



NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT SERVICE
TU'ANGA TAPOROPORO
COOK ISLANDS

Rarotonga

“Satoyama-like Landscapes”

Presenter; Phillip Strickland, Compliance & Advisory Unit

29 14:56

The characteristics of the management of *satoyama*-like landscapes and their benefits for biodiversity conservation and human well-being in Rarotonga

Introduction

- There is no doubt that freshwater is essential for life; not only does it sustain our lives, it also plays an important role in our cultures and traditions, our biodiversity and environment and our economy. However, it is a resource that we think least about to protect and conserve, especially when it flows freely into our taps.



Freshwater resources

- The management of freshwater resources, in particular water catchments, is proving to be difficult to implement because government bodies are weak; they often do not have the capacity to enforce regulations and, because of the various land tenure systems (Cook Islands tribes still own land and are spiritually and emotionally attached to their land), communities are always wary about government initiatives when it comes to managing land and the resources it provides.



Initiating the Project

- In 2002, the Cook Islands International Waters Programme (IWP), which was administered by the Cook Islands National Environment Service, called for expressions of interest from communities to undertake a pilot project to address an environmental issue that their community as a whole was facing.



Proposal

- The Te Au O Tonga Vaka (district) council's expression of interest was only one of two proposals put forward to the National Task Force. The proposal already outlined that increasing activities, such as large wetland taro growing and trekking in the water catchment seemed to be threatening the quality of water from the intake



Consultations

- The IWP coordinators conducted many initial community consultations and held a participatory problem analysis (a problem and solution identification tool promoted by the IWP) workshop so that members can identify the root causes to the problems they were facing and identify what solutions can be implemented, as a community, to sustainably address the issues. This tool allowed communities to actually address the root causes of any problem or issue so that it can be addressed properly.



Solutions

- Installing water tanks for every home so that there is no reliance on the public water supply and activities, such as wetland taro growing and other farming activities, bat hunting and trekking can continue.



Solutions

- Relocation of the intake behind the main wetland taro terraces (agricultural areas). Not an option as this would only reduce the 'cup'[\[1\]](#) of the catchment.
- [\[1\]](#) The intake is located at a position which catches main tributaries. If the intake is moved beyond the taro paddies then the intake would miss these significant tributaries therefore reducing the amount of water that will be caught in the intake.



Solution

- Treatment systems. Strong public resistance to chemical treatment and millions of dollars was estimated to install and maintain systems in all 12 water intakes on Rarotonga alone. People seemed not willing to pay for water from their own land but were willing to charge others for it. Attempts in the past to instil a user-pays system failed. No government seems to be willing enough these days to take on this option (political suicide). Also, installing a treatment system for public water systems will mean that the root causes to degradation will continue as people will feel safe that they will be receiving treated water.



Solutions

- Reviving traditional conservation practices and systems, such as the raii (a taboo system), and empowering communities to protect and conserve their land and its resources came out strong with communities as the best solution. Involving communities to practice and promote better land management practices would be the ultimate action to promote good water quality and have other good environmental spin-offs (such as protected biodiversity). According to current legislation, land such as these in water catchments, could be compulsorily acquired by government as a matter of national interest. People did not like this



Benefits

- Benefits
- Easier implementation (community rangers who will enforce the regulations and carry out activities)
- Empowered community – involvement in resource management and taking ownership of a project. Communities will also be empowered and have the confidence to take on other projects.
- Promote good governance
- Responsible for own health and environment issues and deal with it
- Cost-effective and sustainable
- Less off government agencies
- Keeps land off government or others
- Backed by legislation (optional). The Takuvaine Water Catchment Management Plan also has regulations developed under the Environment Act 2003 – giving more teeth to the managers of the protected area.
- Donor funds to carry out projects



Cost Issues

- Lengthy in terms of consultation. The IWP took four years of consultation to arrive at a management plan that everyone was happy with. The IWP were also faced with governance issues such as traditional leadership, breakdown of community structure and political influences which were important to be addressed in order for the project to be successful.
- Resources still needed. If you don't have the right resources, then no work can be done. Ultimately, if there is no drive then nothing gets done. It will pile up and not have any effect. The onus would then fall back on government agencies such as the National Environment Service.



Cost Issues

- There is a need for good community governance. If a community has a weak governance system then community projects would not work. This was one of the main setbacks of the IWP and one that caused many delays and has probably been one of the major constraints of the IWP in its first year of implementation by the community.
- Communities need to be aware that they won't be seeing any immediate changes to quality of water. Sometimes this can lead to questioning of the management plan and community efforts, and progress may be slowed or halted.
- Time – working with communities is not necessarily an eight-to-five- job, but lots of time is spent working with communities after working hours, weekends, and even holidays.



Focal Issue Problems

- - Uncontrolled activities in the water catchment; trekking, agriculture, farming, bat hunting, harvesting, business (Telecom). No one really knew what was happening up there. A worry that further risk such as building houses and other activities that could potentially degrade the water source would be increased.
- -Users of the catchment were simply unaware that this was in fact a water catchment and the risk their activities could be placing on the quality of water from the intake.
- -Also had to address community and traditional systems as communities are moving towards individualistic goals affecting their ability to act as a group.



Focal Issue Problems

- -The project was also faced with a lack of trust by the community. Communities are wary of government initiatives as failures in the past left communities without any real benefits. Also, any project administered by government departments that looked at sensitive issues surrounding land was going to be a major challenge. The “this is my land” syndrome is a difficult challenge to address and needs patience and acceptance.
- The management plan was merely a guide as to what could be controlled but lacked commitment and more importantly ‘teeth’ to enforce some of the suggested solutions. The bylaws suggested under the plan would not be effective enough to ensure changes in practices. Under Section 6 of the Environment Act regulations were drafted and passed. This provided the committee and its stakeholders with the necessary backup to enforce the regulations.



Lessons learnt

- A major lesson learnt which is of utmost importance is to identify and involve the main stakeholders right from the beginning and to continue to keep them informed. It is important to note that the community of Takuvaine are not necessarily landowners of the lands which make up the Takuvaine water catchment. The IWP failed to ensure that the majority of landowners, especially the major players (titleholders), were kept in the loop. Instead the work was done with a local project committee which only represented a small number of landowners in the catchment area. The IWP did not ensure that these landowners consulted and kept the rest of the clan informed of the progress of the project. Good governance is ultimate for a community project. This includes good guidance and continued decision making and respect of not only the traditional leaders but the landowners of the area who may not live in the community or in the country for that matter.
- Continue to involve IWP stakeholders – including the government agencies that were part of the Task Force, as they have a responsibility also to ensure the project is successful.
- Do not underestimate communities' ability and capacity. They may have their own ways of resource management that could be captured. Don't enter a community fixed on your own ideas for them.
- Avoid political influence or any politics in the project. Once politics joins a project it will be perceived by the community as a political move. Eliminate as much as you can.
- Be prepared to listen for hours to the wonderful stories. Sometimes you'll not be able to achieve the objective of the visit/consultation/meeting, especially if conducted after-hours. On the other hand also be prepared to stand your ground – keep them focused and be the driver and don't let that few walk all over you or the project. You can't satisfy everyone.
- Consider a paid person or group of people to be part-time/full-time project coordinators. It is most likely the work set out by the community or management committee will get done. In some projects management committees should be the final decision-makers and not the executers. The paid coordinator would write up the proposals, work plans, and deal with other administrative tasks.

• END