



Soasoa Intergrated Watershed Management

STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION REPORT



Prepared for The Pacific Community (SPC)



JBP
scientists
and engineers

Cover photos:

Top: Consultation at Vuinika settlement

Bottom: After consultation with team from
Commissioner Northern Office

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1. Introduction

Through the Global Climate Change Alliance Plus - Scaling up Pacific Adaptation (GCCA+ SUPA) project at the Pacific Community (SPC), the Soasoa watershed area in Fiji has been identified as one of the project sites. The project is funded by the European Union with Euros 14.89 million and is implemented over the period 2019-2022, by the Pacific Community (SPC) in partnership with the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) and The University of the South Pacific (USP) and the government and people of Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Tonga and Tuvalu.

The overall objective of the Fiji component of the project is resilience of vulnerable coastal communities of Macuata province enhanced through comprehensive planning and scaled up infrastructure. The project will develop a 30-year watershed management plan for the Soasoa drainage area to guide the management of the basin over the next 30 years and the SUPA project activities. The project's on-the-ground activities aim to build the resilience of the assets and communities living close to the Soasoa drainage area to coastal flooding. It is anticipated that the population of not only the Soasoa drainage area but the wider Soasoa watershed and Labasa area population will also benefit from the SUPA project watershed management plan.

For the period 27th October to 4th November, a series of stakeholder consultations were conducted with stakeholders within the Soasoa watershed area and also with stakeholders that have stake in watershed management in Fiji and also, in economic and infrastructural development in Soasoa. The stakeholder consultation is one of the activities for the development of the Soasoa Watershed Management Plan

According to the TOR, stakeholder consultation was to be conducted in Vuinika and Vunivau settlements only. To ensure an integrated approach is achieved, Eco-Pasifika Consulting also consulted with these the following stakeholder including Vunivau village, Soasoa settlement, Namako settlement, Farmer's group, government departments, non-government organisations and academic institutions.

This report highlights the main outcomes from the various stakeholder consultations and the structure of the findings is as follows:

- Needs and concerns relating to historical flooding events
- Socioeconomic concerns and major development activities in the Soasoa watershed area.
- Policy and effort alignment

2. Objectives

The main objectives of the stakeholder consultation was to identify needs and concerns relating to historical flooding events, socioeconomic concerns and major development activities in the Soasoa watershed area.

3. Approach

The stakeholder consultation was conducted in four 4 phases including:

- Mapping to identify the relevant stakeholders to consult with;
- Matching the stakeholders with the most relevant consultation methods;
- Conducting the consultation activities;
- Analysing stakeholder input.

3.1 Stakeholder mapping

Eco-Pasifika Consulting worked closely with SPC, Ministry of Waterways (Labasa Office) and the Macuata Provincial Office to identify the range of stakeholders that should be consulted. Three broad stakeholder categories were identified:

Community and community-based groups: Including residents and farmers from the various communities within the Soasoa watershed area. This group comprises of landowners, direct resource users and lease holders (residential and farming leases)

Government departments: This group provides policy and strategic directions for economic and infrastructural development in the Soasoa watershed area

NGOs and academic institutions: Have the technical expertise in watershed management and some of them have conducted similar work in areas close to the Soasoa watershed area

3.2 Matching stakeholders to direct consultation methods

Two direct consultation methods were used to involve stakeholders:

Key informant interviews: These were held for up to one hour through face-to-face interviews. Interviews provided an opportunity to obtain detailed, individualised perspectives from key stakeholders.

Focus groups: Were held for 1-2 hours and provided an opportunity to actively explore the collective perception of stakeholder.

3.3 Conducting the stakeholder consultation activities

Each consultation started with an introductory of the facilitators and objectives of the consultations. Participants also introduced themselves and highlighted their roles and responsibilities in the community or institution that they represent. Presentation to provide an overview of the Global Climate Change Alliance Plus Scaling up Pacific Adaptation (GCCA+ SUPA) project is followed, with specific focus on the first key result area of the project, which is the development of a Soasoa watershed management plan (2020-2050).

Consultation participants were then asked questions relevant to the objectives already highlighted.

3.4 Analysing stakeholder input to the review

To analyse stakeholder input, the consultation notes were reviewed and summarised. Key points relevant to the objectives of the consultation were then categorized.

4. Major Points of Discussion

4.1 Needs and Concerns relating to historical flooding events

4.1.1 Frequent flooding event

- Stakeholders highlighted that there is more flooding in the Soasoa plain in recent years. Before flooding usually happen when there is continuous heavy rain for 2- 3 days, however they have noticed that nowadays, it can only take a few hours of continuous heavy rain for the plain to flood.
- Stakeholders have highlighted that climate change is becoming real and this is due to their observation of unpredictable heavy rain that usually floods the Soasoa plain these days.

4.1.2 Flooding impacts

- Flooding event in the lower Soasoa usually cut-off access to essential services for the majority of population including those from other parts of Labasa district, Nadogo district, Namuka district, Dogotuki district and Udu district in Macuata Province and certain districts in the province of Cakaudrove including Tawake, Saqani, Vaturove and Koroalau. These essential services, mostly based in Labasa town include schools, hospitals, administrative matters, shopping and health care services.
- For residents within the Soasoa watershed, the impacts of flooding on them include the destruction of farms and farm produce, economic losses, rise in health issues and cut off access to essential services.
- According to a community rep, flooding has also caused long lasting psychological impacts on some residents and farmers.
- Another observations that stakeholders within Soasoa watershed area highlighted is that flooding also brings diseases, such as Leptospirosis, Typhoid, Dengue and Diarrhoea (LTTD). Usually a week after a flooding event, there would be an outbreak in some of these diseases. In fact, Soasoa has been identified by the Ministry of Health as a red zone for LTTD) meaning that the area is very susceptible to one of these four diseases.
- At the divisional level, flooding in the Soasoa plain delays socioeconomic development and has been identified as one of the major contributors to the slow development in the Northern Division.

4.1.3 Absence of a watershed governance structure

- The Soasoa watershed area comprises of multi-stakeholder with different social groupings and interest. The communities include Vunivau village, Vunivau settlement, Namako Settlement, Nubunivonu Settlement, Soasoa Settlement, Valebasoga Settlement, Vuiva Settlement and Vanuavou settlement.
- Vunivau village, Vunivau settlement, Namako Settlement and Vuiva Settlement are home to mostly landowners who have land ownership rights to all lands in the Soasoa watershed area. The population residing in Nubunivonu settlement, Vanuavou settlement, Vunivau settlement and Valebasoga settlement are mostly residential and farming lease holders and they have legal rights to land that they leased.

- In addition, stakeholders in the Soasoa watershed area are aligned to different religious beliefs with varying social groupings.
- On top of all these, government department also have different mandates on specific stakeholders in the Soasoa watershed area and efforts can always be compromised with other section of the community. An example raised by the community stakeholders is how the the Ministry of Environment and Waterways raises awareness on environment sustainability, while at the same time the Ministry of Agriculture promotes the use of chemicals for farming.
- With these diversities, stakeholders have highlighted that there is an absence of a governance structure to unify residents in the Soasoa watershed area. This was raised as a challenge on the implementation of the proposed Soasoa Watershed Management Plan.

4.1.4 Environment Issues

- Several environmental issues affecting the Soasoa watershed area and communities within were raised during the stakeholder consultation and most of these are anthropogenic, while some are climate change related.
- Landuse practices in the Soasoa watershed area is very unsustainable. Removal of riparian buffers to allow for more space for farming has led to creation of new runoffs and destabilisation of riverbanks. Other agricultural practices such as intensive sloping land cultivation of sugar-cane, intensive flat land cultivation; livestock farming without good pasture management were also highlighted by stakeholders.
- Over the years, these practices have dramatically increased erosion in Soasoa resulting in the thinning of top-soils and the progressive siltation of rivers, deterioration of drainage systems and the frequent inundation of the lower Soasoa area.
- Encroaching to forest areas has been rapid over the years due to increase in population and development needs.
- Improper solid waste disposal was also raised by community stakeholders. It was highlighted that some residents directly dispose solid waste into creeks within the Soasoa watershed area, which end up clogging the floodgate at the lower Soasoa.
- Improper management of dusts and sediments in a quarry located in the upper Soasoa watershed, together with washing down of gravels from road systems within the watershed has led to the Soasoa catchment system becoming shallow.
- The forest system within the Soasoa watershed area is secondary. Primary native forest were logged by Fiji Forest Industries for the period 1980s- 1990s. According to community stakeholders, land in those areas are infertile and soil erosion happens frequently.

4.2 Socioeconomic concerns and major development activities in the Soasoa watershed area.

Socioeconomic concerns raised by stakeholders include:

- Slow economic progress in the area due to issues associated with sugarcane farming and COVID-19 pandemic boader closure and other restrictions.
- Stakeholders highlighted that there has been increase in population in the last few years, with the majority being due to the unsustainable high rate of urban migration. This has been mainly driven by the perceived prospects of jobs, limited income generating opportunities in rural areas of Vanua Levu, the need for better access to medical facilities and treatment and the perception of better education opportunities.
- Traffic congestion during peak hours was also raised by stakeholders and this might be due to the increase in population in the Soasoa watershed area and adjacent residential areas including Vuinika, Bulileka, Low Cost Housing and others.

Some of the major developments underway in the Soasoa watershed area include:

- A program by the Ministry of Sugar and the Sugar Cane Growers Fund to encourage sugar cane farm purchase, with government providing a grant of \$10,000 or 15 percent of the total cost of the farm to the new farmer. As part of the initiative, the Sugar Cane Growers Fund will bear 70 percent of the total cost through a loan and the new farmer will only fork out 15 percent of the total cost of the farm. Several farmers in the upper Soasoa region are beneficiaries of this program.
- Infrastructural development in areas close to the Soasoa watershed include the construction of the Damodar City Complex and the new Fiji National University complex, both at the Vakamasisuasua Subdivision and a new shopping complex and a new football academy in Vuinika.

4.3 Policy and effort alignment

- According to technical expertise stakeholders, watershed management in Fiji is not guided by a specific policy, however is promoted through fragmented policies. Some of the umbrella policies are providing an enabling environment and guidance for sound watershed management. However, there is an absence of a comprehensive overarching policy for intergrated watershed management in Fiji, which integrates the different sub-sectors and actors holistically.
- Also, the legal foundation for actors in the watershed management and flood management in Fiji is fragmented and is weak. For instance, the MoW mandate is based on the Irrigation and the Drainage Act. There is an absence of a legislation to support MoW's aspired flood management and watershed management mandate. Without a legal foundation, provided by respective legal Acts, MoW will only have limited power to act as a leading body in the field of flood management and safeguarding watershed management principles.

- The landscape of actors looking at watershed management in Fiji is also fragmented with each actor assigned to implement sectoral and specific mandates; hence, there is a lack of consolidated inter-sectoral & inter-institutional coordination. The positive aspect of this fragmented landscape is that the different actors have developed their know-how, routine, strategies and plans. Another points raised by stakeholder is that the roles and responsibilities of each actor is not clearly demarcated and defined, hence the overlap in some of the focal areas.
- In terms of specific issues related to watershed management, the stakeholder consultations identified the following aspects:
 - Lack of data and evidence: Unknown situation of watershed systems in Fiji and associated resource, absence of synthesized, modelled climate scenarios that can affect a watershed, limited data availability and exchange, e.g. land use planning without hazards mapping consideration;
 - Lack of coherence: limited mainstreaming of climate risks and disasters into development planning and national budgeting processes
 - Lack of awareness: i) at governmental level in terms of rather unsustainable practices in watershed systems (destructive landuse and flood control measures) as compared to making use of green solutions and coherent watershed management measures and approaches (e.g. consequent protection of riparian buffers) and ii) at community level (flood and agricultural practices);
 - Lack of enforcement: limited control of banned activities and of implementation of the various legislation that can guide sustainable watershed management
- There are some interventions within the Soasoa watershed area with a focus on environmental/integrated natural resource management with potentially important lessons learned and best practices. For instance, in Vunivau village 7 acres of grassland and degraded forest area has been identified for reforestation work

5. Annexes

Annex 1: List of Stakeholders Consulted

Communities and community-based groups

No.	Name	Age	Gender	Community/Institution
1	Adi Losalini Maikau	47	Female	Vunivau village
2	Radoge Tumua	46	Male	Vunivau village
3	Marika Lauvili	43	Male	Vunivau village
4	Kolinio Meo	35	Male	Vunivau village
5	Peceli Rukumai	59	Male	Vunivau village
6	Isoa Baleirotuma	41	Male	Vunivau village
7	Jese Midralawa	53	Male	Vunivau village
8	Vilikesa Batilekaleka	37	Male	Vunivau village
9	Peceli Bukanidivi	39	Male	Vunivau village
10	Ruveni Dewala	41	Male	Vunivau village
11	Maciu Niumataiwalu	29	Male	Vuinika settlement
12	Maritina Ciba	35	Female	Vuinika settlement
13	Temalesi Tuikai	39	Female	Vuinika settlement
14	Mereoni Tonawai	38	Female	Vuinika settlement
15	Filipe Waqavuka	49	Male	Vuinika settlement
16	Osipeni Marau	58	Male	Vuinika settlement
17	Eroni Mawi	60	Male	Vuinika settlement
18	Deo Shankaran	56	Male	Farmer Group- Vunivau
19	Brij Bhoosan	57	Male	Farmer Group- Vunivau
20	Subarmani	64	Male	Farmer Group- Vunivau
21	Kamla Prasad	63	Male	Farmer Group- Vunivau
22	Vasiti	56	Female	Farmer Group- Vunivau
23	Sainimili Nawai	54	Female	Farmer Group- Vunivau
24	Marrow	60	Male	Farmer Group- Vunivau
25	Kamal Prasad	63	Male	Farmer Group- Vunivau
26	Muhu Swammy	57	Male	Farmer Group- Cawaira
27	Mahend Prasad	49	Male	Farmer Group- Cawaira
28	Peceli Ravuga	54	Male	Soasoa settlement
29	Iowane Tuiwailase	32	Male	Soasoa settlement
30	Fulori Cabenavula	47	Female	Soasoa settlement
31	Logayau Maqosa	72	Male	Soasoa settlement
32	Sairusi Maqosa	52	Male	Soasoa settlement
33	Ilimo Tama	47	Male	Namako settlement

NGOs and academic institutions

No.	Name	Age	Gender	Institution
1	Margaret Tabunakawa	41	Female	Fiji Locally Managed Marine Areas Network
2	Semisi Meo	43	Male	Conservation International (CI)
3	Laitia Tamata	39	Male	Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF)
4	Akanisi Caginitoba	45	Female	Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)
5	Isoa Korovulavula	53	Male	USP
6	Rusiate Ratuniata	47	Male	UNDP

Government Department

No.	Name	Age	Gender	Community/Institution
1	Uraia Rainima	50	Male	Commissioner Northern
2	Tagi Vusoniua	42	Male	District Officer Labasa
3	Vishwa Deo	40	Male	Commissioner Office
4	Maikeli Sauwaqa	35	Male	Macuata Provincial Office
5	Makelesi Raciri	34	Female	Macuata Provincial Office
6	Litiana Ratuvuki	52	Female	Macuata Provincial Office
7	Mereadani Tuitubou	52	Female	Ministry of Lands
8	Eparama Young	34	Male	<i>I Taukei</i> Lands Trust Board
9	Sainiana Kirisitiana	43	Female	Ministry of Agriculture
10	Barbara Temo	35	Female	Ministry of Agriculture

Annex 2: Timetable for Labasa-based Stakeholder Consultation

Dates: 27-29 October, 2020

Activity	Date	Time	Planned Specific Consultations	Side Notes
Activity 3: Consultations with communities in the Soasoa drainage catchment (including Vunika and Vunivau residents)	27-Oct-20	Morning	Arrive in Labasa	For the period 27-29 October, the Freshwater ichthyologist will be conducting fieldwork along the Soasoa watershed (in parallel to these consultations), since he will be engaged with other engagement till end of the year, starting from 02/11/2020
		2pm- 3pm	Consultation with Ministry of Waterways to introduce Eco-Pasifika team, brief MoW staff of planned activities (3 & 5) and arrange for staff to be released for community consultation	
		3pm- 4pm	Consultation with Macuata Provincial Office (MPO) to introduce Eco-Pasifika team, brief MPO staff of planned activities (3 & 5), identify Divisional/Provincial/District Plans and Projects related to proposed Soasoa IWMP and arrange for staff to be released for community consultation (especially, Conservation Officer)	
	28-Oct-20	9am-10am	Consultation with Commissioner Northern to introduce Eco-Pasifika team, brief CN of planned activities (3 & 5) and identify Divisional/Provincial/District Plans and Projects related to proposed Soasoa IWMP	
		10.30- 1.00pm	Consultation with Vunivau community	
		2.30- 4.00pm	Consultation with Vunika community	
	29-Oct-20	9am-12pm	Consultation with Soasoa settlement	
		1pm-3pm	Consultation with Soasoa Farmer Association (or host an evening session if farmers are busy during the day)	
		3pm- 5pm	Consultation with Advisory Council	

Annex 3: Photos from the Consultation



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