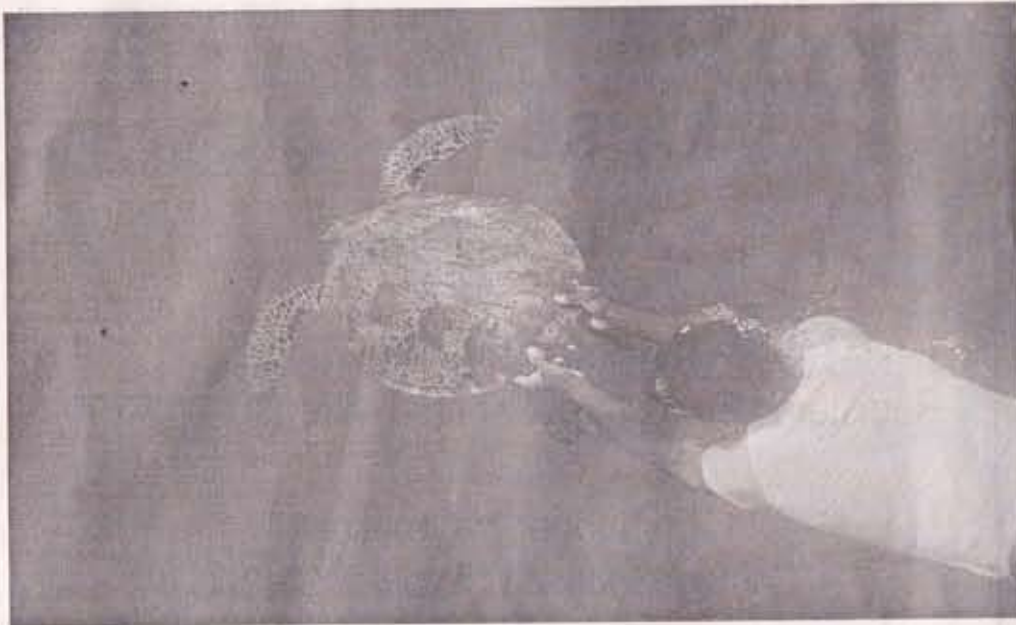


## ENVIRONMENT



● Zaira marine rangers getting close with nature (marine life), Oloana Marine Managed Area, Zaira village. Benthic, coral and fish monitoring program are part of the initiated Marine monitoring activities in south Vangunu last year. Photos: Veira Pulekera



● Terrestrial biodiversity survey by research scientists and Zaira local rangers in the upper forest of South Vangunu in November last year. Sitting front on the left, Justin (Australian Conservationist) and sitting back Tyron Lavery (UQ mammal scientist and field research assistant Padakai Onga).

## Resource management activities in Zaira Village, South Vangunu

A LOT of conservation activities have been taking place through out Solomon Islands over the past years. Many of these conservation efforts in local communities across the Solomons struggle financially, socially and politically, but despite these challenges there are some positive and successful stories occurring in the Western Solomons.

This brief report reveals some of the significant effort done by the locals, rangers and international conservation partners (University of Queensland) in South Vangunu, Marovo Lagoon, Western Solomons.

In the remote "southwest coast" of Vangunu Island is a small isolated coastal village called Zaira. The local inhabitants have intact traditional history in maintaining several cultural and ethical values concerning resource management practices both on sea and forest resources. The land and sea resources within this area are culturally protected and sustainably utilized under tabu (Hope) systems. This hierarchy approach was very much practiced through their strong chiefly and local governance system.

The volcanic island has a unique geographical setting, with exceptional rugged montane forests and interconnected ridges with an average height (1000m) and forming a deep circular crater rim locally known as Tavoamai land.

Now mainly inspired by many young people and supported by our old people, Zaira people recognize the importance of environmental management in order to harmonise individual aspirations with communal interests. This is because the local communities have depended on their surrounding coastal environment and intact forest resources for their basic rural livelihood needs for decades with less dependency on cash

products.

As a result, part of the so-called Zaira complex covering approximately ~900 ha area enclosing the Dokoso tribal Land became the first tribal community conservation area in south Vangunu region. It includes some important endangered species such as leatherback turtles and New Georgia monkey faced bats. This area is very unique as it provides an intact corridor of high cultural and biological diversity from the mountaintops to the coast, reefs and open sea.

In spite of the popular local resource management practice, there is an increasing pressure from outside investors, for logging and mineral prospecting in some parts of the area. This had caused Chief Rev. Green Jino and the people of Zaira to communally engage with international partners to assist them, provide technical assistance, logistics, advice on resource management and monitoring through community interactions and trainings. Zaira community signed an MOU with the University of Queensland in early 2010 to assist them during the time period until the people can manage their resources by themselves.

Zaira community resource management team had then initiated and focus on the four main marine monitoring activities; Coral reef monitoring (Fish, Invertebrate & corals), FAD (Fish Aggregative Device)/CPUE (Catch Per Unit Effort) survey, Marine Patrol and Leatherback nest relocation program in order to accomplish management objectives concerning sustainable use and management of sea areas surrounding Zaira Community Resource Management Area (including the propose upper forest conservation area; in Tavoamai and Sugili Tribal Area).

The community had also



● Solomon eye lash frog (*Discodeles guppyi*) found in the upper forest floor of Mt Mimesi area (623m). Amphibians are important biological species which had crucial ecological niche within their habitats and ecosystems. Eye lash frogs are common in undisturbed forest areas, and south Vangunu area is the only forest area left in whole Vangunu Island need immediate protection.

engaged several scientists to do terrestrial biodiversity studies in their forest since 2010. Some of them who already pay a visit to Zaira were; Patrick Pikacha, (Solomon Islands Amphibian scientists); Tyron Lavery (UQ Mammal scientists, Australia); Justin (Australian Conservationist); Mycen Sirikolo (Solomon Islands Botanist) and Dr. Chris Filardi, Biodiversity Reseracher and Bird Scientist, American Museum of Natural History, America). Their work also contributes to the formation of the Zaira community resource management plan.

### (Partners)

Since 2010, Zaira has partnered with several Institutions and other NGOs, The University of Queensland (UQ), MacArthur Foundation, the Solomon Islands Community Conservation Partnership (SICCP), Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources (MFMR), Tetepare Descendant Association (TDA), Kolombangara Island Biodiversity Conservation Association (KIBCA) and look forward to become full member under Solomon Islands Locally Marine Managed Area (SILMMA)

this year. Zaira also look forward to create a long-term partnership with the Ministry of Environment (MECDM) and the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH).

To formally address the establishment of genuine agreement between partners and customary land-owners, Zaira community has signed an MOU with the University of Queensland (UQ) on 22/01/2010 in Zaira village.

Such opportunity often creates a way for exchange of knowledge systems between scientists and local people. It also improves training programs for rangers concerning several marine and terrestrial monitoring applied skills. Overall, it builds the foundation of educational, social and economical development at the local level. For instance, UQ and MacArthur Foundation have funded resource monitoring trainings, environmental education, providing technical assistances, establishing sustainable resource-use devices and promoting eco-friendly and small income activities. The livelihood support opportunities expanded into providing financial contribution towards Zaira

community United Church fund and Zaira primary school in 2010 and 2011 respectively.

### Challenges

Development pressure from logging, mineral prospecting and tribal conflicts are three major threats in south Vangunu. However, these challenges could be kept under control if the community realizes how important their resources and the fact that they depend on them daily without depended heavily on cash economy. This must always be guided by genuine local governance systems and through understanding of the core ecological and economical value of the resources.

### Expectations

Zaira community has a strong commitment to support and maintain its tradition and history of sustainable resource use and management of the last virgin forest areas and nearby coastal reefs. Although the approach is relatively original in the traditional style, the new threats of logging and mining require a new approach and hence Zaira community is committed to combining scientific and legal advice into their resource management

program. This year Zaira look forward to have their resource management plan registered with the Ministry of Environment.

### Acknowledgement

Zaira community would like to thank the many people who are supportive of the ongoing conservation effort in South Vangunu and to recognize the importance of these fragile ecosystems. Thanks to The University of Queensland and the MacArthur Foundation for your generous support (through funding and technical assistance) towards Zaira community and the south Vangunu people at large.

Local NGOs, TDA and KIBCA for showing great interest in knowledge exchange program and capacity building programs. On behalf of our training team, partners and our very own local people from Marovo we would also like to extend word of thanks to Tetepare Hospitality Manager, Mrs. Mary Bea and her staffs for accommodation arrangements.

To all rangers who spent their time with us during one week training on the wild side of Tetepare Island.