Other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) A geographically defined area other than a protected area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in-situ conservation of biodiversity, with associated ecosystem functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socioeconomic and other locally relevant values (CBD/COP/14/L.19).ii Sources: iCBD. 2004. Programme of Work on Protected Areas. Montreal, Canada. <https://www.cbd.int/doc/publications/pa-text-en.pdf>; and iiCBD. 2018. COP14 Decision 14/8. Protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures. <https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-14/cop-14-dec-08-en.pdf> 14 <https://www.protectedplanet.net/>

52 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific Table 20. Preliminary analysis and comparison of sites submitted to the World Database of Protected Areas as part of conservation commitments

Name of Pacific Island country or territory	No. coastal MPAs*	CBFM† sites reported as MPAs (no. and as a percentage)	CBFM management authority (in addition to local community)	Notes on CBFM features
Cook Islands	11	9‡ (82%)	Ministry of Marine Resources, Island Councils, Vaka Councils, National Environment Service.	Within Marae Moana, island waters from shore to 50 nm
Fiji	118	104 (88%)	Ministry of Fisheries	Locally managed marine areas (LMMAs) or similar
Micronesia (Federated States of)	1	0§	Division of Marine Resources, Office of Fisheries and Aquaculture, Division of Fisheries and Marine Resources, Department of Resources and Development, Marine Resources Management Division, Kosrae Island Resource Management Authority	state (subnational) level governance
Kiribati	11	0	Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resource Development	Marshall Islands
Marshall Islands	16	8‡ (50%)	Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority	Reimaanlok constitutes atoll-wide CBFM
Niue	2	1‡ (50%)	Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Fisheries Team	Transitioning to new arrangement under Moana Mahu MPA
Nauru	0	0	Nauru Fisheries and Marine Resources Authority	CBFM implementation commencing 2026
Palau	49	3‡ (6%)	Protected Areas Network –Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and the Environment	Within state or coastal waters under Palau National Marine Sanctuary Regulations
Papua New Guinea	18	7§ (39%)	National Fisheries Agency, provincial fisheries departments	Solomon Islands
Solomon Islands	82	80 (98%)	Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources and Provincial Fisheries Departments	Community-based resource management, LMMAs etc.
Tokelau	3	0	Fisheries Management Agency, Taupulega	Tonga
Tonga	44	27 (61%)	Ministry of Fisheries, Community Development and Advisory Section	Special management areas
Tuvalu	13	13 (100%)	Tuvalu Fisheries Department, Falekaupules	LMMAs or Funafuti Conservation Area.
Vanuatu	17	2§ (12%)	Vanuatu Fisheries Department	Samoa
Samoa	70	60 (86%)	Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries – Fisheries Division	Village fisheries management sites
Total	461	314 (68%)		

Notes: *Marine protected areas; †sites recorded as Community-based fisheries management (CBFM) sites in the Pacific Island countries and Tokelau; ‡overlapping designations e.g. Marae Moana coastal exclusion zone within which local arrangements are also made; and §evidence of major under-reporting or out of date entries. Sources: SPC. 2025. Regional Community-Based Fisheries Management (CBFM) Workshop: Implementation of the Pacific Framework for Action on Scaling up CBFM. Noumea. <https://www.spc.int/digitallibrary/get/4eycj>; and UNEP-WCMC & IUCN. 2026. Protected Planet: The World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA) and World Database on Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (WD-OECM). [Accessed in February 2025]. Available at: www.protectedplanet.net

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 53 The analysis of coastal MPAs (Table 19) is approximate. Reporting and reporting accuracy varies greatly by country given that some countries do not regularly update the database and some sites reported may no longer be active (Smallhorn-West and Govan, 2018). With these caveats, the following observations can be made: • Fiji,

Samoa and Solomon Islands address conservation targets with CBFM – CBFM sites account for 86–98 percent of their MPAs. • Tonga reports 61 percent of coastal MPAs as 27 SMAs. However, the updated count of gazetted SMAs is at least 64, which would increase the proportion to nearly 80 percent (MoF, 2025). • In most cases the agencies responsible for these protected areas are fisheries agencies (exceptions include the more complex institutional arrangements in the Federated States of Micronesia and Palau). • One third of coastal MPAs are designated as LMMAs, while other commonly-used designations include community-based fishery, MPAs, marine managed area and community conservation area. • Category: 90 percent of CBFM sites do not report their International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) category – 8 percent are reported as Category VI (sites that allow sustainable use). Countries that under-report or do not seem to update the database include the Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Tokelau and Vanuatu, which may be a result of communication difficulties between agencies. Papua New Guinea does not accurately report MPAs or CBFM (SPC, 2025). The Cook Islands, the Marshall Islands, Niue and Palau report wider conservation areas within which CBFM sites are the only sites which record active marine management or coastal conservation. For instance, Marae Moana in the Cook Islands reports a 50 nm exclusive zone around all islands, but the main CBFM interventions are ra'ui in those islands. Reimaanlok is the prevailing CBFM model in the Marshall Islands and is reported for most atolls. Niue and Palau are moving forwards with CBFM models, designating most of the EEZs as conservation. Coastal waters are or are intended to be managed under CBFM arrangements for those zones. The inventory of coastal MPAs suggests that, for most PICs, CBFM has emerged and been adopted as the approach best suited to meeting coastal conservation commitments and sustainable resource-based livelihoods, with such CBFM sites being reported as MPAs. In general, this approach to area-based management supports lessons learned and encourages governments to find pragmatic pathways to identify, document and report effective area-based conservation through flexible yet credible frameworks that align with the CBD (WWF and CISDL, 2026). Building on and expanding the experiences and national strategies for scaling up CBFM seems the advisable approach to achieving nearshore conservation objectives compared to new and regionally untested or unviable models of coastal MPA that do not adequately meet the objectives, needs or priorities of the local community or customary owners. These models are also costly to establish and unlikely to be sustained – as found with the “paper parks” of the 1990s (Huber and McGregor, 2002). The promotion of OECMs in the global conservation discourse was intended to be inclusive of a wide range of spatial conservation and management approaches and measures. The idea was to encompass measures that deliver biodiversity conservation outcomes and that are not recognized or reported as protected areas or designations. This is not the case in most PICs which appear satisfied with the role of CBFM and classify these area-based conservation models as MPAs for the purposes of national and international reporting. The primary role of OECMs i.e. including areas that are not reported as MPAs, does not seem relevant at the present time in these PICs. For these PICs, it may be a distraction or counter-productive to encourage them to re-evaluate CBFM sites against definitions of OECMs or protected areas rather than invest the time in expanding coverage or increasing effectiveness. However, where or when the situation arises that CBFM approaches are questioned as contributions to biodiversity conservation, then OECMs are a useful avenue as regardless of an area's objective, measures included as OECMs will qualify as a Target 3 contribution as long as they produce a biodiversity outcome. Other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) could also resolve a problem in countries where alternatives to MPAs are excluded from national lists because their conservation objectives are not considered to be clear enough – this could be the case for one or two of the PICs listed in Table 20.

54 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific Although OECMs do not seem to address a burning issue for coastal conservation or CBFM in PICs, in some cases they may and they show particular potential for terrestrial conservation and productive landscapes. However, guidance produced outside the region is evolving rapidly and may not align with traditional and regional experiences. Complying with external guidance risks imposing excessive burdens which could undermine national scaling up strategies and conservation. Box 9 provides more clarity on weighing implementation guidance

against the CBD decision. Ultimately the CBD operates to encourage biodiversity conservation under the principles of national sovereignty. Parties decide what qualifies as a protected area or OECM within their jurisdiction and report accordingly, as demonstrated by many developed countries. The KMGBF sets qualitative criteria (effective management, equity and connectivity), but countries assess their own compliance. In summary:

- Pacific Island countries or territories (PICs) are already carrying out Target 3 reporting of CBFM areas, which are routinely reported as MPAs. In most PICs, CBFM sites constitute the majority of coastal MPAs currently reported.
- Pacific Island countries or territories (PICs) retain full national discretion to classify CBFM sites as protected areas, and it is appropriate that they continue to apply fit-for-purpose approaches grounded in customary tenure and local governance, while exercising caution in adopting guidance developed for regions without such systems.
- There is no evidence that PICs have been prevented from reporting marine sites to the WDPA on the basis they fail to meet the CBD definition of a protected area. In practice, CBFM sites are widely accepted and reported as MPAs.

Box 9. Flexibility of other effective area-based conservation measures – guidance of the Convention on Biological Diversity in the context of community-based fisheries management

The 2018 Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Decision 14/8 provides a flexible framework for recognizing other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs), explicitly allowing areas to qualify where governance and management are reasonably expected to achieve positive and sustained in situ biodiversity outcomes, even before measured results are available. Recent CBD, FAO and IUCN guidance confirms that OECMs were intentionally designed as flexible, equitable and community-accessible instruments that recognize existing stewardship by Indigenous Peoples and small-scale and community-based fisheries.^{i, ii} The CBD Decision 14/8 states that an OECM may qualify where its governance and management “achieve, or are expected to achieve, positive and sustained outcomes for the in situ conservation of biodiversity”, without requiring prior demonstration of quantified ecological improvements, and that the criteria should be applied flexibly and on a case-by-case basis. This interpretation is reinforced by FAO’s assessment of small-scale fisheries under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF),ⁱⁱⁱ which emphasizes that community-managed fisheries commonly deliver biodiversity benefits through customary tenure, threat-specific rules (e.g. gear restrictions, habitat protection or seasonal closures) and adaptive management based on local and Indigenous knowledge. It also outlines how imposing data-intensive or MPA-style evidentiary standards risks excluding the low-resource systems that the OECM concept was intended to support. Caution is also warranted. Some recent technical interpretations of OECMs in the fisheries context – including elements of post-COP14 guidance – tend to narrow the practical scope of OECMs by implying requirements for whole-ecosystem management or pre-demonstrated biodiversity gains when only intent is required.^{iv} Such approaches go beyond the CBD text and risk undermining the KMGBF’s human rights-based approach and its explicit commitments to recognize and strengthen Indigenous and community governance (notably Target 1, Target 3 and Target 9). Recent FAO fisheries-specific OECM guidance^v clarifies that while documenting biodiversity outcomes is desirable, there is no CBD requirement to prove outcomes prior to recognition, and that qualitative indicators, community-based monitoring and local knowledge are legitimate forms of evidence under Criterion C, particularly in data-limited contexts. Consistent with the CBD mandate, OECM identification should therefore remain context-appropriate, threat-focused and inclusive, ensuring that community-based fisheries management areas are recognized for the biodiversity conservation they are reasonably expected to deliver, rather than excluded by standards designed for MPAs or data-rich governance systems.^{ii, v}

Sources: i Agardy, T., Himes-Cornell, A., Bowser, L. & Hoelting, K. 2025. Documenting biodiversity outcomes in marine fisheries management – A supplemental guide to the FAO handbook on identifying, evaluating, and reporting fisheries-related other effective area-based conservation measures. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Technical Paper, No. 709. Rome, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cd6085en>; ii Woodley, S. 2024. Frequently Asked Questions on Establishing Marine OECMs under the Convention on Biological Diversity. IUCN-WCPA Technical Note No. 12. Gland, Switzerland, IUCN; iii FAO. (forthcoming). Small scale fisheries in the Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework: A preliminary assessment of opportunities and challenges. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Technical Paper. Rome; iv Jonas, H. D., Wood, P. & Woodley, S., eds. 2024. Guidance on other effective area-based conservation measures

(OECMs). IUCN WCPA Good Practice Series, No.36. Gland, Switzerland, IUCN. <https://doi.org/10.2305/LAAW4624>; and v Dudayev, R., Pane, B., Gammage, T., Gurney, G.G. and Adhuri, D.S. 2025. Community-led marine OECMs: Assessing enabling regulatory frameworks and potential cases in Indonesia. *Parks*, 31. DOI:10.2305/ JHOJ4854

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 55 • Where PICs elect to report CBFM sites as protected areas, the primary rationale for OECMs – namely the inclusion of conservation measures excluded from protected area reporting – does not apply. Should questions of objective clarity emerge, such sites could be reported as OECMs; however, this would remain a technical reporting option under national jurisdiction rather than a substantive conservation constraint. • The absence of formal legal status is not a barrier to recognition or reporting. Under the CBD definition, both protected areas and OECMs may be grounded in local, customary or traditional governance. Most coastal MPAs and CBFM sites in PICs operate without statutory designation, reflecting deliberate community choices that balance administrative burden against perceived benefits. • Community-based fisheries management (CBFM) has been explicitly recognized by fisheries agencies across the Pacific as an effective and appropriate contribution to the 30x30 target, reflecting its alignment with both biodiversity outcomes and sustainable, resource-based livelihoods (SPC FAME, 2025a).¹⁵ • Reporting completeness and consistency remain a practical challenge. Where improving WDPA reporting is prioritized, this is best addressed through coordinated action between fisheries and environment agencies, rather than by reclassifying or reassessing existing CBFM systems. Conservation, climate change and fisheries management require an increase in efforts to scale up CBFM and integrate with other spatial management, funding and the institutionalization of national and subnational support systems (that sustain management and conservation), as well as improved effectiveness of CBFM approaches. Narrowly prioritizing target-based conservation and approaches (30x30) poses a risk to advances achieved in community-based conservation and resource management by local communities and PICs – which rely heavily on marine resources – and could cause additional challenges if it is not handled with care. However, approaching the KMGBF constructively offers many opportunities, including contributing to the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, especially the Ocean and Environment thematic area (Pilling et al., 2025). The 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent (PIFS, 2022) and the Framework for a Pacific Oceanscape (PIFS, 2010) constitute the region's own policy and strongly commit to integrated ocean management and sustainable use to achieve a sustainably managed Blue Pacific Continent, while maintaining resilience to threats to its environment. Spatial planning, community efforts, MPAs, secure national jurisdiction and sustainable fisheries management are tools in an approach referred to as the 100 percent management approach.

3.2.3 Towards 100 percent management of Blue Pacific coastal waters

The coastal and nearshore habitats are vital to coastal fisheries. They are also where the most valued marine habitats, ecosystems and the majority of biodiversity – including coral reefs, mangroves and seagrass beds – can be found (Figure 11). The coastal areas are densely populated and heavily relied on for local use and economic development. Perhaps because of this, designating MPAs far offshore is considered less controversial and easier to implement, as is reflected in several PIC national ocean policies (e.g. Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu). However, concern arises if the increased staffing or financial burden to manage new offshore MPAs is imposed on resource management authorities and this impacts coastal conservation and management by diverting currently scarce budgets away from identified strategies and priorities for scaling up CBFM and from managing coastal biodiversity. In addition, it is unclear that such large offshore MPAs represent the most cost-effective strategies to achieve biodiversity or social benefits (Box 10). Community-based fisheries management (CBFM) systems are mentioned in national conservation policies but may not be meaningfully integrated or supported in national biodiversity strategies and action plans or climate change adaptations plans. The recent emergence of national marine spatial planning and ocean policy frameworks may provide an opportunity to redress this. ¹⁵ Paragraph 22F highlighted the utility of LMMAs and OECMs, as well as monitored and managed sustainable exploitation, including fishing, consistent with the IUCN Category IV to Category VI MPAs, as contributions towards the 30x30 target.

56 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific Figure 11. Predicted range maps for aquatic species in the Pacific Ocean showing more than tenfold increase in diversity in nearshore waters Source: Kaschner, K., Kesner-Reyes, K., Garilao, C., Segschneider, J., Rius-Barile, J. Rees, T. & Froese, R. 2019. AquaMaps: Predicted range maps for aquatic species. [Accessed on 14 October 2025]. <https://www.aquamaps.org> Box 10. Managing offshore biodiversity including sharks, turtles and tuna – alternatives to large marine protected areas An assessment of the Phoenix Islands protected area found no beneficial impact on tuna conservation and concluded that costs likely far outweighed benefits.i In addition, though sharks, turtles and other bycatch species of conservation concern may benefit from appropriately designed strictly protected areas, studies suggest that these marine protected areas have to be embedded in areas of effective fisheries management.ii For some species, national or regional fisheries management may be a more important strategy.iii Effective bycatch mitigation and harvest control rules, regional shark fishing or retention bans and transparency of fishing companies were the highest ranked evidence-based solutions for reducing the overexploitation of sharks.iv A more feasible pathway may be through the Parties to the Nauru Agreement. The tuna management systems greatly increased revenue for PICs, but also facilitated other management strategies including protection of high seas pockets. Using indigenously developed resource management even at this scale seems to offer more practical and holistic approaches to improving management and conservation of offshore biodiversity impacted by fisheries activities.v, vi Sources: See References. Samoa's Ocean Strategy (Government of Samoa, 2020) fully integrates and prioritizes CBFM, the Samoa Marine Spatial Plan (MNRE, 2025) emphasizes existing community marine managed areas as well as the co-managed artisanal longline fishing zone (Alia Boat Fishing Area). However, these strategies designate a further nine fully protected MPAs to cover 30 percent of Samoan waters. Monitoring of relative investment, implementation and impacts will demonstrate whether existing CBFM and co-management initiatives are appropriately funded, improved and sustained for their conservation outcomes. Fiji, Tonga and Vanuatu recognize the importance of CBFM approaches and customary management in their national ocean policies. However meaningful approaches to enhancing their effectiveness or supporting their core role in coastal environmental governance are not apparent and likely to be overshadowed by focusing on the 30 percent target for new offshore MPAs. Coastal biodiversity may not receive adequate management investment unless greater consideration is taken (Government of Fiji, 2020; Government of Tonga, 2021; Government of Vanuatu, 2024).

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 57 In this context, PAAs present a significant opportunity, as they already exclude the major threat of industrial fishing from coastal areas in most PICs (Section 3.1.4). Strengthening and better managing PAAs in a move towards ASAs would provide a useful framework for co-managed zones where small-scale fishers and communities lead management and conservation efforts, help focus cooperation between the conservation and fisheries livelihoods sectors and align with SDGs and biodiversity targets, including but not limited to the 30x30 target (Table 21). Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets Features of scaled up community-based fisheries management (CBFM) that may DIRECTLY enable contribution KMGBF Target1 Spatial planning and effective management • Community-defined management boundaries aligned with customary tenure • Participatory decision-making embedded in local governance • Locally enforced rules addressing key threats and practical, place-based management of nearshore areas KMGBF Target3 30x30 area-based conservation • Large numbers of small, locally managed areas collectively delivering coverage • Governance legitimacy through indigenous and community authority • Management effectiveness based on compliance and social acceptance • Scalable national networks of CBFM sites KMGBF Target10 Sustainable use of biodiversity • Adaptive rules balancing conservation with sustained local food production • Management embedded in everyday fishing practice rather than exclusion SDG 14.4 Regulate and manage overharvesting to restore fish stocks • Improved stock status under CBFM • Reduced pressure through closures, species and gear controls • Social compliance enabling ecological recovery KMGBF Target21 Knowledge and participation • Reliance on indigenous and local ecological knowledge • Community-based monitoring and qualitative indicators • Knowledge co-production between communities and agencies SDG 11.4 Protect the world's

cultural and natural heritage • Reinforcement of customary practices (tabu, ra'ui, locally managed marine areas) • Continuity of culturally grounded stewardship systems SDG 14.b Provide access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets • Secured access and use rights through local tenure systems • Recognition of customary fishing rights in national frameworks SDG 1.4 Ensure equal rights and access to natural resources • Formal and informal recognition of community tenure • Strengthened local authority over resource access KMGBF Target22 Inclusive governance and rights • Local leadership in rule-making and enforcement • Strengthened community institutions and accountability • Reduced elite capture where facilitation is inclusive KMGBF and SDG Targets Features of scaled up CBFM that may INDIRECTLY enable contribution KMGBF Target23 Gender equality • Opportunities to embed gender-inclusive processes at scale • Visibility of women's roles across fisheries value chains • Outcomes highly dependent on facilitation quality rather than CBFM per se SDG 5.5 Ensure full and effective participation and equal opportunities (gender) • CBFM creates governance space for inclusion • Outcomes depend on explicit gender-responsive design SDG 2.4 Ensure sustainable food production • Potential yield and productivity gains following stock recovery • Outcomes contingent on species biology, market access and effort control SDG 1.2 Reduce poverty in all its dimensions • Livelihood benefits where ecological gains translate into income • Highly context-dependent; not automatic SDG 2.1 and SDG 2.2 End hunger and improve nutrition • Contributions via improved access to fish for local consumption • Evidence limited; depends on intrahousehold distribution and markets Table 21. Potential for scaling up community-based fisheries management and co-managed preferential access areas and artisanal stewardship areas to contribute to the Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework Targets and Sustainable Development Goals Sources: Smallhorn■West, P., Cohen, P.J., Phillips, M., Jupiter, S.D., Govan, H. & Pressey, R.L. 2022. Linking small■scale fisheries co■management to UN Sustainable Development Goals. *Conservation Biology*, 36(6): 13977; and FAO. (forthcoming). Small scale fisheries in the Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework: A preliminary assessment of opportunities and challenges. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Technical Paper. Rome.

58 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific Resource management is a long-term process. Despite the attraction of short-term projects and policy declarations, it is long-term support, implementation and enforcement that will determine conservation and sustainable fishery outcomes. Philanthropic organizations have not yet clarified how their financial support will align with long-term management of current conservation efforts or future commitments. Moving forwards, new policies should reinforce existing CBFM structures, embed them as central within broader ocean governance strategies and align conservation funding with national development goals. This includes cross-sectoral budgeting, improved transparency and a renewed focus on community-led stewardship as the foundation for sustainable marine management – building on the body of experience captured under CBFM. 3.2.4 Outlook for scaling up community-based fisheries management in the context of global conservation and ocean agendas Rooted in traditional governance and supported by fisheries agencies and NGOs, CBFM has proven to be the most culturally appropriate and effective approach in a region where coastal areas are largely under customary ownership and top-down conservation efforts have often failed. Over the past 25 years, PICs have developed a diverse array of locally managed areas and other community■led initiatives that blend conservation with sustainable use, reflecting both local priorities and evolving regional frameworks. Analysis shows that CBFM sites already constitute the majority of reported coastal MPAs in the region and that PICs are well positioned to meet global commitments through their existing systems, including national progress on scaling up CBFM to their entire coastal populations. These approaches have been widely adopted and are now central to national and regional conservation strategies, even as global definitions and targets, such as the push for 30 percent marine protection by 2030, continue to evolve – often out of step with the Pacific. Opportunities and potential priority actions: Ensure that scaling up and sustaining CBFM is prioritized in national and regional ocean governance discussion. The opportunities and challenges facing scaling up CBFM, and management of coastal waters in general, have been extensively discussed and charted for many years. The vital need for increased and secure budgetary support to maximize coastal resource management needs to be more strongly reflected

in the emerging ocean policy environment, as should the risks to biodiversity. Rich coastal waters should governments further stretch their limited budgets to cover ambitious, costly new commitments. Embrace expertise from the climate change and biodiversity sectors. Community-based fisheries management (CBFM) approaches at site, subnational and national levels should be improved in terms of effectiveness and sustainability to achieve community-driven conservation, resource management, climate adaptation and livelihood benefits. Meaningful discussion with other sectors would help achieve this and ideally result in mutual support in the long term. Secure investments from other sectors for ongoing costs of management and enforcement – consider trust funds and sector budget support. The commitment to substantially increase philanthropic funding for marine protection risks distracting fisheries agencies and governments from consolidating the next steps in establishing coastal fisheries management systems and local management areas that aim to achieve both sustainable livelihoods and ecosystems. However, it also represents a major opportunity as there is an urgent need to explore how aid funding could most effectively supplement annual government operational budgets in the long term, including recurrent costs of implementation and enforcement, so that scaling up CBFM can truly secure its potential for stewardship of coastal biodiversity. Trust funds or direct sector support could be starting points for discussion, while the regional and subregional policies would be the logical framework for their design (Section 3.2.1). Explore and promote ASAs. The lead taken by a small number of countries to incorporate territorial waters into their conservation commitments together with the encouragement provided by the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States Fisheries Ministers should be more broadly considered (Section 3.1.3). Artisanal stewardship areas (ASAs) offer opportunities for buffering the

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 59 impact of industrial fishing, improving coastal livelihoods, enhancing governance and management of critical ecosystems, meeting conservation commitments and accessing philanthropic and donor funding earmarked for Target 3 of the KMGBF. Improve tracking of both CBFM and community conservation and protected areas. Tracking and reporting on protected areas and community conservation sites in PICTs face the same issues as the compilation of CBFM inventories and should receive increased attention collaboratively across sectors. Promote and facilitate neutral evidence-based discussions of Pacific Island-appropriate management and conservation approaches. Experience and evidence in achieving sustainable and productive coastal and offshore systems as well as national priorities and fiscal realities should drive discussions on how best to achieve Target 3 of the KMGBF, other global and regional conservation commitments, as well as other priorities under the SDGs and the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent. The experience of coastal management from PICs should be a starting point for strategies rather than abstract promotion of expensive instruments, such as fully-protected MPAs. Fisheries ministers have called for further advice and regional NGOs and intergovernmental agencies should facilitate incisive debate – particularly between fisheries and environment agencies. If this is politically sensitive, there could be a role for other agencies to act as facilitator. Exercise caution in response to pressures to align Pacific CBFM with new definitions of protected areas and OECMs. Most PICs consider CBFM as a legitimate Pacific-appropriate contribution to protected area targets and CBFM comprises the majority of coastal site-based conservation in PICs. While recent definitions of protected areas and OECMs may offer new opportunities, the risks of modifying existing practices may outweigh benefits, therefore, PICs should exercise caution before sacrificing the unique approaches developed for their special context under pressure from global agendas. Ultimately the CBD operates under the national sovereignty principle, with parties deciding what qualifies as a protected area or OECM within their jurisdiction and reporting accordingly. This is the approach adopted by many developed countries.

3.3 Sustainable resource management and fisheries administration

The greatest challenges for sustainable resource management and fisheries administration are still the inadequate budgets and staffing of fisheries agencies for coastal fisheries management, especially CBFM (Section 2.2.4 [Ernst and Young, 2025]). In the larger countries, the challenge is exacerbated in poorly supported subnational approaches (for example at the provincial, island council, state or local government level). Predictable and sufficient budgets are intrinsic to major management functions such as MCSE.

3.3.1 Budgetary support to coastal fisheries management and community-based fisheries management

Government budgets for CBFM in PICTs are chronically underfunded, especially at the provincial and island levels – regional practitioners outlined the following issues and challenges (SPC, 2025): Chronic underfunding and misaligned budget priorities • National and subnational budgets for coastal fisheries and CBFM are consistently inadequate, leaving agencies unable to meet the required needs. • Policy progress is not matched by financing; many countries have CBFM strategies, but lack dedicated, long-term recurrent funding to implement them. • National priorities and budget allocations often favour other agendas (e.g. MPAs, aquaculture and conservation initiatives) that attract political or donor attention, while CBFM receives less direct support. Heavy dependence on donor projects • Many governments rely on temporary, project-funded staffing and operational support, especially through projects with large donors (e.g. World Bank, New Zealand and the European Union).

60 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific • This creates vulnerability to funding cycles, project closures and shifting donor priorities, limiting continuity and long-term planning. • Sustainable financing mechanisms are largely absent and there is a strong need for flexible, multiyear support that extends beyond project cycles. Severe subnational resource constraints • Provincial and island-level offices often lack operational budgets entirely, especially in large, geographically-dispersed countries (Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu). • Logistical barriers – geographic spread, transport costs, remoteness – make outreach expensive and difficult. • Even where staff exist, they typically lack transport, fuel, equipment and the recurrent operating funds required to support CBFM effectively. • Subnational offices also face limited financial autonomy, unable to influence allocation decisions or secure appropriate resources. Inefficiencies, duplication and limited coordination • Many sectors (climate, disaster risk, conservation and environment) use community-based approaches, which also requires costly outreach. • Poor coordination leads to duplication, higher costs, inconsistent messaging and the risk of confusing or overburdening communities. Weak budget transparency and tracking • Few countries systematically track CBFM-related expenditures, making it difficult to assess real investment levels, justify budget increases or plan strategically. • This also obscures gaps between staffing, mandates and available operational funds. The challenge of building resilient, well-supported government systems for sustaining coastal fisheries through CBFM remains key. There have been persistent gaps in staffing, financing and institutional integration. Moving forwards, a multipronged strategy is needed – one that builds on community strength and maximizes the role of government to achieve long-term sustainability.

3.3.1.1 Strategic approaches to cost-effective scaling up of community-based fisheries management

The precise staffing, roles and budgetary requirements for scaling up CBFM to produce nationally adequate results in sustainable fisheries and economic well-being are not usually known or specified. The human resource and financial needs require careful consideration at the same time as developing strategies to suit country size and other contextual criteria (Section 2.2). Where site-based support must only be provided to a small proportion of communities, clear and defensible selection criteria may be required. The Framework for Action calls on countries to address these issues in scaling up strategies at national or provincial level, with countries increasingly tailoring these strategies to their contexts (e.g. Case Study 1. Sustainable resource management), especially the roles and capacity of staff and the allocation of resources. Estimating the number of staff required to support scaling up CBFM and coastal fisheries management should be part of national strategies, but staff capability and qualifications must also be considered. Postgraduate qualifications may be desirable for some roles, but the curricula of many universities may not be aligned to the national contexts of CBFM and bespoke training may have to be designed (e.g. Restrepo et al., 2019; Govan et al., 2025). Tracking inputs, investments, outcomes or impacts will be crucial to improving cost-effectiveness and justifying requests for larger investment. Regional surveys of government budgets have so far been inconsistent (Section 2.2.4), and it has proven particularly difficult to disaggregate operational support for coastal fisheries management from other budgetary uses. The most practicable approach may be that project staff and partners jointly track subnational or national budgets as part of scaling up collaborations and incorporate evidence-based assessments to justify future budgets.

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 61 3.3.1.2 Leveraging community strengths Approaches that have been used to leverage community strengths: Information for community management and compliance. Community-based fisheries management (CBFM) builds on community strengths. Several countries have prioritized ensuring that the majority of communities receive at least the essential information relating to marine resources, detecting issues and potential management options (Case Study 3. Information strategies). Supporting traditional or local governance. Recognizing and reinforcing traditional and local management systems can reduce external costs and enhance legitimacy. This includes legal recognition, capacity support and integration into national frameworks. Vanuatu's reliance on traditional systems, as well as similar findings elsewhere in Melanesia, illustrate the potential of community-led stewardship – even with minimal external funding. Support for local governance or CBFM by governments may take the form of concentrating on areas that prove challenging for communities, such as enforcement of market or land-based impacts. Community-led financing mechanisms. Local governance remains a cornerstone of effective CBFM. Tuvalu's designation of all islands as LMMAs, coordinated and managed through island councils, provides an opportunity for community budgeting to support some aspects of CBFM. Small grants programmes (Box 11) have demonstrated the catalytic potential of small amounts of funding for community champions and CSOs able to perform scaling up activities. These mechanisms could form part of future national trust funds or co-financing schemes, offering more predictable and flexible support. Box 11. Small community grants for scaling up community-based fisheries management A pilot small community grants programme was developed through the locally managed marine area component of the Pacific–European Union Marine Partnership programme as an innovative mechanism to test whether grassroots community-based organizations could effectively contribute to scaling up community-based fisheries management across the Pacific. The programme aimed to allocate small grants (up to EUR 10 000 each) to local organizations, enabling them to design and implement activities that would reach multiple communities, foster local leadership and strengthen community voices in fisheries management. The process included a call for expressions of interest, capacity-building workshops on proposal development and financial management, and close mentoring throughout implementation. Despite administrative and procurement delays that reduced the implementation period from 12 to 6 months, seven grants were ultimately awarded and completed. Activities ranged from training and awareness campaigns to participatory data collection and traditional management database creation. The pilot achieved several notable outcomes. All organizations that received a grant worked with more than 1 community – some reaching up to 15 communities. They implemented a variety of approaches, such as reviving traditional management practices, promoting sustainable fishing through video storytelling and facilitating multi-community training sessions. The small grants demonstrated that even modest investments could catalyse meaningful change at the grassroots level, empowering local actors to tailor solutions to their specific contexts. The programme also revealed that, when adequately supported, community-based organizations are capable of managing funds, complying with reporting requirements and delivering cost-effective, scalable activities. The experience generated significant interest among donors and regional stakeholders, leading to discussions about integrating similar small grant mechanisms into future programmes. However, the pilot also highlighted important challenges and provided lessons to be learned. The most significant was the burden of financial reporting, which proved difficult for many of the recipient organizations despite intensive training and support. This administrative hurdle extended the grant end date and reporting period and required significant oversight from the project management team. Adapting the SPC's (the funding organization) financial administration systems was also key and took innovative and intense efforts from its staff. Nevertheless, the pilot provided clear evidence that community-based organizations can play a vital role in scaling up community-based fisheries management, provided that future small grant schemes are designed with flexible, context-appropriate financial procedures and ongoing capacity-building. The pilot's success in empowering local organizations and demonstrating scalable, low-cost models for community engagement highlighted the viability and need for continued investment in grassroots capacity for sustainable fisheries management. The proportion of funds that reached the ground was substantially higher than in larger-scale projects. Source: Govan, H. & Vieux, C. 2025. Internal Evaluation of the LMMAs

62 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific 3.3.1.3 Building and strengthening institutions

Project-driven modalities and the need for urgency tend to overlook the fact that many PICs have only gained independence relatively recently, with some still building their own institutions and systems to address natural resource management and livelihoods. A longer-term view focusing on institutional assessment and strengthening is required for government and also for communities and civil society. Piloting government activities. Core funding that embeds CBFM into national and provincial institutions is essential for long-term viability. This includes not only staffing but also operational budget support for subnational offices and community engagement. In smaller countries or subnational governments this may require merging departments or seconding staff to other sections or sectors. Demonstrating the utility of activities designed to scale up CBFM, for example, by ensuring well-informed communities, improved fishery livelihoods and by enhancing community feedback and participatory surveillance may serve to convince decision makers that such investments are worthwhile. Piloting potential government staff roles. Institutional absorption of project staff would reduce dependence on donor-funded cycles. Solomon Islands (Schwarz et al., 2021) created a staffed CBFM section and more recently Vanuatu (SPC, 2025) has included two national CBFM positions, which specifically reference CBFM in the job descriptions, among several new provincial level fisheries officer positions being offered. In Kiribati, the two externally funded CBFM positions are now permanently funded by the government. The creation of new government positions is not a matter that central governments take lightly. However, the successful cases share several common features. They all comprised a phase in which projects provided short-term funding for staff, carefully recording and demonstrating the benefits that such positions could bring. This allowed governments to make better informed decisions on staffing needs, ensured continuity of expertise, embedded CBFM within national systems and signalled long-term commitment to CBFM.

Subnational innovations. Provincial, district-level or multi-community planning, such as Tonga's pilot of District SMAs, could offer a scalable model that consolidates planning across multiple communities. This approach minimizes duplication, optimizes resource use and enables more strategic deployment of limited staff. Provincial-level CBFM action plans are emerging as a decentralization tool for example in Malaita Province in Solomon Islands and in New Ireland Province in Papua New Guinea. However, their success hinges on targeted support in the long term – provincial offices must be equipped with operational budgets and trained personnel to translate plans into action (SPC, 2025). Networks as institutions to be strengthened. Robust community networks at various scales have proven essential for effective civil society engagement in coastal fisheries management across the Pacific Islands. These networks facilitate the sharing of practical information, peer learning and feedback mechanisms that empower communities to manage their resources and communicate their needs to their government and other stakeholders. Grassroots networks, such as the Vanua Tai network in Vanuatu, have demonstrated the ability to disseminate information, coordinate local action and bring community concerns directly to policy forums. Networks can reduce isolation, strengthen the representative voice of communities and support legal action against large-scale threats. They may also need to address challenges, such as ensuring inclusivity, avoiding the perpetuation of exclusion, and maintaining coordination and funding. Governments and partners should invest in supporting and sustaining existing networks, as they are critical for scaling up CBFM and ensuring that local knowledge and priorities inform broader policy and management decisions (SPC, 2025). Care should be taken to build on and strengthen existing networks rather than attempt to create new ones. Community representation and feedback to governments. The Framework for Action calls for the institutionalization of community feedback and sharing mechanisms (referred to as two-way communications), ensuring that community experiences and concerns are recorded, used to inform government strategies and policies, and fed back to communities. This aligns closely with the principles of the SSF Guidelines, which emphasize the right of small-scale fishing communities to participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives, livelihoods and resources. National and subnational forums, regular meetings and consultative committees are identified as successful approaches

for enabling community feedback and participation in policy development. Networks may play a strategic role in coordinating advocacy, supporting inclusive participation – including women, youth and marginalized groups – and amplifying community voices in national and regional policy processes. Strengthening these networks and communication channels is therefore vital for achieving sustainable, resilient livelihoods and healthy fisheries, as well as for fulfilling global commitments to human rights, equity and effective resource governance (SPC, 2025; FAO, 2015).

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 63 3.3.1.4 Integrating community-based fisheries management within and across government systems Community-based fisheries management (CBFM) intersects with multiple national priorities – food security, biodiversity and climate resilience. Aligning its funding with sectors like the environment, disaster preparedness and agriculture can unlock new resources and foster cross-sectoral collaboration. Integrated budgeting across ministries can assist in achieving flexible and long-term support that moves away from rigid, short-term donor cycles towards flexible, multiyear funding frameworks that allow for adaptive management and sustained capacity building. It is also notable that fisheries agencies in the region have pivoted from being primarily development oriented to currently focusing on resource management. However, it is still important to balance and ideally integrate or coordinate both aspects as complementary and reducing polarization (Adams, 2022). The creation of a new integrated Ministry of Fisheries, Oceans and Maritime Affairs in Vanuatu may provide an opportunity to trial such integration.¹⁶ Outreach activities and transport are some of the more costly activities that support CBFM. However, they also present challenges to other sectors such as the police, health, rural water supply, climate change, conservation, disaster preparedness, education and infrastructure (Section 3.3). In smaller countries and at subnational government level, an increasing number of positive examples of different sectors collaborating to share transport and even staff are emerging (Box 12). There is at least one example in the region of tourism levies partially financing aspects of marine conservation that include CBFM – the Palau green fee (Box 13). Other tourism levies in countries such as the Cook Islands, Fiji and more recently Papua New Guinea exist but have not so far directly supported community conservation or CBFM. There is potential, particularly in countries where coastal biodiversity is a major tourist attraction, for these sources of funding to be more clearly targeted and integrated with CBFM. Box 12. Scaling up community-based fisheries management in Temotu Province, Solomon Islands, through coordinated local governments Given significant institutional budget constraints, innovative approaches for reaching large numbers of very remote communities can be achieved through planning interagency and partner sharing activities. Such approaches can improve community-based fisheries management (CBFM) support services for communities and potentially be integrated with other services such as disaster preparedness, health and climate change adaptation (as called for in the Framework for Action). Temotu Province is the most remote and geographically dispersed province in Solomon Islands and presents multiple challenges, particularly its lack of telecommunications. With very limited budgets and staff and little support from non-governmental organizations and other partners, the focus for scaling up CBFM is ensuring the remote communities receive information on fisheries management and establishing communication mechanisms for communities to feed back to their government. A trial assessed the capacity and readiness of provincial staff from other ministries, Provincial Ward Development Officers and Ward Support Officers, to support the CBFM programme. Interviews with key informants revealed that with some targeted training, these officers were able to effectively perform as CBFM extension workers. One very positive initiative was the implementation of joint service deliveries to remote communities by coordinating with the provincial Planning division to help share costs. Additionally, church mission groups and provincial education teams were identified as other key partners for disseminating awareness materials, especially in remote islands like Tikopia and Anuta. Source: Govan, H., Akao, I., Lalavanua, W., Ketu, B., Kilakau, K., Leinga, G. & Kengeva, C. et al. 2025. First regional training in scaling up community-based fisheries management: Building skills together for different contexts. SPC Fisheries Newsletter, 177: 11–22. <https://www.spc.int/digitalibrary/get/kz5cnGovan et al., 2025> 16 <https://vbr.vu/news/new-oceans-bill-to-boost-economy-and-secure-resources/> Box 13. The Palau green

fee The Palau Pristine Paradise Environmental Fee, introduced over a decade ago, is the region's first tourism green fee. Foreign tourists are charged USD 100 via airline ticket sales. The fee is the main source of funding for the management of Palau's National Marine Sanctuary and Protected Area Network (PAN). In 2019, 40 percent of the USD 9.1 million revenue raised was used to support Palau's protected areas through the PAN Fund and allocated to the Marine Sanctuary managers of 15 PAN sites, a Fisheries Protection Fund and Palau's International Coral Reef Centre. These funds are also used to capitalize Palau's USD 10 million endowment account, held within the Micronesia Challenge Endowment Fund. Source: Nimwegen, P. van, Leverington, F.J, Jupiter, S. & Hockings, M., eds. 2022. *Conserving our sea of islands: State of protected and conserved areas in Oceania*. Gland, Switzerland, IUCN. <https://doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.CH.2022.08.en>

64 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific 3.3.1.5 Access revenue from offshore fisheries Offshore fisheries have experienced remarkable improvements in the sustainability of some of the major migratory stocks and increased returns to countries on the value of catches. Access fees for the major purse seine fisheries have risen fivefold since 2010 to around USD 500 million per year (Govan, 2017; Gillett and Fong, 2023). A proportion of offshore fisheries and tuna revenues could be allocated to local or provincial government or island councils to support regular and ongoing costs of CBFM and relevant coastal fishery livelihood diversification (e.g. FADs) and compliance activities (such as local MCS officers). Promising examples of redirecting offshore fisheries revenue already exist. Tuvalu has designated a proportion of the tuna Vessel Day Scheme revenue to be allocated to island councils for local use under the Community VDS Scheme.¹⁷ This provides an opportunity to fund coastal fisheries if the councils decide this is a priority. Kiribati has strategically reinvested its tuna revenues into social protection and social assistance programmes – appropriate investments in CBFM may be possible especially where this aligns with poverty alleviation or food security policy (Box 14). The potential for revenue from offshore fisheries to be reinvested in coastal fisheries management and sustainable development (e.g. FAD deployment) needs to be explored in greater depth. Other major opportunities, such as those relating to conservation philanthropy, are considered in Section 3.4.

3.3.2 Monitoring, control, surveillance and enforcement Increasingly MCSE is being highlighted as one of the most important issues to address for scaling up CBFM and coastal fisheries in general (Section 2.3). The chronic underfunding of coastal fisheries management and apparent decline of staffing for MCSE give further cause for concern. Monitoring, control, surveillance and enforcement (MCSE) should be an essential operational backbone of fisheries governance and minimum MCSE conditions need to match progress in CBFM. Offshore MCSE generally receives more attention than coastal fisheries MCSE due to the significant financial gains from access fees and fines. Offences are often more straightforward to identify and address in terms of applying a penalty.¹⁸ However, experience from offshore fisheries may not be applicable in the coastal environments where the diversity of cultures and institutions requires tailored approaches for each context. For coastal fisheries, perpetrators may be relatives, extended family or people who are known locally and may have CMT rights. The regional approach of CBFM is partly based on the premise that through participation and engagement, fisheries rules will be regarded locally as more legitimate, thus encouraging voluntary compliance and reducing conflict and cost. The aim of MCSE is generally to ensure that fishers comply voluntarily through awareness and agreement with the rules. Those who do not comply may need to be assisted (e.g. reminded of the rules) or more forcefully directed (social pressure or lower level prosecution). In the case of those strongly persisting or committed to breaking the rules, then strong enforcement will be necessary (Pomeroy et al., 2015; SPC, 2025). Practitioners of CBFM are increasingly concerned with MCSE and highlight the need to tailor it to the context of the grassroots approaches that characterize CBFM. The VADE (voluntary, assisted, directed, enforced) model of compliance response provides a useful structured pathway for this, emphasizing modern, graduated compliance from voluntary adherence through to enforcement where necessary. Clear communication on rules, compliance expectations and reporting options is central to behaviour change and supports community level legitimacy of the system (SPC, 2025).

Box 14. Offshore fisheries revenue alleviating poverty in Kiribati The last 15 years saw offshore fishing revenue from Kiribati's exclusive economic zone increase from

AUD 43 million in 2010 to AUD 210 million in 2024. The Government has allocated AUD 50.4 million of this revenue to a range of initiatives, including the copra subsidy, social protection programmes and other poverty alleviation strategies. This converts Kiribati into the largest investor in social assistance programmes in the Pacific region, and it has also helped the country eliminate extreme poverty and bring the national poverty rate down by nearly 75 percent. Source: Cross Kwansing, R. 2025. Leave no-one behind: social protection reducing poverty in Kiribati. In: DevPolicy Blog. Canberra. [Cited 5 August 2025]. <https://devpolicy.org/leave-no-one-behind-reducing-poverty-and-inequality-in-kiribati-20250805/> 17

Tuvalu Fisheries Corporate Plan 2023–2025
https://tuvalufisheries.tv/?sdm_process_download=1&download_id=13768 18
<https://fame.spc.int/fisheries-management/monitoring-control-surveillance-and-enforcement-mcse>

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 65 Non-compliance threats to CBFM can be posed by community fishers, non-community fishers or by actors outside the fisheries sector – each requiring different responses (Pomeroy et al., 2015; SPC, 2025). For non-compliant fishers it is important to distinguish their provenance and relationship with the community – whether rule-breakers come from the community (or have cultural or family ties) or come from outside the community (do not have social obligations to the community). Community fisher compliance In cases in which community members are the rule-breakers, the following considerations are relevant (SPC, 2025):

- Fisher participation in CBFM planning. Were the rule-breakers properly included in the CBFM process and rule setting? Increased participation in agreeing on problems, solutions and rules helps to increase understanding, buy-in and compliance.
- Fisher awareness of rules. Were rule-breakers adequately informed of the rules and do suitable awareness and information programmes exist? Regular reminders are needed as people tend to forget rules and why they were set.
- Status and motivation of rule-breakers. Are all rule-breakers equal? It may be necessary to design specific strategies for certain groups such as for chiefs or trusted leaders, neighbouring communities, relatives living outside the community, youth, businesses and traders. Commercial fishers are most likely to break rules, but breaking rules when fishing for subsistence will need careful treatment to avoid undue suffering.
- Do the CBFM rules sit well with traditional approaches? Are the CBFM rules embedded in cultural processes or regarded as new, complicated or not as legitimate as other local rules? There may be limitations to the traditional or community governance approaches for the enforcement of fisheries or conservation rules. Communities highlighted what might be termed compassionate enforcement, the gradation of sanctions depending on whether the rule-breaker is a first time or repeat offender.
- Suitability of local enforcement officers (formal or traditional). Is it possible or desirable to empower community members as authorized officers for compliance and enforcement? There is a range of experiences in the region and issues to be considered such as the extent of the legal authority of local enforcement officers, whether they would require remuneration and from whom, safety and the need for ongoing capacity development with a registration system to track active and non-active officers (Lalavanua et al., 2018). Relying on unpaid volunteers without clearly legislated authority can undermine the rule of law and create conflicts with national officers. In some cases, poorly defined roles have encouraged vigilantism, which is counter-productive to CBFM objectives.

Non-community fisher compliance – rule-breakers from outside communities These rule-breakers may not be subject to obligations through communities or traditional governance arrangements and will ultimately require adequate government MCS teams and strategies supported by appropriate legislation. Monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) teams are consistently underfunded and need more support. More strategic and cost-effective enforcement strategies could help, such as targeting certain points in the market chain and ensuring that rules (and their rationale) are well known. Different types of participatory surveillance or community involvement in reporting rule-breaking by outsiders can be explored to suit different contexts. Weak or under-resourced MCSE systems are particularly vulnerable to black market actors and external poachers, who tend to target communities where enforcement presents the least resistance. Such activity undermines community trust and threatens the success of CBFM initiatives, reinforcing the need for strong, well-supported MCSE structures.

66 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific Non-fisheries threats Non-fisheries threats (Section 2.2.5) require cross-agency approaches to enforcement as fisheries agencies usually lack the mandate to address many external threats (e.g. environment, disaster, climate, forestry, mining) and communities lack the authority to address issues originating outside their boundaries (e.g. pollution, logging and mining) without broader government support. Enforcement will require high level political recognition and support as well as institutionalized, systematic cross-agency mechanisms, especially at the subnational level and in larger countries. Cross-agency enforcement pathways could be formalized through mandated, time-bound memoranda of understanding, supported by clear legal tools and institutional arrangements. Strengthening MCSE within a formal legal architecture also offers opportunities to integrate traditional and customary compliance practices, ensuring both legal mandates and existing local authority structures are respected and harmonized. Across the region, chronic underinvestment in coastal MCSE remains a major barrier. Dedicated budget-tagging, including allocating a portion of offshore licence fees into a centralized management pool, could provide much-needed resourcing for coastal MCSE and CBFM. Investment in digital inspection systems and case tracking tools, including emerging regional MCSE databases, can help close information gaps and improve transparency, feedback loops and responsiveness (M. Nicholson, personal communication, 2026). Fisheries agencies highlight major capacity needs for supporting CBFM in the areas of MCSE and for ensuring better information and awareness (Section 3.3.3).

3.3.3 Information and awareness

The availability, accessibility and quality of information that the public, communities and fishers have access to is a fundamental first step for compliance (awareness and understanding of the rules). However, they are also vital for implementation (i.e. how well policies are implemented) and good governance and enforcement (i.e. whether policies are being implemented and enforced appropriately). The Framework for Action prioritizes the development and implementation of national and subnational information strategies that ensure communities have access to practical and relevant information about coastal fisheries management that can be easily understood. The Framework for Action encourages the establishment and ongoing funding of national or subnational strategies for outreach activities that leverage a locally appropriate mix of communication channels, including radio, social media, television, mobile phones, printed materials and direct engagement through networks and community champions. Such cost-effective strategies are designed to reach as many communities as possible – especially those that cannot be supported directly – and to foster a sense of ownership and engagement with fisheries management initiatives (Box 15). Successful examples include (SPC, 2025):

- Radio shows with community voices and government officials: a highly valuable, low-cost activity.
- Social media/mobile phones across all countries: a cheap and efficient way to disseminate information and create dialogue.

Box 15. Solomon Islands National Information Strategy

The need for a national information strategy was identified in the national community-based resource management strategy. The “Solomon Islands National Information Strategy: To empower all communities to better manage their resources” gives the country’s fisheries agency and other stakeholders clear direction to engage in CBRM, ensuring information reaches many more communities than could be supported directly. The emphasis is on using simple and cost-effective tools and prioritizing the activities that ensure they reach as many communities as possible. Tools that communities find useful, can relate to and that they feel belong to them are developed. This includes ensuring they are based on identified needs and that the quality of information is good and easily accessible. Branding is used to increase people’s ownership (in this case “Solwata blo iumi” [“our sea” or “our ocean”]) and the content of the tools are verified by a technical advisory committee across government and civil society. The information strategy is integrated with other policies including the national plan of action for the coral triangle initiative. The information strategy envisages information reaching 90 percent of coastal communities at a lower cost and level of support. So far, it is estimated that 22 percent of coastal communities have been reached. Other strategies to improve the reach of the information tools include the involvement of provincial fisheries officers such as training in how to use the tools and training of community champions to cover the nine provinces. Source: SPC. 2025. Regional community-Based Fisheries Management (CBFM) Workshop: Implementation of the Pacific Framework for Action on Scaling up CBFM. Noumea. <https://www.spc.int/digitalibrary/get/4eycj>

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 67 • Supporting subnational staff to deliver low-cost outreach and support feedback mechanisms: a critical tool for reaching more communities in the larger countries. • Government partnerships with NGOs, CSOs and national or local networks: these can offer cost-effective strategies with multiple benefits. Networks facilitate community exchanges to share information and “inspiration” for CBFM including local, low-cost and simple, easily scalable solutions to manage resources. • Widespread dissemination of practical CBFM tools: such advice or “do-it-yourself ” toolkits can reach many communities that have little to no other support and provide practical guidance on how to implement CBFM. • Branded campaigns through many channels: higher interest and uptake may be achieved over social media, mobile phones, radio/TV and through fisheries officers, networks and champions using appropriately named or engaging campaigns. Governments need to ensure there is enough funding and dedicated staff to support this work. Developing and testing different ways to share information can inform the development of cost-effective information strategies that, once refined, should be permanently staffed and resourced. Tracking how information is shared and measuring its impact informs these efforts (Box 16). Finally, using traditional knowledge alongside modern communication tools tends to strengthen community engagement and supports sustainable fisheries management (Case Study 3. Information strategies).

3.3.4 Transparency and accountability for increasing national and community revenue

Transparency and accountability are crucial in fisheries because they help ensure implementation of government commitments, track the equitable application of laws, ensure fair and legal use of valuable marine resources, and build public trust in fisheries management. All this contributes to reducing the risks of corruption (UN-PRAC, 2023) and responds to the 1995 FAO Code of Conduct, the 2015 SSF Guidelines and the UN General Assembly resolution on sustainable fisheries 79 of 2024.¹⁹ Without transparent processes and clear accountability, opportunities for illegal activities – such as bribery, illegal licensing and under-reporting of catches – increase, undermining both conservation efforts and the economic benefits that fisheries provide to Pacific Island communities. Effective transparency allows communities, governments and stakeholders to monitor decisions, access information and participate in governance, while accountability ensures that those responsible for managing fisheries are answerable for their actions. Together, these principles support sustainable fisheries, protect livelihoods and help achieve broader goals such as food security and economic development in the region. The financial benefits may be considerable, improved governance in the valuable coastal sea cucumbers fisheries has been estimated to have the potential to double or triple the value of revenue (Box 17). The regional Coastal Fisheries Working Group (CFWG, 2019) and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime in the Pacific offered some potential ways forward for increasing transparency and reducing corruption risks relevant to coastal fisheries in PICTs (UN-PRAC, 2023).

Box 16. Community feedback on best approaches to information and awareness

Community surveys can inform ways to better provide information to communities as well as the role of community, governance and tenure for resource management. In Papua New Guinea’s New Ireland Province, only 28 percent of people said they received the information they needed to manage their coastal fisheries. In Makira, Solomon Islands, only 11 percent of communities have received information on CBFM and 82 percent of survey respondents said they had not received any information on CBFM.ⁱ In Malaita in 2022, between 51 percent and 85 percent of communities did not have access to information on CBFM before the information campaigns started.ⁱⁱ

Sources: i Govan, H. & C. Vieux. 2025. Internal Evaluation of the LMMA Component of the PEUMP Programme. Noumea; and ii Worldfish. 2022. Malaita CBRM status fact sheet 2022. Honiara. 19 Seventy-ninth session, agenda item 75 (b). Oceans and the law of the sea: sustainable fisheries. <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/ltd/n24/377/87/pdf/n2437787.pdf>

68 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific • Ensure design of transparent and accountable decision-making processes for high-value coastal species that are robust to interference and help regain public confidence: • public awareness of data on the performance of the fishery and the rationale for management regulations and opportunities for complaints and feedback mechanisms; • public disclosure of official documents, licensing processes and possibly e-governance as part of an anti-corruption policy in coastal fisheries; and • improving governance structures (in particular boards or

committees for price control, setting fees and licensing) which ensure accountability, transparency and independence by, for instance, involving other ministries, financial and legal authorities. • Review data to optimize the economic returns and determine net benefits of current and alternative management arrangements, involving all relevant line ministries (e.g. to appropriate level of licence fees, tax rates or incentives). Determine the value to be gained for national and community income through improved governance. • Seek to include key anti-corruption elements in broader programmes that support fisheries governance, monitoring and compliance, and policy development carried out by regional agencies. For example, ensure FFA and SPC governance programmes incorporate relevant safeguards in drafts of legislation. • FAO could build capacity using its online training for addressing corruption (FAO, 2014) and may have opportunities to support the implementation of regional policies that specifically focus on issues of transparency and accountability in accordance with the 1995 FAO Code of Conduct and the 2015 SSF Guidelines. • Civil society organizations (CSOs) in the environment sector are relatively strong in the region and have opportunities to raise awareness nationally and regionally on fisheries governance issues. • Global initiatives to achieve minimum standards of fisheries transparency at national level such as the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI) are active in the Pacific Island region. The seventh and eighth Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States Fisheries Ministerial meetings called for members, including PICs, to enhance the transparency of fisheries management information through the internationally recognized framework of FiTI, support for which is currently active in the Pacific.20, 21, 22 Box 17. Tripling the value of sea cucumber fisheries through good governance Improving transparency and accountability in the management of sea cucumber (bêche-de-mer) fisheries has the potential to deliver significant economic and livelihood benefits for Pacific Island countries and their coastal communities. More than half the potential value of sea cucumber fisheries is currently lost because of a lack of transparent and accountable governance, with millions of USD in revenue slipping away from both national economies and local fishers. By enforcing simple management rules, such as minimum size limits and rigorous licensing processes, and by ensuring public disclosure of official documents and decisions, countries could double, and potentially triple, the revenue generated from these fisheries (up to an estimated USD 40 million). This would not only increase direct income for communities and local businesses but also provide greater tax revenue for governments, supporting broader social and economic development. Furthermore, transparent governance helps to reduce opportunities for corruption and malpractice, ensures fairer pricing and builds public confidence in the management system, all of which are essential for sustaining livelihoods and promoting a sustainable blue economy. Key approaches to strengthening the management of sea cucumber fisheries: • Only declare open seasons when stocks have adequately recovered, based on scientific assessments. • Ensure open season dates are set only after all regulations and management systems are fully in place and operational. • Support and enforce regulations and penalties consistently, without interference. • Avoid exemptions or mechanisms that suspend technical or precautionary best practice regulations. • Maintain integrity in licensing procedures, preventing inappropriate influence or favouritism. • Provide robust support and adequately fund key enforcement tools in management plans, in particular enforcing minimum size limits and monitoring exporters. • Collect, manage and report data accurately and comprehensively to inform decision-making. Source: CFWG. 2019. A call to leaders: Most urgent actions required for sustaining or increasing the contribution of coastal fisheries to our communities. Noumea, SPC. <http://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/t6zjq>

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<https://www.oacps.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/DECLARATION-ENGLISH-1.pdf> 21
<https://fiti.global/benefits> 22 <https://fiti.global/pacific-leaders-highlight-transparency-at-honiara-summit>
 3.3.5 Outlook for coastal fisheries administration and management effectiveness in successful scaling up of community-based fisheries management Key challenges relate to sufficient resourcing and strategic deployment of the resources available. Promising developments include leveraging community strengths, integrating traditional management systems and piloting small grants programmes, but scaling up remains difficult without clear criteria for resource allocation and tailored institutional strengthening. Effective management also depends on robust MCSE systems and a commitment to transparency. Opportunities

and potential priority actions: Secure long-term budgetary support for coastal fisheries and CBFM. Governments must move beyond short-term, donor-driven project cycles and establish sustainable financing mechanisms for coastal fisheries management and CBFM. Chronic underfunding – especially at provincial and island levels – undermines implementation of national strategies and leaves communities without adequate support. Dedicated recurrent budgets, flexible funding frameworks and mechanisms to channel resources to subnational offices are essential to ensure continuity, operational capacity and resilience in fisheries governance. Embed CBFM in national and subnational institutions. Institutionalizing CBFM within government structures is critical for long-term sustainability. This includes creating permanent positions, absorbing project-funded staff and ensuring operational budgets for provincial offices. Successful examples from Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu demonstrate that embedding CBFM roles in government systems secures continuity and signals commitment. Multi-community or district-level planning models, such as Tonga's SMAs, should be explored to optimize resources and reduce duplication. Develop strategic scaling up plans with cost-effectiveness criteria. Scaling up CBFM requires clear national or provincial strategies that define staffing needs, roles and budget allocations based on defensible criteria, particularly where certain communities may be selected to benefit. These plans should include workforce development, tailored training programmes aligned to local contexts and systematic tracking of investments and outcomes. Transparent cost-effectiveness assessments will strengthen the case for increased government and donor investment and help prioritize resources where they deliver the greatest impact. Allocate offshore fisheries revenue to support coastal management. Countries should consider earmarking a proportion (e.g. 3–10 percent) of offshore fisheries revenues, such as tuna access fees, to fund CBFM and coastal fisheries management. Examples from Kiribati and Tuvalu show that reinvesting these revenues can support local governance, compliance activities and livelihood diversification. Formalizing such allocations would provide predictable funding streams and reduce reliance on external donors, while aligning offshore and coastal fisheries management objectives and underlining PICTs commitment to stewardship of their ocean in line with increasing global recognition. Leverage community strengths and provide local financing mechanisms. Community-based fisheries management (CBFM) should build on traditional governance systems and community-led initiatives to reduce external costs and enhance legitimacy. Legal recognition and capacity support for these systems can strengthen stewardship. Community financing mechanisms, such as small grants programmes and trust funds, have proven effective in catalysing grassroots action and should be scaled up. These approaches empower local actors, improve ownership and provide flexible, low-cost models for expanding CBFM.

70 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific Integrate CBFM processes across government sectors and budgets. Community-based fisheries management (CBFM) intersects with food security, biodiversity conservation and climate resilience. Integrating CBFM into broader government planning and budgeting – such as environment, disaster preparedness and agriculture – can unlock new resources and foster cross-sectoral collaboration and cost effectiveness. Shared outreach and transport strategies across ministries can reduce costs and improve service delivery to remote communities. Innovative models, such as Vanuatu's integrated ministry and Palau's tourism green fee and protected area network, illustrate possible opportunities for cross-sector financing. Build and fund robust coastal MCSE systems as an operational backbone for scaling up CBFM. Strengthen coastal MCSE by ensuring sustained funding for dedicated MCSE teams, supporting participatory surveillance and establishing clear legal authority, safety provisions and training for authorized officers. Monitoring, control, surveillance and enforcement (MCSE) strategies should reinforce voluntary compliance through communications, awareness and fisher participation (the VADE model of graduated responses) and distinguish between community and non-community rule-breakers to ensure fair and context-appropriate enforcement. Institutionalize cross-agency enforcement to address external threats. Institutionalize coordinated cross-agency enforcement mechanisms, formalized through mandated, time-bound memoranda of understanding and supported by clear legal mandates, to address non-fisheries threats such as logging, mining, pollution and coastal development that fall outside community or fisheries mandates. Political

commitment and whole-of-government collaboration are essential to protect coastal ecosystems and ensure CBFM efforts are not undermined by unmanaged external pressures. Strengthen community networks and feedback mechanisms. Robust community networks are vital for scaling up CBFM and ensuring that local voices inform policy. Governments and partners should invest in sustaining these networks and institutionalizing two-way communication channels, including national and provincial forums. Feedback mechanisms must prioritize inclusivity, enabling participation by women, youth and marginalized groups. These systems enhance transparency, accountability and trust, aligning with SSF Guidelines and human rights principles. Improve community issue diagnosis and use of appropriate fishery management tools. Community-based fisheries management (CBFM) requires communities to correctly diagnose their fisheries challenges and select management tools that directly address the issues identified. Governments and partners should ensure clear, accessible guidance and simple diagnostic steps that help communities link observed problems – such as declining catches, habitat damage or increased effort – to the most suitable responses, whether that is gear rules, size limits, seasonal closures, habitat protection or other measures designed to enhance management effectiveness. Strengthening this capacity through information exchange, practical information products and facilitated reflection will result in more deliberate, effective and locally grounded management decisions. Enhance information access, transparency and accountability. National and subnational information strategies should ensure communities receive practical, culturally relevant guidance on fisheries management through cost-effective channels such as radio, social media and community champions. Transparency in licensing, revenue allocation and decision-making processes is essential to reduce corruption risks and build public confidence. Adopting international standards such as FiTI and embedding anti-corruption measures in governance frameworks will maximize economic returns and strengthen accountability. 3.4 Adaptation, livelihoods and resilience Climate change has become the dominant driver shaping the future of coastal fisheries and increasing the pressure from overfishing and land-based threats (Section 2.2.5). Disasters and global shocks have presented major and unpredictable challenges. Pacific Island communities have a long history of resilience in the face of disasters, drawing on generations of adaptive cultural practices and local knowledge to cope with environmental extremes such as cyclones, tsunamis, droughts and floods (Box 18). Improving or securing this resilience will require addressing internal as well as external factors, in particular social inclusion, to ensure resilient communities that leave no one behind.

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 71 Box 18. Community resilience in the face of a global pandemic – COVID-19 and the Pacific Islands When the COVID-19 pandemic struck the PICTs in 2020, border closures and movement restrictions imposed by Pacific governments prevented widespread transmission but also caused significant economic hardship, particularly through job losses and disrupted supply chains. Despite these challenges, Pacific Island communities across seven countries, surveyed because of their CBFM activities, demonstrated notable resilience during the pandemic's early months. This resilience was rooted in their ability to fall back on customary food sharing networks and traditional food production techniques, ensuring food security even as formal markets and employment opportunities collapsed. Strong social networks – historically reinforced through ceremonial trade alliances – enabled communities to barter, share and support each other in times of need. Practices such as crop diversification, surplus food preservation and communal management of land and sea resources further strengthened their capacity to adapt, while traditional governance structures facilitated cooperation and collective action. Key features underpinning this resilience included the maintenance of social cohesion, the revival and application of ancestral knowledge (such as pit fermentation of breadfruit or reliance on sago palm), and the flexibility to adapt food production and sharing practices to new challenges. Even when faced with simultaneous disasters – such as cyclones or volcanic eruptions – communities mobilized quickly, activating support networks and drawing on deep-rooted customs of mutual aid. These experiences highlight the enduring importance of cultural practices, social capital and local governance in enabling Pacific Islanders to withstand and recover from both global shocks like COVID-19 and the ongoing threats posed by climate change and natural disasters. Strong social networks among Pacific Islanders have long fostered resilience to food system shocks, both within and between

island communities. More recent investment in networks at different scales has also proven important. Source: Jupiter, S., Tuxson, T., Ferguson, C. & Mangubhai, S. 2022. Pacific Islanders' Food-Sharing Customs Ensure Resiliency in Face of Disaster. In: Truthout. [Cited 10 August 2025]. <https://truthout.org/articles/pacific-islanders-food-sharing-customs-ensure-resiliency-in-face-of-disaster/>

3.4.1 Climate change and other external shocks The increasing evidence of climate change stress and damage to coastal ecosystems due to warming, extreme events, acidification and direct effects of CO₂ emissions is compounded by mismanagement and overexploitation. The impacts of climate change are expected to be heaviest for small-scale and coastal fishers such as in the Pacific Ocean. Reductions in harvests and changes in species composition as habitats respond to climate change as well as increased uncertainty in replenishment of stocks will increasingly challenge coastal fishers. The Pacific Community (SPC) has recently driven two major climate change initiatives – an extensive review of climate change implications for fisheries in the Pacific Islands region (Johnson and Wabnitz, 2025) and a regional Draft Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture Climate Change Strategy (SPC FAME, 2025c). The review forecasts highly variable declines in coastal fish biomass – up to 40 percent in many PICTs by 2050, with some areas facing catch reductions of 65 percent (Welch et al., 2025). The strategy warns that climate impacts will be far more severe where fisheries are already overexploited or poorly governed and that existing management approaches cannot keep pace with accelerating ecological change. Tectonic events such as volcanoes and tsunamis have major impacts and other global shocks such as financial crises or disease pandemics reach the Pacific through markets or transport links. Communities may be exposed and may also prove particularly resilient (Case Study 2. Global shocks). The review and strategy draw clear conclusions, effective, climate-ready management systems are no longer optional, they are essential. Community-based fisheries management (CBFM) embedded in a coherent national system, focused on reducing overfishing, protecting habitats, and planning for variability is one of the most powerful climate-adaptation tools available for Pacific coastal fisheries (Welch et al., 2025). Monitoring is important, but integrated approaches that do not overburden communities need to be designed (Section 3.4.2).

3.4.2 Monitoring of community-based fisheries management The need for monitoring related to climate impacts on community fisheries needs to be effectively integrated with monitoring and tracking of CBFM. A regional review and monitoring guide for CBFM has been produced (Vieux et al., 2026), highlighting lessons learned and providing guidance for monitoring design. Monitoring of CBFM across the Pacific has struggled to meet expectations

72 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific because it has often been built on resource-intensive, externally driven models that could not be sustained or scaled across hundreds of communities. Many monitoring approaches relied heavily on outside expertise, complex methods and intermittent support, resulting in irregular data collection and limited use of results for local decision-making. Monitoring was often complicated by trying to meet multiple objectives or a simple lack of clear objectives and as a consequence, monitoring has rarely delivered the consistent, community-owned evidence base needed to drive adaptive management at scale. Effective monitoring must therefore rely on approaches that are simple, low cost, culturally grounded and feasible for long-term use by communities themselves, without depending heavily on external experts. Community-led perceptual methods, such as focus groups, interviews and basic catch or habitat observations, play a central role because they are accessible, provide timely feedback and can meaningfully guide adaptive management at the local level. At broader programme scales, governments and NGOs can complement these efforts with more technically demanding methods in a few sites to gain deeper understanding, creating a tiered system where community monitoring informs national evaluation and policy. It is important to ensure that monitoring remains practical, repeatable and capable of supporting sustainable fisheries management despite the constraints faced across Pacific Island contexts. A solution proposed in Fiji, and more recently Tonga (MoF, 2025), is a strategic, tiered approach to monitoring where all communities record their perceptions of resource status to inform and improve local management rules. These reports are collated by CBFM programme coordinators who also directly monitor the status of resources in a subset of representative communities to inform broad-scale CBFM programme effectiveness. More costly

academic research is directed towards a handful of appropriate locales to test the assumptions underpinning CBFM programmes. 3.4.3 Sustainable livelihoods, income generation and livelihood diversification Communities, governments and NGOs across the Pacific commonly seek assistance in diversifying, expanding or finding new livelihood and climate adaptation opportunities. Usually, the types of activities in demand are those that will generate much-needed cash to supplement subsistence lifestyles dependent on agriculture, fishing and local activities. This demand (for cash-generating activities) is relevant to all government agencies and sectors, but government fisheries agencies and collaborating organizations are designed around ensuring sustainable or recovered fisheries resources as the major contribution to livelihoods. Many of the broader requests for income-generation support may not be relevant to the skills and capabilities of fisheries organizations unless there is some relationship with fisheries or the market chain, such as: • targeting new species or fish stocks; • improved or new fishing techniques or practices; • accessing markets or improving the financial return on marine products; • improving value chains or fish processing; and • aquaculture. Income-generating and livelihood diversification activities not related to fisheries are often promoted to reduce the pressure on coastal resources and divert efforts from marine resource extraction. Despite many examples of “alternative livelihood projects” there is very limited evidence that many of these have proven successful enough to warrant investment or scaling up from government agencies (O’Garra, 2007; Govan, 2011; Eriksson et al., 2020, Banuve, 2025).²³ Livelihood projects and interventions remain popular and it cannot be ignored that they provide tangible benefits to some, not so much the intended beneficiaries (who may experience a very small proportion of the investment), but mainly to intermediary organizations and their staff.

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 73 24 The regional data are relatively unreliable but definitely highly skewed by commercial pearl farming and shrimp in the French territories – 88 percent of the USD 90 million value of regional aquaculture production (Mori et al., 2022; Gillett and Fong, 2023) 3.4.3.1 Aquaculture Aquaculture has been promoted for many decades based on its potential to support community livelihoods including for income generation and food security, but very few initiatives have lived up to initial promise at community level. The total regional value of aquaculture production has remained around USD 10 million per year for more than a decade – excluding large-scale commercial shrimp and pearl farming in the French territories (Gillett and Fong, 2023; Mori et al., 2023).²⁴ The community relevant aquaculture experiences that have shown some promise are highly dependent on very specific local contexts such as tilapia (Fiji and Papua New Guinea) and seaweed which remains extremely sensitive to global prices and local logistics (Fiji and Solomon Islands). Other specific initiatives have shown localized successes, but it is not clear whether they are financially viable in the long term or scalable without ongoing external support (Case Study 4. Value chain of sea grapes; Box 19). Marine aquaculture is often high risk and very demanding with practical marketing and economic constraints that are particularly challenging at the community level. Even for the areas which may hold potential, a fundamental change in approaching mariculture development is needed. This includes impartial and context-specific assessment and planning, more thorough and realistic market appraisals, estimates of production, distribution and marketing costs, and better development planning of mariculture within the wider processes of economic development planning and/or integrated coastal management. The recommendations of Hambrey et al., (2011) have still not been explicitly addressed in subsequent studies or policies. Proposals must be reviewed thoroughly and impartially, with: • better development planning within the wider processes of economic development planning and/or integrated coastal management; • more objective and informed project preparation and appraisal including cost-benefit analyses and more thorough and realistic market appraisal; and • a greater role for the private sector as a key partner in any government- or aid-promoted development project. The promotion of aquaculture is popular but risks masking the enduring need for coastal fisheries management, without which restocking and recovery of wild stocks will not be feasible (Preston and Tanaka, 1990). When investing in sustainable livelihood interventions the potential gains for communities must be offset against the long-term costs of partners and governments to support these activities and others that might be a higher priority. For context, sustaining or improving commercial coastal fisheries may be worth upwards of USD 120 million per year

(Gillett and Fong, 2023) and improving the governance and management of the sea cucumber fishery alone could triple national revenue from USD 14 million to as much as USD 40 million (CFWG, 2019).

3.4.3.2 Fisheries value chain approaches

Attempting to improve community incomes, often in very remote villages, requires more careful market, cost-benefit and institutional analyses by proponents. Communities and local staff can carry out broad brush assessments of such factors in and for their particular situations (see tools such as Govan et al., 2019). Taking a value chain approach so that communities can improve post-harvest handling, processing and marketing, is broadly advocated including by the SSF Guidelines. The potential of understanding and strengthening fisheries value chains for improving the livelihoods of Pacific Island coastal communities is increasingly recognized. Value chains – the full sequence of activities from harvesting to processing, marketing and consumption – can determine how much economic and social benefit local fishers and their families ultimately receive. In the Pacific, value chain assessments are increasingly being carried out for fisheries in general (Dacks et al., 2020), sea cucumbers (Mangubhai et al., 2016), mud crabs (Mangubhai et al., 2024), shell money (Barclay et al., 2019), gender impacts and livelihoods (Stacey and Govan, 2020) and corruption prevention (UN■PRAC, 2023).

74 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific Value chain assessments leading to improvement of local livelihoods in the PICs are less common, but implementation of their findings may have improved support or avoided pursuing unlikely initiatives (Box 19). The case of sea grapes is more fully described in Case Study 4 (Value chain of sea grapes) where local solutions to sustainability and market access seem to have been successful. Initial success in community management and marketing of sea cucumbers shows potential but the challenges should not be underestimated as shown in one pilot project (Box 20).

Box 20. Sustainable management and added value of community sea cucumber fisheries in Papua New Guinea

The Mwanus Endras Asi Resource Development Network (MEARDN) in Manus, Papua New Guinea, was supported by The Nature Conservancy to apply community-based fisheries management to sustainably manage and add value to their *bêche-de-mer* (sea cucumber) fishery. The Nature Conservancy played a pivotal role by helping MEARDN register a business, obtain export licences and, crucially, secure direct access to premium buyers in Hong Kong. The Nature Conservancy leveraged its international networks and facilitated negotiations, enabling MEARDN to export sustainably certified, high-value species directly to Hong Kong wholesalers, bypassing traditional middlemen. This approach aimed to capture more profit for local fishers, improve ecological outcomes and offer a model where local knowledge and cooperative behaviour could drive both conservation and economic resilience. In its first year, the project paid fishers premium prices, maintained healthy sandfish populations and generated profits, suggesting a win–win for livelihoods and conservation. Despite initial success, the project struggled to remain viable as external and internal conditions shifted. Increased competition, more export licences and fluctuating market dynamics in the second year led to reduced profits and weakened community control. Poaching within tambu areas increased and profits were not reinvested as intended. The experience highlighted that even well-supported, community-driven projects are vulnerable to unpredictable social, economic and governance changes such as government increases in the number of export licences, inconsistent enforcement and shifting policies. Successful and sustainable outcomes in small-scale fisheries require not just good design and local engagement, but also the capacity to adapt continually to volatile conditions. Sustained support including interaction with government, flexible strategies and realistic expectations about market and governance challenges are essential for long-term success. Source: Hamilton, R., Waldie, P., Clark, T., Matawai, M., Thomas, M., Kinch, J., Tovaboda, E. & Bode, M. 2025. Conservation and Commerce: Managing Small-Scale Fisheries for Ecological and Livelihood Benefits. *Conservation Letters*, 18(6): 70011. <https://doi.org/10.1111/con4.70011>

Box 19. Assessing a mud crab fattening project in Fiji and its potential for scaling up

A cost-benefit analysis was carried out on a community owned mud crab fattening initiative in Vunuku in Fiji's Rewa province. Despite strong community support and engagement, the project did not meet income or economic impact expectations though it was felt to have improved social relationships. Technical challenges existed, predation of the smaller crabs, but seasonal variation in supply combined with the lack of secure markets posed near insurmountable obstacles. Key strategies for improvement might include forming strategic

partnerships, expanding buyer networks, and improving logistics and sales agreements to expand market access. The project itself was not suitable for replication or scaling up until the challenges identified at a pilot scale are successfully overcome. At the community level implementing a revenue-sharing model, monitoring farm husbandry and grow-out practices, and enhancing post-harvest handling may be useful. However, the success of this communal project will depend on marketing and strengthened support systems which are issues largely beyond community control, needing government or partners to address market access, as well as security and value chain improvements. Source: Banuve, S. 2025. Assessing the mud crab fattening project in Vunuku, Rewa, Fiji and its potential for scaling-up. In: Govan, H., Akao, I., Lalavanua, W., Ketu, B., Kilakau, K., Leinga, G. & Kengeva, C. et al. First regional training in scaling-up community-based fisheries management: Building skills together for different contexts. SPC Fisheries Newsletter, 177: 11–22. <https://www.spc.int/digitalibrary/get/kz5cn>

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 75 3.4.3.3 Inshore fish aggregating devices The installation of inshore fish aggregating devices (iFADs) is an approach within the mandate of fisheries agencies and partners that reportedly demonstrates clear potential benefits to coastal communities (MRAG, 2022; Gillett, 2023; Chapman, 2025). The benefits of artisanal or inshore FADs have been promoted for many years in the Pacific but their deployment has usually taken the form of irregular and unsustainable projects. However, the body of experience has grown substantially and recent surveys have shown that increasingly Pacific Island fisheries agencies have adequate inhouse capacity and are well on the way to developing national FAD policies and implementation plans. Unfortunately, few countries have an internal budget for FAD work and all still rely on ad hoc co-financing or project funds (Chapman, 2025). The benefits of iFADs recorded for coastal communities include (Kinch, 2023):

- increased catches for food security;
- lower fuel consumption compared to other forms of fishing;
- less pressure on reef resources;
- higher catches for income and commercial development; and
- reduced reliance on imported food and store-bought tinned fish.

A very important feature of iFADs is the opportunity they provide to access the largest fishery resources in the region, the tuna fishery, which is otherwise principally exploited by large vessels far offshore and beyond the reach of coastal fishers. Inshore fish aggregating devices (iFADs) are an opportunity for communities to access these resources at a time when coastal fishery production may be at its limit and further strained by climate change. Gillett (2011) estimated that the total annual tuna production by small-scale fishing for all PICs may be in the order of 20 000 tonnes, less than 1 percent of all tuna landed by industrial fishing (Williams and Ruaia, 2023). However, unlike industrial tuna, artisanal tuna directly enters the domestic food supply of PICs (Tolvanen et al., 2019). Improving access of local fishers to this resource is one of the Figure 12. Different types of inshore or nearshore anchored fish aggregating devices used in the Pacific Island countries Note: aFAD = anchored fish aggregating device Source: Smailes, O. 2022. Unlocking the potential of pelagic fisheries: How can anchored fish aggregating devices be used to address food insecurity in tropical small-scale fisheries? SPC Fisheries Newsletter, 167: 24–30. <https://www.spc.int/digitalibrary/get/deqa7>

Box 21. Realizing the potential of inshore fish aggregating devices in community-based fisheries management and coastal fisheries in Pacific Island countries and territories Regional experience suggests the following priorities to ensure inshore fish aggregating devices (iFADs) realize their potential as tools for food security, increased income generation and reduction of pressures on inshore environments as well as adapting to potential impacts of climate change. Inshore fish aggregating devices (iFADs) should become an established component of coastal fisheries and integrated with community-based fisheries management (CBFM) support:

- Appropriate governance structures at national and subnational levels and policies need to be developed with all stakeholders to fully support iFAD programmes. This includes, where necessary, legislation and regulations and a comprehensive national and subnational iFAD management plan, strategies and annual workplans. Once the national iFAD management plan is approved and endorsed by government, it provides the guidance and approach for implementing the iFAD programme as a collaboration between the fisheries agency, other relevant government departments and all stakeholders.
- Allocating regular operational budgets annually is a key priority for deployment and maintenance of iFAD programmes at the appropriate level (usually province, island or district). Without

regular funding, systematic deployment and maintenance of iFADs is very challenging regardless of the existence of public policies or iFAD strategies. Regular deployment and maintenance of iFADs is a function best addressed by governments. Whether budgets are allocated to some programmes (such as aquaculture) to the detriment of FAD programmes should be debated using available cost-benefit data.

- Inshore fish aggregating devices (iFAD) programmes should integrate with other fisheries community outreach and extension, particularly CBFM support. Community organization, information and consensus are important for all fisheries collaborations between partners and communities.
- i, ii For livelihood interventions, including the deployment of iFADs, gender risk assessments are necessary to understand if and how the functions and roles of men and women may be affected differently. The deployment of iFADs, and particularly their maintenance, affect coastal fisheries management and should draw on the same extension and information services, as well as local governance arrangements for their care and maintenance.
- Clarify community and fisheries agency roles and responsibilities. Experience shows that iFADs require maintenance, protection from mishandling or abuse and eventual replacement. Some of these functions should be the responsibility of the users or local community but in the long term more expensive maintenance and replacement will be required and should be factored in by government agencies.
- Integrate iFAD programmes with other rural development partners and agencies. The benefits extend across many sectors, and the scarce budgets and staff could be usefully shared across the functions of deployment, maintenance and follow-up. Linking to relevant authorities relating to sea safety will be important.
- Monitoring and basic data collection as well as regular evaluation are needed to ensure that designs are appropriate, programmes are improved and the benefits are measured to ensure political support and ongoing budgets.

iii Sources: iAlbert, J.A., Beare, D., Schwarz, A.M., Albert, S., Warren, R., Teri, J., Siota, F. & Andrew, N.L. 2014. The contribution of nearshore fish aggregating devices (FADs) to food security and livelihoods in Solomon Islands. *PLoS One*, 9(12): 115386; iiSaeni Labuinao, E. 2020. Kastom, gender and economic development: The case of the fish aggregating device in To'abaita, Solomon Islands. *SPC Women in Fisheries Information Bulletin*, 32:13–18. <https://www.spc.int/digitallibrary/get/96tuy>; and iiiChapman, L. 2025. Adapting tuna dependent Pacific Island communities and economies to climate change: Feasibility of scaling-up national fish aggregating device (FAD) programmes in 14 Pacific Island countries. Technical Study 3. Brisbane, Australia, Lindsay Chapman Consulting Pty Ltd. <https://www.spc.int/digitallibrary/get/au6vm>

major attractions of iFADs for food security. Strengthening national iFAD Programmes is seen as a highly effective approach to support domestic food security across the 14 PICs (Chapman, 2025; MRAG, 2022; Bell et al., 2015). The potential to improve income generation is also significant. A reasonable estimate of the proportion of overall artisanal tuna catches captured around iFADs may be around 10 percent (R. Gillett, personal communication, 2025) which would be worth, either as tuna on the market or substituting for tin tuna purchases, around USD 50 million – a significant contribution to household economies and far surpassing alternatives such as aquaculture or sea cucumbers. The data of Gillett, Chapman and others shows that deployment of iFADs has proven to be one of the few successful income-generating initiatives that can be supported to contribute to small-scale fisheries in PICTs. Despite upfront costs, FADs effectively allow small-scale fishers to economically take advantage of the region's large tuna resources. Active and well-managed FAD programmes may be among the most effective support governments can provide small-scale fishers (Gillett et al. 2018), a recommendation increasingly supported in regional policies and programmes (e.g. SPC, 2025c).

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 77 Box 22. Enhancing the participation of women and social inclusion in Kiribati The CBFM programme in Kiribati started in 2014. A key issue to be addressed was that fishing was perceived as a male activity, generally elders and men play crucial decision-making roles, while women, young men and children are not included. Women, though active fishers, are regarded as “only catching clam” i.e. not real fishing. Initially, fisheries ministry teams were faced with only men and elders when doing community consultations and had to make concerted requests to communities to allow women and youth to participate. The ministry prompted for their inclusion and, though there was some involvement of these groups during discussions, this was not so apparent in

implementation. The ministry changed the approach and supported the creation of women's groups (inviting all women in the community, with the groups to be formally registered under the NGO Act). Such groups provide opportunities for women to share their views in "safe spaces" where they are protected from adverse impacts of speaking out. Internally, the ministry is successfully increasing the employment of women fisheries officers but the reaction of men to women compliance officers may pose challenges in the future. SPC. 2025. Regional Community-Based Fisheries Management (CBFM) Workshop: Implementation of the Pacific Framework for Action on Scaling up CBFM. Noumea. <https://www.spc.int/digitallibrary/get/4eycj> The experiences with local deployment and maintenance of iFADs provide useful lessons on local factors and challenges. However, systematic, regular and sustained support by national governments and fisheries agencies for deployment and maintenance of iFADs is needed. The overlaps between the potential needs of communities (such as declining local fisheries resources), possible solutions (such as better community-based management or compliance with national rules) and the needs for collaboration within communities and with government agencies suggest that iFAD programmes should be better integrated into CBFM and coastal fisheries extension work in general. The challenges facing CBFM in terms of inadequate and unsustainable operational budgets are the same as those faced for FAD deployment and maintenance and it could be useful to address them together in national and provincial coastal fisheries support strategies (Box 21).

3.4.4 Gender, equality, disability and social inclusion

The Framework for Action, together with associated social equity commitments and guidelines, has been guiding PICTs to integrate GEDSI principles into their national fisheries instruments including policies, legislation and CBFM frameworks. The SPC produced the Pacific handbook for gender equity and social inclusion in coastal fisheries and aquaculture (Barclay et al., 2021) which provides additional guidance. Priority actions include assessment of potentially overlooked marginalized groups, improving processes to ensure inclusion of gender, youth and marginalized groups in community decision-making processes and engaging with national social development agencies and stakeholders such as women's departments, civil society groups and community groups (Box 22). Youth are increasingly active in fishing, processing, marketing and digital communication, yet they are rarely included in governance structures. People with disabilities often rely on gleaning, processing or small-scale trade, but face barriers to information, mobility and participation. The handbook calls for proactive inclusion: targeted outreach, accessible training and leadership pathways that recognize the strengths and aspirations of these groups (Case study 5. Social inclusion). Climate change adds urgency to this agenda as reefs, mangroves and intertidal zones, which are sensitive to environmental variations, are also the areas where women, youth and people with disabilities most commonly fish, and these groups face disproportionate impacts on food security and income. Scaling up CBFM as part of climate change responses must therefore integrate inclusive climate adaptation: supporting diversified livelihoods that are accessible to all, improving post-harvest practices and ensuring that new opportunities, such as nearshore pelagic fishing, aquaculture and value adding, are designed so that women, youth and people with disabilities can participate meaningfully.

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3.4.5 Outlook for community-based fisheries management for climate change adaptation, sustainable livelihoods and community resilience

Climate change has become the most significant force shaping the future of coastal fisheries in the Pacific, compounding pressures from overfishing and land-based threats. Pacific Island communities have shown remarkable resilience in the face of disasters and global shocks, and this may be considered a major asset to maintain and strengthen. Assisting communities may require addressing both external challenges – such as climate change, extreme weather events and global market disruptions – and internal factors, especially social inclusion. The Climate Change Strategy, the Framework for Action and regional GEDSI documents provide important guidance. Governments, communities and NGOs have experimented with a wide range of livelihood diversification and income-generating initiatives to supplement coastal fishing. These efforts have included promoting alternative fisheries, introducing new fishing techniques, developing aquaculture, installation of FADs and supporting market access and value chain improvements. While some projects have shown promise, particularly those closely linked to fisheries and local market realities,

many have struggled to deliver lasting economic benefits or prove scalable without ongoing external support. Some of the most promising opportunities require more integrated coastal fisheries support strategies with an increased role for iFADs. Opportunities and potential priority actions for adaptation, livelihoods and resilience: Accelerate implementation of the Framework for Action appropriately as a key response to climate change. Establish robust, sustainable management systems that can function under climate stress, ensuring communities have the authority, support and tools to manage coastal resources, while national and subnational agencies provide consistent legal frameworks, technical guidance, extension and enforcement capacity. Management must be simple, cost-effective, locally-driven and adaptive. It must use clear rules, practical indicators and include regular review cycles to respond to ecological change. Emphasize the protection and restoration of coastal habitats. The ecological basis of coastal fisheries – coral reefs, mangroves and seagrass meadows – are increasingly vulnerable to warming, acidification and extreme weather. An increased emphasis of CBFM approaches must integrate entire habitat stewardship that includes reducing land-based pressures, preventing destructive practices and supporting habitat restoration where feasible to sustain fish stocks and provide natural buffers against climate impacts (Objective 5 – Framework for Action). Improve cost-effective data, monitoring and evidence-informed decision-making. Tracking and monitoring the outcomes of management is important for informing both communities and government on the effectiveness of their chosen strategies but also vital to detect emerging climate vulnerability and impacts. Community-based fisheries management (CBFM) monitoring approaches need attention and must be chosen based on feasibility and simplicity so they can be maintained. Outcomes should not only focus on the biological but also the intended livelihood security benefits and climate vulnerability. Climate change and other external shocks increase variability and uncertainty, thus increasing the need to track emerging issues. Community-based fisheries management (CBFM) provides the local ability needed for, at least simple, monitoring and reporting which may not need to rely on scientific surveys or complex methods. However, national CBFM monitoring systems in general need to be specifically developed and include the relevant mechanisms to gain early warning of emerging issues and assess the effectiveness of local and national management strategies that provide practical, fit-for-purpose information able to support timely decisions (e.g. Tonga SMA Strategy [Tonga MOF, 2025]). Invest in interinstitutional collaboration and networking. Climate change, disasters and global shocks challenge all sectors and segments of society. Better coordination and collaboration across agencies and with communities through civil society, including through networks and partnerships, is important in preparing for and responding to disasters (SPC, 2025) and other shocks (e.g. monitoring impact of the COVID-19 pandemic [Case Study 2. Global shocks]).

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 79 Diversify climate-resilient food systems for communities. With the decline of reef fisheries some fishing effort should be shifted toward pelagic species through the deployment of iFADs. Improved post-harvest handling and value-adding can further increase resilience by reducing waste and stabilizing supply but the attraction of commercial activity should not distract from the fundamental food security and nutritional importance of coastal fisheries. Ensure social inclusion to advance equity and improved community resilience. Women, youth and marginalized groups are heavily involved in coastal fisheries and are often the most affected by climate impacts. Improved involvement of women, youth, people with disabilities and other marginalized groups will ensure equity, reduce potential conflict and will likely improve overall resilient community management. Gender, equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) principles should be institutionalized in CBFM systems, which should include information, awareness and feedback systems, as well as support networks or coalitions that amplify marginalized voices. Focus areas include MCSE and tracking CBFM coverage and disaster response to reduce the risk of disproportionate livelihood and food security risks for the most vulnerable. Focus on fisheries-linked livelihoods. Government fisheries agencies and their partners should play to their strengths and expertise prioritizing activities directly related to fisheries and the market chain, such as those normally associated with fisheries extension. For example, they should focus on targeting new fishing activities, improving techniques and practices, enhancing market access and financial returns, strengthening value chains, processing and management and/or restoration of productive fisheries.

Inshore fish aggregating devices (iFADs) should receive increased attention and aquaculture should be treated carefully. Exercise caution in approaches to livelihood diversification. Projects not linked to fisheries (e.g. crafts, agriculture and ecotourism) are often promoted to reduce pressure on marine resources, but evidence of their long-term success is limited. Investment should be guided by realistic and objective assessments of viability, scalability and community context. Non-fisheries projects should be undertaken under the auspices of the government sector responsible. Fully implement and sustain iFADs. Inshore fish aggregating devices (iFADs) are among the most promising innovations for food security and income generation. Recommendations include: establishing appropriate governance and policies at national and subnational levels; allocating regular operational budgets for deployment and maintenance; integrating iFAD programmes with CBFM and extension work; clarifying roles and responsibilities between communities and agencies; partnering with other rural development agencies for shared benefits; and ensuring ongoing monitoring, data collection and evaluation. Apply value chain approaches and carry out assessments. Strengthening resilient fisheries value chains, from harvest to processing and marketing, can significantly improve local incomes and resilience. Value chain assessments should be used to identify bottlenecks and opportunities, and findings should be implemented to avoid pursuing unlikely projects. Sea cucumber fisheries present many opportunities for improved value added from selective harvest of species and product quality, as well as increased governance. Assess aquaculture carefully and plan realistically. Aquaculture continues to show unrealized potential and is high risk and demanding. Most community-level initiatives have not met expectations. Aquaculture should not be pursued at the expense of robust coastal fisheries management or technologies with a proven track record such as iFADs. Aquaculture projects require impartial, context-specific assessment and planning. They need thorough market appraisals and cost-benefit analyses, integration with broader economic development and coastal management plans and greater involvement of the private sector as co-investing partners. Community aquaculture risks such as deepening inequities, displacement of traditional livelihoods, undermining customary tenure and weakening community cohesion should be assessed and mitigated. Success depends on early economic support, recognition of local traditions and social structures, and the creation of context-specific governance systems (Castillo et al., 2025).

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4. Conclusions Decades of experience in the highly diverse contexts of PICTs have shown that CBFM, usually grounded in customary tenure and traditional knowledge, offers some of the most effective and culturally appropriate approaches for achieving sustainable fisheries, resilient ecosystems and thriving coastal communities. The Framework for Action has been validated as the principal roadmap for progress, offering strategic guidance for governments, partners and communities. A key finding is the centrality of governance, tenure and TEK. The co-existence of customary and statutory tenure systems is a defining feature of Pacific fisheries governance. Most countries recognize both, but the degree of legal support and practical implementation varies. Customary marine tenure (CMT) and TEK provide the foundation for local stewardship, enabling communities to assert control over access, use and management of marine resources. However, the integration of CMT into modern legal frameworks remains uneven, co-management needs to be seen less as “working together” and more like each party fulfilling their role more effectively and avoiding excessive bureaucratic processes that undermine community autonomy. Sustainable resource management and fisheries administration face persistent challenges, particularly chronic underfunding and limited staffing, especially at provincial and island levels. While national strategies and supportive policies have advanced, their implementation is hampered by inadequate operational budgets, reliance on short-term donor projects and insufficient financial autonomy at subnational levels. Community strengths, traditional governance and local financing mechanisms (such as small grants) have proven effective in catalysing grassroots action and should be scaled up. Embedding CBFM within government structures and ensuring robust community networks and feedback mechanisms are critical for long-term sustainability. Adaptation, social inclusion and resilience are increasingly important as climate change becomes the dominant driver shaping the future of PICs and coastal fisheries, compounding pressures from overfishing and land-based

threats. Projected declines in coastal fish biomass underscore the urgent need for climate-ready management systems. Community-based fisheries management (CBFM) is recognized as a powerful tool for climate adaptation, but building true resilience also requires inclusive approaches that ensure women, youth and marginalized groups participate in decision-making and benefit from adaptation strategies. Social cohesion, strong networks and traditional approaches have underpinned community resilience in the face of disasters and global shocks.

82 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific Policy coherence and improved interactions with other global conservation agendas are also crucial. Community-based fisheries management (CBFM) is the cornerstone of coastal conservation in the Pacific, contributing the majority of reported MPAs and aligning with global targets such as the KMGBF (30x30). The growing influence of global conservation agendas presents both opportunities and risks. Global targets must be integrated with, and not imposed over, local realities and homegrown successes. Effective tracking, reporting and alignment of CBFM with broader ocean governance strategies are essential for maximizing impact and accessing new funding streams. Efforts to diversify livelihoods have been met with mixed success. Projects closely linked to fisheries and local market realities (such as iFADs) show the most promise. Value chain improvements and cautious, context-specific approaches to aquaculture and alternative livelihoods are needed. Investments should be weighed against long-term costs and compared to the benefits of improving commercial coastal fisheries and their value chains, which may offer greater returns. Scaling up CBFM provides a framework for sustainable coastal fisheries and other rural development priorities but requires sustained investment, institutional strengthening, and the integration of traditional and modern governance systems. Budgetary support must move beyond short-term projects to establish predictable operational budgets. Responsive funding mechanisms are needed, including the allocation of offshore fisheries revenues to support coastal management. Inclusive adaptation and resilience-building must be prioritized to ensure that no one is left behind. Policy coherence and cross-sectoral collaboration are essential for aligning conservation, climate and development goals. Monitoring, transparency and accountability are fundamental for building public trust, reducing corruption and ensuring fair and legal use of marine resources. Opportunities to accelerate implementation of scaling up CBFM under the Framework for Action have been identified and potential actions include: 1. Governance, tenure and traditional knowledge for scaling up CBFM: • Strengthen legal and policy frameworks in support of customary tenure and community management rights. • Safeguard against market-based transfers of collective or community rights. • Promote indigenous-led dialogue on CMT in the context of coastal resource management. • Build on and better incorporate traditional knowledge. • Link rights to responsibilities for stewardship. • Improve and enforce PAAs which exclude industrial fishing from nearshore areas. • Explore a transition of PAAs towards ASAs to improve management and local fisher benefits. • Improve research, monitoring and assessment of tenure and governance. 2. Scaling up CBFM in the context of global conservation and ocean agendas – 30x30: • Improve tracking of both CBFM and community conservation and protected areas. • Facilitate neutral, evidence-based discussions between conservation and fisheries management to design appropriate mutually supportive marine resource management, conservation and sustainable use measures. • Ensure Pacific Island experiences are the basis for protected areas and OECMs, and consider ASAs. • Ensure that enhanced upscaling and sustaining CBFM is prioritized in national and regional ocean governance discussions. • Embrace expertise from the climate change and biodiversity sectors and seek integrated approaches. • Enhance funding for ongoing costs of fisheries management and enforcement from biodiversity and conservation budgets including trust funds and sector support.

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 83 3. Coastal fisheries administration and management effectiveness in successful scaling up CBFM: • Secure long-term national budgetary support for coastal fisheries and CBFM, including at subnational level. • Develop strategic scaling up plans with cost-effectiveness criteria to ensure sustainability and reach. • Leverage community and traditional strengths and provide local access to financing mechanisms. • Embed CBFM in national and subnational institutions: budgets, staff and systems. • Strengthen community networks and feedback mechanisms that

improve learning and policy development. • Integrate CBFM processes across government sectors and budgets to improve cost-effective service provision. • Allocate offshore fisheries revenue to support coastal management. • Build and fund robust coastal MCSE systems as an operational backbone for scaling up CBFM. • Institutionalize cross-agency collaboration and enforcement to address land-based and external threats. • Enhance information access, transparency and accountability. 4. Scaling up CBFM for climate change adaptation, sustainable livelihoods and community resilience: • Accelerate implementation of the Framework for Action appropriately as a key response to climate change. • Emphasize the protection and restoration of coastal habitats for climate resilience. • Diversify climate-resilient food systems for communities in particular through iFADs. • Improve cost-effective data, monitoring and evidence-informed decision-making. • Invest in interinstitutional collaboration and networking for disaster prevention and response. • Ensure social inclusion to advance equity and improved community resilience. • Ensure cautious, assessed and well-planned approaches to livelihood diversification. • Focus on improving fisheries-linked livelihoods: market access, enhancing the value of products and iFADs. • Finalize and implement governance, policy and embedded fisheries agency programmes for iFADs. • Employ value chain approaches and assessments. • Assess aquaculture carefully and plan realistically.

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Bul Traditional ban or closure in Palau
Framework for Action The Pacific Framework for Action on Scaling Up Community-based Fisheries Management: 2021–2030
Kapu Traditional ban or closure in Hawaii
Lafu Traditional ban or closure in Tokelau
Mo Traditional ban or closure in the Marshall Islands
Qoliqoli Traditional fishing rights areas in Fiji
Ra'ui Traditional ban or closure in the Cook Islands
Rahui Traditional ban or closure in French Polynesia
Sa Traditional ban or closure in Samoa
SFF Guidelines Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication
Tabu Traditional ban or closure in Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu
Tapu Traditional ban or closure in Tuvalu

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 97
Case studies Case Study 1. Sustainable resource management and governance of tenure: Vanuatu and Tonga
Community-based fisheries management (CBFM) of coastal resources in the Pacific region is practiced and supported in diverse ways, nesting community rights that are often grounded in customary marine tenure (CMT) with modern legal systems under overarching national legislation and a centralized fisheries agency. This legal pluralism is common to most but not all Pacific Islands and countries (PICs) and co-management entails defining appropriate roles for communities and government under this dual system (Cohen, et al., 2024; Rohe et al., 2019). Section 5 of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) recognizes that small-scale fishing communities are entitled to tenure rights over their local fishing grounds for food security and livelihoods, and these rights should be protected by the appropriate enabling environment. The Guidelines also recognize that communities play an important role in the management and conservation of fisheries areas. This case study describes CBFM approaches in two very different countries. Vanuatu has very strong CMT enshrined at constitutional level and CBFM is carried out by local communities with very little government or external support. Tonga does not have CMT but fisheries legislation was established to allow communities to apply for the right to manage fisheries resources in their village areas and the Special Management Area (SMA) programme is implemented with communities by the Ministry of Fisheries based on community requests for support. Another key difference is country size, the number of communities and the distances involved – countries with large numbers of coastal communities, such as Vanuatu, are unlikely to be able to reach and maintain significant coverage of communities compared to smaller and better resourced nations, such as Tonga (Govan and Lalavanua, 2023). Vanuatu The archipelagic nation of Vanuatu has a land area of 12 281 km² spread over 83 islands, an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of 200 nm and a population of 331 470 people living across an estimated 1 400 communities (SDD, 2025). In 2016, coastal subsistence fisheries production was 2 800 tonnes with a value of almost USD 7.5 million, while coastal commercial fisheries production was approximately 1 100 tonnes and valued at over USD 5.5 million (Gillett and Tauati, 2018). With 80 percent of the population residing in rural areas and two-thirds of the population living within 1 km of the coast, subsistence fisheries are vital for food security and livelihoods and are a major source of protein for local communities (Vanuatu Fisheries Department, 2019). Coastal resources belong to the traditional landowning clans, chiefs and villages, and rights of access can be

98 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific allocated by landowning units to heads of families, as well as for the equitable distribution of benefits of these resources through CMT (Hickey and Johannes, 2002). Customary ownership and control over resources, including the rights to exclude outsiders, remain the foundation for resource management in the country. These traditional systems are respected by government agencies, such as the Vanuatu Fisheries Department, and non-government organizations (NGOs) such as Wan Smolbag and the Vanuatai Network. They are also reinforced through legislation, including the Constitution (Hickey, 2008; Hickey and Robinson, 2024). A recent scaling up CBFM survey carried out by the Vanuatu Fisheries Department found that 527

communities out of the 586 surveyed were aware of at least one fisheries management rule (community or government). With only 33 of these communities classified as official project sites, it can be deduced that the majority of these communities were practising some form of management, most likely of a traditional nature with little external support (SPC, 2024). The traditional management regimes in local communities are custom-based, dynamic and rooted in diverse local belief systems, primarily with social and cultural motivations (Hickey, 2006; Jupiter et al., 2014), while approaches undertaken more recently have adopted increasingly modern influences and sometimes with scientific support, for example bans on and restocking of commercially valuable species, such as Trochus (Amos, 1993; Dumas et al., 2010). Like other large PICs, it has been established that government or NGO promotion and support of site-based approaches will not be able to achieve sufficient coverage to meet national needs for food security and livelihoods, and other avenues need to be developed in order to engage more communities and achieve impacts on a national scale (SPC, 2024). The Vanuatu Government has developed the National Roadmap for Coastal Fisheries 2019–2030, and the National Strategy for Scaling Up Community-based Fisheries Management in Vanuatu published in 2023. These documents help focus efforts towards strengthening the enabling environment and cost-effective activities required to support the scaling up of CBFM, as well as laying out a strategic plan to guide relevant agencies in their approach as suggested in the Pacific Framework for Action for Scaling up CBFM 2021–2030 (SPC, 2024). Monitoring and enforcement of legislation and rules across such remote rural areas by national and subnational fisheries agencies is difficult, so the Vanuatu Fisheries Department focuses its efforts on raising awareness, providing practical advice for resource management and attending to community requests where their budget or projects will allow (Raubani et al., 2017; Tavue et al., 2016). This national approach to scaling up CBFM builds on the importance of local ownership underpinned by traditional culture and indigenous knowledge (kastom) to guide locally implemented management activities (Amos, 1993; Vanuatu Fisheries Department, 2023). Tonga The SMA programme in the Kingdom of Tonga started in the early 2000s, and coastal and island communities are supported by the Ministry of Fisheries to carry out CBFM in local fishing grounds. Tonga is another archipelagic nation, comprising 169 islands and encompassing approximately just 747 km² in land mass. It has a relatively large EEZ of 700 000 km² and a population of almost 104 000 (SDD, 2025). There are 111 coastal communities and 77 percent of the population lives in rural areas, with about half of the total population residing on the main island of Tongatapu (FAO and SPC, 2019). In 2014, coastal subsistence fisheries production was 3 000 tonnes, valued at more than USD 10 million, while production for coastal commercial fisheries was 3 900 tonnes, with a value of just over USD18 million (Gillett and Tauati, 2018). Unlike many other PICs, CMT is not recognized and coastal resources are owned by the Crown, the resultant open access of all coastal resources had historically encouraged overharvesting, jeopardizing the food security of coastal communities (FAO, 2017). Realizing this, and that centralized management and enforcement were challenging, the Fisheries Management Act of 2002 provided the basis for co-management whereby communities were offered the mechanism to develop and implement co-management jointly with the government in designated SMAs (D’Andrea et al., 2024).

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 99 Through its SMA strategy, the government has laid out clear planning around community target numbers, sustaining and improving the effectiveness of existing SMAs and ensuring other coastal issues are addressed, including those for ecosystem and disaster management (Tonga Ministry of Fisheries, 2025). Communities wishing to manage their fishing grounds make an official request to the Ministry of Fisheries who then provides support through the establishment of a Coastal Community Management Committee to oversee the development and implementation of the Coastal Community Management Plan (Tonga Ministry of Fisheries and Vava’u Environmental Protection Association, 2021). The Tonga Government provides information and awareness support on a national scale, improving inclusivity and exploring the inclusion of landlocked communities that historically used coastal resources. It enhances compliance and supports enforcement for existing SMAs and monitoring of any biological and socioeconomic impacts (Tonga Ministry of Fisheries, 2025). The main approaches used by all SMAs is excluding access to fishers from other communities (similar to the access rights accorded by CMT) and within these areas, declaring fish

habitat reserves (FHR) or community marine protected areas (MPAs) (Smallhorn-West et al., 2020a). While some of these approaches have demonstrated improvements in fish abundance and diversity, there are indications that FHRs may not be sufficient and other measures may be required (Smallhorn-West et al., 2020b; Webster et al., 2017). This need for diversified approaches in the management of community fishing grounds has also been highlighted in the national SMA strategy. The SMA programme has become very popular, community requests exceed capacity to support them and the approach has expanded exponentially in recent years. However, monitoring and evaluation of SMA impacts has proven to be an ongoing challenge for communities and government alike (Ford-Learner et al., 2024).

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Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 101 Case Study 2. Global shocks: COVID-19 impacts and community response Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic were felt on a global scale. The Pacific region was no exception, with the virus and its effects reaching even the most remote island and coastal communities. The disaster and shock support systems for local communities of Pacific Island governments are generally poor, especially in rural and isolated communities, with communities often having to rely on their traditional and local knowledge to respond to disasters and global shocks (Fletcher et al., 2013). Due to the nature of indigenous Pacific Island customs, kinship bonds and the communal way of living, these traditions and local knowledge acted as social capital during the COVID-19 pandemic and were an important component of resilience for these remote Pacific communities (Ferguson et al., 2022; Vave, 2021). Section 5 and Section 9 of the FAO SSF Guidelines state that recognizing tenure rights and establishing a holistic and integrated approach is essential for disaster preparedness and building resilience for small-scale fishing and coastal communities. Ensuring secure tenure rights of indigenous Pacific Island communities provides the social safety nets needed to survive and enhances their resilience against the negative impacts that can result from global shocks and disasters, such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Mangubhai et al., 2024). The government restrictions during the pandemic had widespread implications for Pacific Island countries. Restrictions such as border closures, lockdowns and the loss of employment caused many people who lived in urban centres to return to their villages in rural areas to live off the land (Sherzad, 2020). In the case of Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, both governments strongly encouraged people in urban centres to return to their island communities (Eriksson et al., 2020). Through the existence of a civil society network (Locally-managed Marine Area [LMMA] Network) and project partner network (Steenbergen et al., 2020) it was possible to mobilize a rapid assessment in the form of a COVID 19 impacts survey. The assessment was conducted across the region in the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu to assess the initial effects that the pandemic itself, and the subsequent restrictions, had on coastal and

island communities (Ferguson et al., 2022; Steenbergen et al., 2020). At the local level, it was determined that resilience was maintained through existing cultural norms and practices. Through the surveys conducted in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, the following were identified as key areas providing resilience and community recovery (Ferguson et al., 2022; Lau et al., 2020; Steenbergen et al., 2020; LMMA Network et al., 2020a; LMMA Network et al., 2020b): 1. food sharing in all countries. For example, when people returned to villages from urban areas, families shared root crops and vegetables until they were able to harvest their own. During the lockdowns, older people and widows were cared for by neighbouring families; 2. in Papua New Guinea, the use of the traditional barter system that exists between highland and coastal communities, as well as the common and popular production of sago was vital to support local communities and help them thrive;

102 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific 3. the wantok system in Solomon Islands recognizing tenure and providing support to relatives; 4. solesolevaki in Fiji, which are community activities to benefit the collective, such as village fish drives and the group weaving of mats for women to sell; 5. food preservation techniques and the reliance and revival of traditional taro patching in the Federated States of Micronesia; and 6. the reliance on village food systems across the region, such as agriculture through community farms and harvesting marine resources from local fishing grounds. At a regional level, the existence of multiple national networks and one regional network meant that practitioners and community groups were able to rapidly mobilize to gather the first indications of whether a major crisis was emerging in terms of community livelihoods and fisheries resources in the remote villages of PICs (LMMA Network, 2021). This highlighted the significance of two-way communications and maintaining strong and active networks across the region. The results of the surveys were provided to government and regional decision makers directly or through network websites. This underscores the importance of targeted information needing to be provided by stakeholders, even academic institutions. The academic publication process proved to be unsuited to disaster response purposes (Ferguson et al., 2022), although it will likely have a role to play in informing longer term recovery processes. There are numerous lessons to be gleaned from the COVID-19 pandemic response in the Pacific. Tenure rights are a vital asset for communities. In Fiji, the Indo-Fijian fishers and market chain do not have marine tenure rights and did not have access to the same social capital as indigenous communities. The lack of access to other social safety nets such as insurance, government welfare programmes or ownership rights over land greatly reduced their chances for alternative livelihood options and left these groups disproportionately vulnerable (Mangubhai et al., 2021). The pandemic also highlighted the need for countries to develop robust food security policies and food systems to support local communities, and to reduce overdependency on imported foods which can reduce local capacity to meet food needs (Farrell et al., 2020; Ferguson et al., 2022; Mangubhai et al., 2024). Food security was further put to the test as at least two major cyclones passed through the region during the height of the COVID-19 restrictions (Cyclone Tino in Tonga and Tuvalu, and Cyclone Harold in Fiji and Vanuatu) (Steenbergen et al., 2020; WCS-Fiji and LMMA Network, 2020; LMMA Network and Tuvalu Fisheries Department, 2020). Papua New Guinea also faced drought and Vanuatu was impacted by volcanic activity, while the region continued to face the ongoing effects and pressure of climate change on coastal populations and resources (Steenbergen et al., 2020; LMMA Network et al., 2020). Notably, across the region, in general, a marked increase in fishing pressure was not reported during COVID-19. Local communities did turn to their fishing grounds to supplement loss of income and provide sustenance to their families but relied on agriculture and other diverse livelihood assets which their land and sea tenure afforded. This underscores the importance of communities' ongoing management of coastal resources which may serve as an important village safety net (Lauer et al., 2024; Mangubhai et al., 2024). Although the number of casualties due to direct infections were low compared to the rest of the world, and in some Pacific Island nations there were no fatalities, communal living practices and close quarters for intergenerational families could have been disastrous if the virus had gained a foothold in the rural communities of the Pacific (Sherzad, 2020; Wood, 2020).

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Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 105 Case study 3. Information strategies to support scaling up community-based fisheries management A core requirement for coastal

fisheries management in the Pacific and central to scaling up CBFM, as per the Framework for Action, is that communities receive appropriate and timely information relevant to their fisheries resources and the surrounding ecosystems, as well as to be aware of the relevant legislation, including fisheries regulations (SPC, 2024). The objective is to empower communities so that they can determine for themselves whether they face an issue with their resources, such as overfishing or habitat degradation, and if they do, they can decide what actions to take to address the problems identified. FAO's SSF Guidelines underscores the importance of information and communications in Section 11, stating that access to information is critical for communities to cope with existing problems and improve their livelihoods. It is also important for decision-making and promotes two-way communications using existing platforms and networks at all levels. Scaling up CBFM requires more than one-off or occasional media campaigns. For the long term, information pathways need to be established and maintained. Community and civil society networks have performed vital functions to share information, but governments should, ideally, invest in and implement long-term national or provincial information strategies (cChange, 2020). Over the past five years and since the endorsement of the Framework for Action, three government-endorsed information strategies have been launched in Fiji, Solomon Islands and New Ireland Province in Papua New Guinea. Two more countries (Tonga and Vanuatu) have initiated national information workplans where the national government is the lead agency for implementation. The main objectives of the national information strategies and workplans are to: increase understanding of CBFM issues and solutions in all communities; motivate and enable communities to take practical CBFM actions with minimal external support; and develop two-way communication channels to enable governments to understand community priorities better and allocate resources more effectively (cChange, forthcoming, a). Furthermore, to ensure sustainability, national information strategies should utilize approaches that are cost-effective and best able to rely on existing national and local budgets and staff, as well as approaches that are strategic and measurable. Monitoring and evaluation to assess cost, reach and impact is important to allow government to prioritize spending where it is most needed (cChange, 2025a). Source: cChange. 4FJ Fish Smart App

106 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific Since 2020, these five countries have been testing these approaches through the recently concluded Pacific–European Union Marine Partnership (PEUMP) programme and the ongoing project, “Strengthening and scaling community-based approaches to Pacific coastal fisheries management in support of the New Song,” also known as the Pathways Program. Initiated as part of PEUMP, the activities carried out under the national information strategies and workplans have included: (1.) broadcast media, such as news media, radio talkback shows and social media; (2.) extensive dissemination, namely community “do-it-yourself” toolkits, roadshows and annual festivals; (3.) targeted dissemination, such as private sector outreach, fisher forums and distribution at fish landings and markets; and (4.) direct engagement through building the capacity of government officers and partners, and activating grassroots stakeholders (Govan and Vieux, 2025). Through these pilot activities, a number of lessons have been learned for moving forwards with national information strategies. In all countries, technical advisory committees (TAC) comprising local experts were convened to ensure the information met certain criteria (e.g. evidence-based, practical and actionable) and to provide support for the development of all information products and community toolkits. Technical advisory committees (TACs) require considerable work to maintain but are considered an essential component. Gaining sufficient support for integrating national information strategies into annual government budgetary and staffing commitments proved challenging. However, in Fiji, distribution of information products and toolkits have been formally adopted by the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs and the Ministry of Fisheries. In Solomon Islands, the branded social media page on Facebook, Solwata Blo lumi (“our sea” or “our ocean”), is officially run by the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of certain activities proved problematic. As many M&E activities were carried out on a voluntary basis, reporting was irregular and much of the feedback was anecdotal and gathered by involved CBFM stakeholders through committee meetings or visits. In the future, conducting an annual survey to support M&E could prove fruitful to keep track of the impact and progress of activities conducted as part of national information strategies. Other lessons were learned, and successes documented for each individual

approach to be used for future planning under the national information strategies. Activating grassroots was a major element for all countries. This meant involving local stakeholders, such as community-based organizations, locally-based NGOs and faith-based organizations. Toolkits for stakeholders involved in CBFM used to support community “do-it-yourself” management activities were an essential part of this as well as the Training of Trainers programmes which trained selected community representatives to use these toolkits to host discussions in their villages and provide support to communities interested in CBFM. In New Ireland Province, the toolkit approach and the Training of Trainers programmes proved so successful that almost 50 percent of these programmes were conducted without project funding and the activities were taken on by local civil society organizations (CSOs) and community-based organizations (cChange, Forthcoming, b). However, it was discovered that whilst the toolkits were critical to start community discussions, there was a need for follow-up outreach materials that provided more in-depth information on other coastal fisheries management tools beyond the popular community marine protected area or tabu (J. Mesulam, personal communications, 2025). In addition, tracking tools for the distribution of the toolkits were also met with success, especially in Fiji, where partnerships with government agencies and other stakeholders saw distribution reach 43 percent of coastal communities nationwide (cChange, forthcoming, c). Radio talkback shows proved popular in all countries and are a key area for future investment because of their wide reach and the trust gained from older audiences. In addition, radio shows were able to be adapted for use on social media. News media was not overall an important channel for rural communities; however, it was valuable for targeting decision makers and for advocacy, with these news items being shared on multiple platforms.

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 107 Overall, social media had good reach and impact, and it was possible to track the interactions with the country campaign pages online on Facebook. The most popular posts across countries on social media were the community stories. Fiji, New Ireland Province and Solomon Islands all had national branded campaigns serving as an umbrella for all social media activities. Whilst not mandatory for a national information strategy, in these countries, branding helped create local ownership and increased participation. It provided more flexibility in multipartner efforts and helped ensure consistency in messaging (cChange, forthcoming, a). It is imperative that approaches are tailored to suit each country and the most cost-effective approaches are adopted into regular government practice. Improved reporting or evaluation of activities regarding reach and impact will help improve, justify and sustain future national information strategies. References cChange. 2020. The Fiji National Information Strategy to empower all communities to better manage their fishing grounds. <https://www.spc.int/digitallibrary/get/SmjBt43ixnwakuK> cChange. forthcoming, a. How to Build a National Information Strategy to Scale Community-Based Fisheries Management: A Learning Guide. cChange. forthcoming, b. Final Report. Papua New Guinea. LMMA_PEUMP KRA 3.7. cChange. forthcoming, c. Final Report. Fiji. LMMA-PEUMP KRA 3.7. Govan, H. & Vieux, C. 2025. Internal Evaluation of the LMMA Component of the PEUMP Programme. Suva, LMMA Network. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.10783.32165> SPC. 2024. Pacific Framework for Action on Scaling up Community-based Fisheries Management: 2021–2030. Noumea. <https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/4x64x>

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Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 109 Case Study 4. Value chain of sea grapes (*Caulerpa* sp.) in Fiji and Samoa Pacific Island communities rely on their marine resources for subsistence and livelihoods, including finfish, shellfish and seaweed. Traditional knowledge and management practices provide the basis for such activities. Pacific communities desperately need cash income from these livelihoods but face many challenges in bringing raw product from the sea to market, particularly in product selection, post-harvest handling, preparation, transport and access to markets – all key stages along the value chain. These value chain challenges affect small-scale fishers globally and are recognized in Section 7 of the SSF Guidelines which highlights the need for all actors – especially women – to be supported with investments in infrastructure, organizational structures and capacity development to ensure the production of safe, highquality fishery products for markets, while promoting traditional

associations and cooperatives to enhance income and livelihood security. Effective fisheries management systems are vital to prevent overexploitation driven by market demand. As such, all stakeholders are encouraged to both ensure that benefits are fairly distributed and prevent any adverse environmental, social or cultural impacts. A popular nutritionally-rich seaweed delicacy found in many Pacific countries are sea grapes (*Caulerpa* sp.) (Söhnen et al., 2025). The sea grape fishery and its associated value chain are typically dominated by women, extending from harvest activities to preparation, transporting and selling at markets. Recently in a few Pacific countries, sea grapes have been explored as a potential sustainable income-generating opportunity for local communities (Anderson et al., 2023; Morris and Bala, 2016; Thomas et al., 2021). Sea grapes in Fiji and Samoa, known colloquially as nama in Fiji and limu fua fua in Samoa, are harvested and sold at local and national markets. Fiji and Samoa both govern coastal resources through a traditional chiefly hierarchy, which may set management rules (village fisheries management plans in Samoa) often supported by government or NGO partners and implemented by committees or similar local organizations. Traditional knowledge and skills related to sea grapes are mainly held by women fishers and the practice of wild harvesting, management, preparation for household consumption and marketing are all carried out by women (Kitolelei et al., 2022; Source: Cherie Morris. Seagrapes

110 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific Tiitii et al., 2022; Vunisea, 2014). Wild harvest of sea grapes as a traditional subsistence activity in both countries has given way to harvest for commercial purposes. This has therefore led to challenges in terms of ensuring sustainable harvesting and fair access to markets and prices. The sea grape as a commodity appears to have high potential as a sustainable healthy seafood product which could alleviate pressure on the extraction of other resources in coastal fishing grounds. Communities and partners set out to determine whether sea grapes could be sustainably harvested through management and/or farming, and whether this activity could be economically viable through better access to the value chain and whether the activity could in some way alleviate pressure on coastal resources. In Fiji, fishers aimed to carry out the sustainable harvesting of sea grapes through a community management regime. Local village female fishers have received support for harvest and marketing activities from the Women in Fisheries Network, Institute of Marine Resources at the University of the South Pacific, and other NGO and government partners (Vunisea, 2014). In Samoa, fishers aimed to sustainably harvest wild sea grape stocks where available. In other locations, including those where wild stocks are not found, they tried to farm sea grapes in their village fishing grounds. Samoa has initiated a collaborative project between local communities, the Samoan national Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, with technical and financial support provided by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Japanese Government and the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR, 2023). The value chains for sea grapes were mapped for Fiji and Samoa by researchers from the University of the South Pacific and ACIAR, respectively. Fiji relies only on wild harvest, marketing by fishers is either wholesale (intermediaries buy produce from fishers) or retail (fishers sell direct to consumers at markets) (Morris et al., 2014). Women are responsible for much of the value chain, spanning all stages – from the harvest to the retail of sea grapes. Management of sea grape growth areas is carried out by the fishers involved (Morris and Bala, 2016) and can comprise rotational harvesting and special harvest methods whereby fishers leave the runner and root system intact when removing the grapes to allow the plant to continue to grow (C. Morris, personal communication, 2025). The value chain for Samoa starts with either wild harvest sea grapes or farmed sea grapes, then proceeds to processing, marketing and consumer stages (ACIAR, 2023). These value chain activities were integrated into the village fisheries management plans for local Samoan communities. Sea grape farming is now a collective and inclusive activity in Samoa in which both women and men participate (Anderson et al., 2023). However, wild harvest and the passing down of associated traditional knowledge is still predominantly conducted by women (Tiitii et al., 2022). The value of traditional knowledge on harvesting held by Samoan female fishers became very apparent, providing encouragement and good reason for communities to preserve traditional knowledge – not just because it is important to Samoan culture, but also because of the economic, nutritional and social impacts (Tiitii et al., 2022). This has led to increased recognition of

women's traditional knowledge of this fishery and a push for more inclusion in the decision-making committees responsible for the Village Coastal Fisheries Management Plan (Larson et al., 2023). Promotion of farming in Samoa and management in Fiji have the potential to ensure the sustainability of the sea grape resources. In Fiji, management of the resource is the responsibility of the fishers, and women involved in the fishery are aware, and make others aware, that removing the sea grape runners is unsustainable and detrimental to the stock (Morris and Bala, 2016). Preservation techniques are used by fishers to ensure extended shelf-life of the harvested sea grapes, a process which also allows for more time to reach the markets. Fishers apply a wound-healing methodology, for example women store the sea grapes in aerated seawater for 48 hours directly after harvest (Morris and Bala, 2016). Some villages have an ongoing relationship with intermediaries who retail the product for the fishers, some communities have developed a direct relationship with

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 111 a popular supermarket chain that has outlets around Fiji, and others sell their harvests themselves at urban markets with peak days on Fridays and Saturdays (Morris et al., 2014; Morris and Bala, 2016). For Samoa, the development and promotion of sustainable harvesting and farming practices has strengthened relationships between the local communities and government fisheries officers and other partners. These relationships also foster increased information exchange. Across the Pacific, sea grapes and seaweed are a major part of life that coastal communities will continue to harvest and consume provided that stocks are available. In both Fiji and Samoa, sea grape growth areas and harvest activities are susceptible to adverse weather conditions, such as storm surges and cyclones, and the continuing impacts of climate change (Larson et al., 2023; Morris and Bala, 2016). This underscores the importance of maintaining a diverse set of livelihood activities and not relying on just one commodity. In Samoa, the farming of seaweed and sea grapes, and the broad inclusion of men and youth has the potential to diminish women's ownership over what was traditionally recognized as their domain and responsibility. Care needs to be taken that sea grape harvesting and farming remains advantageous to female fishers and continues to respect their knowledge of sustainable practices (Anderson et al., 2023). Markets in Fiji and Samoa remain local and the potential to substantially increase the local market is likely limited. Export potential has not been fully explored in the Pacific. Trials conducted in the late 1990s in which product was sent from Fiji to Japan proved unsuccessful. However, attempts to send a shipment to New Zealand from Fiji in 2011 showed greater success, with the product arriving in good condition, even after a 2-day quarantine, indicating that the potential for export to nearby countries should be explored (Morris and Bala, 2016)

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Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 113 Case Study 5. Social inclusion: youth engagement in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands Populations in the Pacific, especially in Melanesia, are young, with about 20 percent of the region's total population being defined as youth (SDD, 2025). In Papua New Guinea, the National Youth Development Authority Act defines youth as any person under the age of 35, with this category accounting for approximately one quarter of the country's total estimated population. In Solomon Islands, the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs define youth as any person under the age of 34, equating to about 20 percent of the country's total estimated population. Within the fisheries sector, the role of youth is frequently undervalued, and they are often regarded as a marginalized group (SPC, 2015). Inclusion and equity are vital for fisheries to remain healthy and productive, as well as to ensure the sustainable use and management of coastal resources (Mangubhai and Cowley, 2021). Youth hold untapped potential for supporting food security, poverty reduction and income generation, but are often excluded or unable to fully participate in aspects of CBFM and the decision-making processes that are involved when managing local fishing grounds (Espinoza-Tenorio et al., 2022; Pamphilon et al., 2022). FAO's SSF Guidelines stress the importance of social inclusion, especially regarding marginalized and vulnerable groups. In nearly all sections, the guidelines reiterate the importance of investing in capacity development, ensuring access to markets, information and equitable benefit-sharing, as well as inclusivity in policymaking, planning and frameworks. Pacific regional policy has highlighted the need for improved social inclusion, particularly for youth and gender (SPC, 2015, 2024). Since the launch of the Framework for Action, pilot scaling up CBFM activities have taken on a greater youth focus. In Malaita Province, Solomon Islands, and New Ireland Province in Papua New Guinea, youth have been specifically engaged and targeted for a number of scaling up CBFM activities. In Malaita, Solomon Islands, led by WorldFish and the Malaita Provincial Fisheries Office, youth "influencers" were engaged to spread awareness and disseminate information about coastal fisheries management, as well as encourage other youth to become involved in CBFM activities within their communities, such as mangrove and coral replanting (Sukulu et al., 2016; Sukulu et al., forthcoming). Youth may be excluded from decision-making, but they can wield influence through their participation in the arts. Messaging through community theatre and music performances, seemed to be effective especially among their parents, elders and peer groups (Sukulu et al., 2025 unpublished). In New Ireland Province, Papua New Guinea, a broad partnership including Wildlife Conservation Society-Papua New Guinea, West Coast Development Foundation, Ailan Awareness, Lolieng Sustainable Programme, cChange and a number of the New Ireland Province local level government fisheries offices sought to increase youth involvement in a majority of the pilot activities testing the scaling up of CBFM under the recently concluded Pacific European Marine Partnership (PEUMP) Programme (cChange, forthcoming).

114 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific A large number of youth participated in the Training of Trainers Programme, during which they learned to use the scaling up CBFM information toolkit to host discussions about resource management and coastal fisheries issues in their communities and neighbouring villages (J. Mesulam, personal communications, 2025). A considerable number of this youth have become community champions for their various districts and active members of the New Ireland Province Champions Network for CBFM which meets annually to exchange and share

lessons learned from their activities during the PEUMP Programme (Govan and Vieux, 2025). This led to champions being a major contributor to encouraging their peers to participate in CBFM activities within their own communities, such as turtle tagging and fish landing surveys (WCS-PNG, 2021). Activating grassroots stakeholders is a major component of scaling CBFM. However, in order to involve youth, their specific challenges and barriers to engagement must be addressed. Opportunities that align with the ambitions of youth and an enabling environment conducive to their participation must also be created (Arulingam et al., 2020; Fry et al., 2021). A large percentage of youth in both Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands possess a low level of education and are unemployed. They are also excluded from decision-making processes by traditional leaders who expect them to comply with the established rules (Craney, 2022; Pamphilon et al., 2022). In Solomon Islands, in order to engage youth successfully, it was important to take into account the following: localized ecological knowledge; level of youth participation in fishing; education levels; social networks, particularly church and sports; gender relations; and the level of trust placed in youth leaders by their peers (Sukulu et al., forthcoming). Organizations like WorldFish, Dreamcast Theatre and other small community-based organizations such as Japuana Youth Advocacy Association and Sirubai Voko Tribe Association in Solomon Islands have centred many of their scaling up CBFM activities around youth engagement using the above information to varying degrees of success (Govan and Vieux, 2025). These activities consisted mainly of awareness raising and advocacy through networking, music, theatre and art, such as environment-themed song competitions and speech contests for school-age children in Western Province hosted by Sirubai Voko Tribe Association. Organizations like the West Coast Development Foundation and the National Fisheries College in Papua New Guinea have engaged youth and created opportunities through capacity building programmes for livelihood development. One example is the Small Fishing Operations Training in which participants learn basic boat safety and navigation, fishing gear design and operations, seafood handling and resource management to encourage sustainable use of fisheries resources while also learning safety at sea (J. Mesulam, personal communications, 2025). It is important to recognize the key role that youth play and the value that, through specific engagement, they can add in supporting food security, livelihood development and poverty alleviation in rural communities across the Pacific. References Arulingam, I., Nigussie, L., Sellamuttu, S. S. & Debevec, L. 2020. Youth participation in small-scale fisheries, aquaculture and value chains in Africa and the Asia-Pacific Led by In partnership with Youth participation in small-scale fisheries, aquaculture and value chains in Africa and the Asia-Pacific. Wordfish. [https:// digitalarchive.worldfishcenter.org/items/d58211f1-2a7b-4507-a86c-315ef77e8aba](https://digitalarchive.worldfishcenter.org/items/d58211f1-2a7b-4507-a86c-315ef77e8aba) cChange. forthcoming. Final Report. Papua New Guinea. LMMA_PEUMP KRA 3.7. Craney, A. 2022. Youth in Fiji and Solomon Islands – Livelihoods, Leadership and Civic Engagement. ANU Press. <http://doi.org/10.22459/YFSI.2022> Espinoza-Tenorio, A., Gabriela Ehuan-Noh, R., CuevasGómez, G.A., Narchi, N. E., RamosMuñoz, D.E., FernándezRivera Melo, F. J. & SaldívarMoreno, A. et al. 2022. Between uncertainty and hope: Young leaders as agents of change in sustainable small-scale fisheries. *Ambio*, 51(1287–1301). [https:// doi.org/10.1007/s13280-021-01639-2](https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-021-01639-2)

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 115 Fry, C., Arulingam, I., Nigussie, L., Senaratna Sellamuttu, S., Beveridge, M. & Marwaha, M. 2021. Youth in small-scale fisheries and aquaculture. CGIAR Research Program on Fish Agri-Food Systems. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12348/4752> Govan, H. & Vieux, C. 2025. Internal Evaluation of the LMMA Component of the PEUMP Programme. Suva, LMMA Network. [https:// doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.10783.32165](https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.10783.32165) Mangubhai, S. & Cowley, A. 2021. Gender Equity and Social Inclusion Analysis for Coastal Fisheries. Suva, Wildlife Conservation Society. <https://doi.org/10.19121/2021>. Report.40304 Pamphilon, B., Caffery, J. & Perry, Jocelyn. 2022. Developing rural youth as the farmers of the future using a strengths-based approach: the example of Papua New Guinea. Canberra, University of Canberra. SDD (Statistics for Development Division). 2025. In: SPC Statistics for Development Division. [Cited 8 December 2025]. <https://sdd.spc.int/SPC>. 2015. A new song for coastal fisheries – pathways to change: the Noumea strategy. Noumea, SPC. <https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/b8hvs> SPC. 2024. Pacific Framework for Action on Scaling up Community-based Fisheries Management: 2021–2030. Noumea. [https:// purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/4x64x](https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/4x64x) Sukulu, M., Orirana, G., Oduagalo, D., Waleilia, B., Sulu, R., Schwarz, A.-M., Van Der Ploeg, J. &

Eriksson, H. 2016. "Management over ownership": Modern community cooperation in Langalanga Lagoon, Solomon Islands. SPC Traditional Marine Resource Management and Knowledge Information Bulletin, 37: 13–21. Sukulu, M., Jasper, M., Ride, A. & Konamalefo, A. forthcoming. Calling all influencers: Including youth in community-based resource management. WCS-PNG (Wildlife Conservation Society Papua New Guinea). 2021. Securing widespread community livelihoods and resilience through coastal fisheries co-management in Papua New Guinea. Report for the New Ireland Province Locally-managed Marine Area Network Meeting. Kavieng, Papua New Guinea.

116 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific Case Study 6. Traditional knowledge for management planning In Palau in the north Pacific, two large-scale management plans were developed by traditional leaders, the national government and other stakeholders: Palau's Northern Reefs Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) and the Koror Southern Lagoon Coastal FMP. These plans manage most of the coastal areas of Palau's main island group. Palau has a long history of traditional coastal fisheries management based on traditional and local knowledge (Johannes, 1977, 1981). This case study examines how or whether tradition has been taken into account for the development of the modern Northern Reefs FMP and the Koror Southern Lagoon Coastal FMP. Respecting traditional and local knowledge held by fishers and indigenous communities is vital to the sustainable use and management of coastal resources and this is recognized in Section 11 of the SSF Guidelines. The SSF Guidelines explicitly state that in addition to recognition, the knowledge, culture, traditions and practices of small-scale fishing communities should be appropriately supported and used to inform responsible local governance and sustainable development processes (FAO, 2015). Palau has been a Pacific frontrunner for implementing co-managed MPAs since the late 1990s, in response to declining resources and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. The success of these early fisheries management initiatives led the way for the passing of the Protected Areas Network Act by the government and the creation of a sustainable financing mechanism through the "green fee" charged to all visitors to Palau. However, it was found that marine resources were still in decline, which prompted the development of a large-scale management plan for the Northern Reefs in order to include much needed non-spatial management tools in the fished areas surrounding the existing MPAs, acknowledging the necessity to manage the entire area as one system with the support of communities, government and other stakeholders. The Northern Reefs FMP was completed in 2016, covering the two northern states of Kayangel and Ngarchelong. The development of the plan was undertaken by diverse stakeholders, including the government, local communities, conservation NGOs and research scientists. The enabling environment for the plan was strengthened through legislation enacted by the two states through the Coastal Fisheries Management Act, and the signing of a cooperative agreement between the two state governments (The Nature Conservancy, 2016). Research scientists and conservation NGOs were engaged to carry out stock assessments and it was found that overfishing was prevalent in these areas. The management and control measures were largely based on these findings and included a permits and licensing system, species bans, size limits, seasonal closures and other closures such as no-take areas, limited-use areas, and multi-use areas. Despite following a participatory approach, the Northern Reefs FMP was still very science-heavy and it was considered that key traditional knowledge was not adequately included.

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 117 Subsequently, when it came to developing the Koror Southern Lagoon Coastal FMP, officials insisted the approach be more inclusive of traditional and local knowledge. The rationale was that including the local communities, especially the fishers and main resource users, and drawing on their local knowledge and practices in management planning and rule-making, would enhance local ownership of the rules and support more comprehensive and inclusive use of their relevant knowledge, and ultimately increase the likelihood of compliance (L. Gibbons-Decherong, personal communications, 2025). The plan for the southern region was launched in 2021. In addition to using the most recent scientific data, the plan incorporated information collected from local fishers, coastal communities and the main resource users, local tour guide and dive operators, and local fish sellers – this therefore included traditional knowledge, fishing practices, perceptions of overfishing and modern management, and mapping of the value chain (Gouezo et al., 2021). Seventy-five

local fishers from 13 hamlets in Koror State were consulted over a 6-month period via a community planning team made up of between 7 and 11 local community members. Information gathered ranged from the mapping of fishing grounds to traditional knowledge on species life cycles and spawning locations, as well as details on lunar, tidal and seasonal information for specific species. For example, upon recommendations from local fishers, temporal measures were instituted for two species of snapper, the humpback red snapper (*Lutjanus gibbus*) and the red snapper (*L. bohar*). For the red snapper specifically, fishing is banned 2 days before, during and 2 days after the full moon. This information was then complemented by recent scientific data that had been collected by researchers. For example, data collected on spawning potential and size at maturity for 23 valued species were used to inform new fishing regulations within Koror State, including a number of different species within *Lutjanus*, *Plectropomus*, *Lethrinus* and *Acanthurus*, among others. The traditional knowledge and scientific information were collated and then applied to the management and control measures which had broad acceptance from a wide range of resource users. This underscores the sentiment that local and traditional knowledge from communities, fishers and the primary resource users should be used in management planning and is invaluable to the planning process. Control measures for the Koror Southern Lagoon Coastal FMP consist of spatial measures, size limits, species and gear restrictions and a permitting system for fishers under the various fisheries divisions existing in Koror. These are measures similar to those included in the Northern Reefs FMP but with more local buy-in. Control measures are implemented under each division as necessary. In addition, community-based protected area planning is aligned with the national Protected Areas Network management planning, for example, Protected Area Management Plan 2020–2025 for the Ngarchelong Marine Managed Area falls under the overarching Northern Reefs FMP. Likewise, the alignment with other management regimes, such as the Koror Sustainable Fisheries Management Plan overlaps and coordinates with the management of the Rock Islands Southern Lagoon World Heritage Area. References FAO. 2015. Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication. Rome. <https://openknowledge.fao.org/handle/20.500.14283/i4356en> Gouezo, M., Gibbons-Decherong, L. & Azuma-Malsol, M. 2021. Koror Southern Lagoon Coastal Fisheries Management Plan 2021. Palau Conservation Society Johannes, R. E. 1977. Traditional Law of the Sea in Micronesia. *Micronesica*, 13(2): 121–127. Johannes, R. E. 1981. Words of the Lagoon: Fishing and Marine Lore in the Palau District of Micronesia. Berkely, USA, University of California Press. The Nature Conservancy. 2016. Northern Reefs Coastal Fisheries Management Plan 2016. Koror, Palau.

118 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific Peter Guttman, © SPC

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 119 Table A1a. Supportive legislation for customary marine tenure in Pacific Island countries Annex 1. Assessing customary marine tenure Basis for customary marine tenure (CMT) American Samoa Customary land exists as well as administration, leasing, use and development of the lands and natural resources (48 U.S. Code, s. 1706) but community rights of management are supported under the community fisheries management plans (CFMP) regulation. Cook Islands Rights of communities over adjacent waters are recognized de facto, but not legally. Island councils manage fisheries of local interest in their areas of authority (Marine Resources Act 2005, s. 8). Fiji Community fishing rights Registration of mataqali's exclusive fishing rights by the iTaukei Fisheries Commission (s. 13[1]), iTaukei Lands Act 1905. In practice fishing rights owners are supposed to be consulted when a development or coastal fishing licence is to be approved. Micronesia (Federated States of) Constitution of three states: the Pohnpei State Constitution, Article IV(2), the Chuuk Constitution (art. 4[4]) and the Yap Constitution (art. 13[5]). Guam Historically but no current legal rights. Kiribati Community rights over fishing grounds are slightly confused but referred to under customary fishing rights of kainga / utu (Fisheries Act 2010, s. 18). Island councils assigned jurisdiction for resource management over the lagoon and 3 nm from the low water line seawards. Local Government Act 1984 with 2006 amendments. Marshall Islands State ownership of marine resources (Fisheries Act 1997, s. 202) – 5 nm local government councils. Customary fishing rights recognized for owners of land abutting marine areas (Public Land Act 1966, s. 103[1][b]). Traditional and customary right of the landowner, clan, family or

municipality to control the use of marine areas and resources below the high watermark, subject only to government ownership. (Public Land Act 1966, s. 103[1][e]). Niue Sea is state-owned, but government and villages may declare a fishing reserve/fono. Legal basis for Community-based fisheries management (CBFM) in terms of excluding other villages not clear. Village council establishes plans for “the sustainable use of coastal, reef, and sea foods”. (Village Council Act 2016). Nauru State ownership of marine resources but recognizes traditional knowledge and customary practices (Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture Act 2020, s.7). Palau States have ownership of marine resources up to 12 nm, but traditional fishing rights are protected (Constitution, art. I, s.2) and recognized for submerged reefs (Palau National Code 27 [Fishing], s.146). Traditionally ownership is at village or family level. Papua New Guinea Customary ownership of fisheries resources (Fisheries Act 1998, s. 26). Confusion on interpretation in practice. Samoa Land below high watermark is public land (Constitution s. 104) but exclusive use can be granted through village fono which when consulted takes into account customary land ownership, traditional access rights and fisheries practices (Fisheries Management Act, ss. 19 and ss. 22) Solomon Islands Customary rights over inshore fisheries waters are acknowledged. Community management plans are supported under the Fisheries Management Act 2015, s. 21.

120 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific The bundle of rights approach to assess the relevant tenure rights and whether they are changing appropriately for present-day fisheries management context in each PIC. Table A1b shows broad characteristics based on the legally recognized extent of local marine tenure arrangements and the rights conferred by the systems under current legislation. Tokelau Tokelau Village Incorporation Regulations 1986. Local communities or tribes have rights to access coastal fisheries, exclude others and set management rules. Tonga No basis for CMT: 1. Communities do not have exclusive rights to access coastal fisheries in general. 2. Local communities only have rights to exclude others from coastal fisheries if they gazette a special management area (SMA). 3. Local communities have rights to set management rules over coastal fisheries only if they gazette an SMA. Special management area (SMA) communities must be consulted before fishing permits are issued. Tuvalu Local communities or tribes have rights to access coastal fisheries. They have rights to exclude others from coastal fisheries near them – customary ownership rights in and over the waters, seabed, foreshore and fisheries up to 12 nm (Laws of Tuvalu Act 1987; Sch. 1 [4]) and councils or Kaupule may enter into marine conservation agreements (Conservation Areas Act 1999, s. 9). Kaupule bylaws may regulate fishing in the Falekaupule area (Falekaupule Act 1997, ss. 53 and 40, Sch. 3[1][n]). Vanuatu Customary ownership of land extends to the foreshore (Constitution of Vanuatu, s.73; Foreshore Development Act 1975 and Land Reform Act, CAP. 123, § 1.). Source: Authors’ own elaboration based on Govan, H. & Lalavanua, W. 2022. Status of community-based fisheries management in Pacific Islands countries and territories: survey report. Noumea, SPC. <https://www.spc.int/digitallibrary/get/ocw6w>

Type of right (from the bundle of rights) Government administered Designated for local communities Indigenous or local ownership

1. Access rights. Grant authorization to an area and/or resources. Access and withdrawal rights are often referred to together as use rights. May include formal licences/permits or other permissions. CM and A and A
2. Withdrawal rights. The right to harvest resources within the area – may include fisheries management measures such as catch limits and quotas. CM A A
3. Management rights. Grant decision-making power to create the rules about how areas and resources are used and maintained. Management rights can be used to define allowed and prohibited activities. B or A
4. Exclusion rights. Allow rights-holders to exclude or ban others from using certain resources and accessing areas. B or A
5. Enforcement rights. The right to enforce established rules in the area and apply sanctions for non-compliance. B A
6. Transfer rights. The right to transfer existing rights to other individuals, groups, or entities. Also known as alienation rights. Transfer may take place through selling, leasing, gifting, via customary payments and ceremony, or through descent systems or marriage. A
7. Transformation rights. The right to repurpose the land (area and resources) for a different use A

Table A1b. Types of right comprising the bundle of tenure rights and how these rights apply across Notes: The three broad categories of resource management are: government administered (top-down and basic co-management); designated for local communities; and indigenous or local ownership (community-based fisheries

management [CBFM] can function under both government-designated and locally owned). CM refers to rights that if both access and withdrawal rights are designated to communities by government, then this may form sufficient basis for co-management; A refers to rights that must be held and must also be held in combination with at least one “B” right to form a basis for CBFM, while a community which enjoys all A rights has ownership rights. Source: Authors own elaboration based on Cohen, P.J., Tholan, B., Dean Fitz, K., Pradhan, S.K., Solis Rivera, V., Govan, H. 2024. Marine, Coastal and Shoreline Tenure. Zenodo. doi:10.5281/zenodo.11515141

Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 121 Notes: Community or collective rights are differentiated between the rights that each or every indigenous coastal dweller may have over their coastal areas throughout the country or rights allocated only for specific sites –usually through some process or negotiation (e.g. Tonga). Negotiated means that the right is only acquired through a legal or government process. Blue shading suggests adequate basis for community-based fisheries management and green suggests challenges that should be considered. Y: yes, Ne: negotiated, N: No. *threatened; †subsistence only; ‡provision for community fisheries management plan for local commercial fisheries; and §community authorized officer: increasing degree of application +, ++, +++. Table A1c. Preliminary assessment of Pacific Island countries’ customary marine tenure using the bundle of rights approach

Countries or territories	Rights holders	Access rights	Withdrawal rights	Management rights	Exclusion rights	Enforcement rights	Community authorized officer§
Cook Islands	“customary landowners” typically chiefs	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	L+Tiaki ra’ui
Micronesia (Fed. States of)	“traditional owners”	Y*	Y*	Y*	N	N	?
Fiji	resources owning group often mataqali represented	Y	Ne	Y†	Y	Ne	Y
Kiribati	honorary fish wardens kainga and utu	Y	Y	Ne	Ne	Y	P+?
Marshall Islands	landowner, clan, family or municipality/local govern	Y	Y	Y	Y	?	L? mayor or municipal police
Nauru	district community	N	Ne	N	Ne	Ne	No
Niue	Village	Y	Y	Ne	Y	Y	L?
Palau	Clan-village-residents	Y	Y	Ne*	Y	Ne*	L?
Papua New Guinea	Clans, tribes	Y	Y	Ne	Y*	Ne	Y*, Ne L?
Samoa	Fono	Y	Y	Ne	Ne	Ne	L+++
Solomon Islands	Tribes	Y	Y*	Nell	Y	Y	No
Tokelau	Village taupulega	Y	Y	Y	Y	?	
Tonga	Village committee	Ne	Ne	Ne	Ne	Ne	L+
Tuvalu	Kaupule	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	L
Vanuatu	Clan, Tribe, Nasara, Nakamal, family	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	L

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Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 123 Annex 2. Reported categories of coastal protected areas reported Table A2a. National designations of community-based fisheries management sites Table A2b. International Union for Conservation of Nature protected area categories Note: National designations reported to the World Database of Protected Areas (at February 2025) as part of marine protected area commitments in the Pacific Islands (<https://www.protectedplanet.net>). Source: SPC. 2025. Regional Community-Based Fisheries Management (CBFM) Workshop: Implementation of the Pacific Framework for Action on Scaling up CBFM. Noumea. <https://www.spc.int/digitalibrary/get/4eycj>

Designation No.	sites	Locally-managed marine area	Community-based fishery	Marine managed area	Marine protected area	Marine protected area/tabu	Community conservation area	Conservation area	Marine conservation zone	Multi/multiple use conservation area	Special management area	Marine conservation area	Community conserved area	Wildlife management area	Co-management area	Fishing zone	Marine park	Not reported	Other area	State waters	Total
115	58	32	30	22	13	8	8	8	6	4	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	314

Category No. of sites Ia 1 II 1 III 1 IV 8 Not assigned 44 Not reported 235 VI 24 Total 314 Note: Protected area categories assigned to community-based fisheries management sites reported to the World Database of Protected Areas (at February 2025) as part of marine protected area commitments in the Pacific Islands (<https://www.protectedplanet.net>). Source: SPC. 2025. Regional Community-Based Fisheries Management (CBFM) Workshop: Implementation of the Pacific Framework for Action on Scaling up CBFM. Noumea. <https://www.spc.int/digitalibrary/get/4eycj>

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Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific | 125 Annex 3. Original names of policy instruments in the French territories Table A3a. Original French language names of fisheries legislation in

French Pacific Island territories relevant to community-based fisheries management or coastal fisheries co-management Country or territory – agency responsible for coastal fisheries and fisheries management Full title of main legislation supporting coastal fisheries co-management* French Polynesia La Direction des Ressources Marines Loi du Pays n° 2022-25 portant modification de la délibération n° 88-184 modifiée relative à la protection de certaines espèces animales marines et d'eau douce (Territory Law on Marine and Freshwater Species 2022 amending the Marine and Freshwater Species Regulations 1988) Délibération n° 88-183 du 8 décembre 1988 portant réglementation de la pêche (Fisheries Regulations 1988, including regulated fishing zones) Délibération n° 2004-34/APF du 12 février 2004 portant composition et administration du domaine public en Polynésie française (Public Domain Regulations 2004) Code de l'environnement de la Polynésie française: Loi du pays n° 2017-25 du 5 octobre 2017 et Arrêté n° 466/ CM du 22 mars 2018 (French Polynesia Environment Code : Territory Law 2017 and Order 2018) Arrêté n° 410/CM du 21 octobre 2004 rendant exécutoire le plan de gestion de l'espace maritime de l'île de Moorea (Order approving the Moorea Marine Spatial Plan 2004) Arrêté n° 507 CM du 3 avril 2018 portant classement de la zone économique exclusive de la Polynésie française en aire marine gérée, modifié par Arrêté n° 1828 CM du 25 septembre 2025 portant classement de la zone économique exclusive en espaces naturels protégés du code de l'environnement et création de zones de pêche réglementée (Order declaring the Exclusive Economic Zone as Marine Managed Area 2018, as amended by Order on Natural Protected Areas and Regulated Fishing Zones 2025) New Caledonia Direction des affaires maritimes de Nouvelle-Calédonie and Provincial authorities Loi organique n° 99-209 du 19 mars 1999 relative à la Nouvelle-Calédonie (Organic Law No. 99-209 of New Caledonia) Loi du pays n° 2022-1 du 12 janvier 2022 relative à la protection des aires marines de la Nouvelle-Calédonie (Territorial Law on Marine Protected Areas 2022) Délibération n° 2014-316/APN du 24 octobre 2014 portant création d'une aire marine protégée intitulée « Aire de gestion durable des ressources de Kan-Gunu » (North Province Regulations on the Kan-Gunu Marine Protected Area 2014) Code de l'environnement de la Province Nord 2008 (North Province Environment Code 2008) Code de l'environnement de la Province Sud 2009 (South Province Environment Code 2008) Code de l'environnement de la Province des Iles Loyauté 2016 (Loyalty Islands Province Environment Code 2016, including customary protected areas)

126 | Scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific Wallis and Futuna Islands Direction du Service de l'Agriculture, de la Forêt et de la Pêche Loi statutaire n° 61-814 du 29 juillet 1961 conférant aux îles Wallis et Futuna le statut de territoire d'outre-mer (Basic Law of Wallis-and-Futuna 1961) Délibération n°73/AT/05 du 25 novembre 2005 portant modernisation de la réglementation en matière de pêche et la commercialisation des produits de cette activité approuvée et rendue exécutoire par l'arrêté n°2005-625 du 14 décembre 2005 (Commercial Fishing Regulations 2005 – Deliberation No.73/AT/05 on the modernization of fisheries regulations and the marketing of fisheries products, as approved) Délibération n° 68/AT/2024 du 03 décembre 2024 approuvant le principe de création d'aires marines protégées coutumières sur le Territoire des îles Wallis et Futuna, rendue exécutoire par Arrêté n° 2024-783 du 16 décembre 2024 (Customary Marine Protected Area Regulations 2024 – Deliberation No. 68/AT/2024 of 3 December 2024 approving the establishment of customary marine protected areas in the Territory of the Wallis and Futuna Islands [made enforceable by Order No. 2024-783 of 16 December 2024]) Note: *All laws mentioned, those they repeal and subsequent updates may be found at <https://www.spc.int/CoastalFisheries/Legislation/countries> Sources: Ariella D'Andrea, personal communication, 2025; Govan, H., Lalavanua, W. & Steenbergen, D.J. 2024. Coastal Fisheries Governance in the Pacific Islands: The Evolution of Policy and the Progress of Management-at-Scale. In: Nakamura, J., Chuenpagdee, R. & Jentoft, S. eds. Implementation of the Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines. MARE Publication Series, vol 28. Cham, Switzerland, Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-56716-2_11; and Govan, H. & Lalavanua, W. 2023. The “Pacific Way” of coastal fisheries management: Status and progress of community-based fisheries management. SPC Fisheries Newsletter, 169: 33–47. <https://www.spc.int/digitallibrary/get/svtsz> Table A3b. Original French language names of fisheries legislation in French Pacific Island territories relevant to community-based fisheries management or coastal fisheries co-management Country or territory Full title of Main fisheries

policy/coastal fisheries policy French Polynesia Délibération n° 20186 APF du 13 mars 2018 portant approbation de la politique sectorielle de la pêche hauturière de la Polynésie française 2018–2022 (French Polynesia Offshore Fisheries Policy 2018–2022) New Caledonia Stratégie pour une pêche côtière durable 2023–2033 (Strategy for Sustainable Coastal Fisheries 2023–2033) Délibération n° 50/CP du 20 avril 2011 relative à la politique des pêches de la Nouvelle-Calédonie (New Caledonia Fisheries Policy 2011) Wallis and Futuna Islands Arrêté n° 2024-201 du 22 avril 2024 approuvant et rendant exécutoire la délibération n° 32/AT/2024 du 26 mars 2024 portant adoption de la politique de développement durable de la pêche et de démarrage de l'aquaculture 2024-2028 (Sustainable Development Policy for Fisheries and Aquaculture of Wallis and Futuna Islands 2024–2028) Notes: All policies mentioned may be found at <https://www.spc.int/CoastalFisheries/Legislation/countries> or <https://www.spc.int/DigitalLibrary/FAME>; Sources: Ariella D'Andrea, personal communication, 2025; Govan, H., Lalavanua, W. & Steenbergen, D.J. 2024. Coastal Fisheries Governance in the Pacific Islands: The Evolution of Policy and the Progress of Management-at-Scale. In: Nakamura, J., Chuenpagdee, R. & Jentoft, S. eds. Implementation of the Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines. MARE Publication Series, vol 28. Cham, Switzerland, Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-56716-2_11; and Govan, H. & Lalavanua, W. 2023. The “Pacific Way” of coastal fisheries management: Status and progress of community-based fisheries management. SPC Fisheries Newsletter, 169: 33–47. <https://www.spc.int/digitallibrary/get/svtsz>

Pacific Community BP D5 • 98848 NOUMEA CEDEX NEW-CALEDONIA Phone : +687 26 20 00 E-mail : cfpinfo@spc.int Barcode Fisheries and Aquaculture Division – Natural Resources and Sustainable Production Contact us: SSF-Guidelines@fao.org SSF-Guidelines@fao.org Learn more: <https://www.fao.org/voluntary-guidelines-small-scale-fisheries/en/> #SSFGuidelines Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Rome, Italy