

SUCCESS STORY

A Driving Force

Committed leader at environment ministry makes things happen in Solomons



Agnetha Vave-Karamui, chief conservation officer for the Ministry of the environment, heads the National Coordinating Committee of the Solomon Islands.

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“Conservation should be led by government. It’s the only way for it to be sustainable.”

—Agnetha Vave-Karamui, Chief Conservation Officer, Environment

The success of a new program often comes down to a capable and committed leader. The drive to enable Marine Protected Areas in the Solomon Islands certainly benefits greatly from the leadership of Agnetha Vave-Karamui, chief conservation officer for the Ministry of the Environment and national coordinator of the committee created to fulfill the country requirements of the Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security (CTI-CFF). Agnetha and Lysa Wini, who is USAID’s Coral Triangle Support Partnership (CTSP) national liaison officer for the country’s National Coordinating Committee, have been praised repeatedly by NGOs, government workers and technical advisers. “Agnetha and Lysa have held the whole thing together,” said Anne-Maree Schwarz, the country program leader for WorldFish Center. “That’s the bottom line.”

Agnetha, whose grandfather was a ship’s captain and boat builder, is from Marovo Lagoon in Western Province. She has the sea in her blood. While completing her graduate degree in Environmental Sciences at University of the South Pacific in Fiji, many of her electives were courses in marine resources. After a stint as an advocacy officer for a local NGO, she joined the environment ministry. She attended the first CTI-CFF working group meeting in 2008, and a year later she took a lead role in the Solomon Islands CTI-CFF National Coordinating Committee (NCC).

Solomon Islands NCC consists of more than 20 members, including representatives of the Attorney General’s and Permanent Secretary’s offices, seven different ministries, conservation NGOs, University of the South Pacific and the Solomon Islands College for Higher Education. Its monthly meetings, organized by a core team led by Agnetha and Lysa, bring together government and other stakeholders to provide a forum to share lessons, make decisions and maximize the impact of resources available for coastal and marine management. As Agnetha, whose vision for marine conservation in the Solomons is optimistic and compelling, says, “Misunderstandings and wrong messages (between key parties) are the only thing hindering progress,” and the work of the NCC helps mitigate both problems.

In the 20-30% of her time not devoted to CTI-CFF and marine resource management, Agnetha and her staff of 12 are responsible for administering the new Protected Areas Act, passed with CTSP support, and the Wildlife Protection and Management Act. To manage all this, she “has learned to cut down corners, to make systems work more quickly” and to delegate. She is a consistent champion of sustainable marine management, always on the go, always moving ahead. “Conservation should be led by government,” she said. “It’s the only way for it to be sustainable.”