

Project Update: March 2015

During the 2014 OceansWatch expedition to Vanuatu we worked primarily with Southwest Bay. The team of George Coward, Charlotte Leger and Mason Myrmo measured the health of the Community Conservation Areas and carried on building the relationship with the communities and the local schools.

The comparison between the Community Conservation Area (CCA) and the control site at Labo did indicate some ecological effectiveness. Hard coral cover, soft coral cover, giant clam density, butterfly fish density and parrot fish density were all greater within the CCA. This suggests that there is enforcement and community compliance of CCA regulations. Unfortunately the presence of COTs both on and off-transect is alarming. Crown of thorns (COTs) outbreaks represent the biggest biological threat to the Indo-Pacific's tropical reefs. Education, awareness and regular removals are recommended to maintain healthy COTs populations and prevent outbreaks.

At the Southwest Bay Primary School Headmaster, we showed *Yumi Tugeta*, an excellent CCPIR-GIZ film about reef conservation in Pele and then we organised a game on the school fields to illustrate the concepts of overfishing, scarce resources, climate change impacts and different marine management options.

Our day with the Southwest Bay Secondary School was separated into four workshops. Each workshop was tailored to accommodate 15 to 25 students, enabling us to reach the entire school in one day by rotating the students into the four classrooms. Each teacher present also attended all the workshops to further their education and enhance their lesson plans. Workshops covered: the conservation of turtles, sharks and ray biology, coral reef ecosystems and the importance of conservation through protected areas, permaculture as a way of increasing food security and rocket stoves to show the possibilities of reduced fuel consumption.

Chief Raobong from Lawa Village organised a community meeting with both the men and women of the village. He was particularly interested in discussing CCA effectiveness. Although the Lawa CCA was clearly defined by the OW 2013 team, he expressed his concern in convincing the villagers of the effectiveness of the closure. We showed the villagers and chiefs short clips from the surveys done on the CCA, as well as pictures from the fore reef, exemplifying juvenile fish abundance and coral cover. We showed images of COTs, and COTs predation within the CCA, as well as images of Chief Raobong surveying the reef. The fishermen of the village participated in an active conversation about the changes in fish abundance and size they have noted. Elders talked about the loss of the traditional ways, and the youth expressed the importance of gaining that knowledge back and respecting *tabu* areas. OW showed a video from CCPIR-GIZ on creating marine protected areas, and discussed size and net limits for fish catch, as well as different ecosystem functions of reefs. Throughout the meeting, all the community members present were sharing and reading the CCPIR-GIZ permaculture resources, as well as the boat's fish identification books.



Top Left: Beach clean-up. Top Right: Charlotte Leger talks about Reef conservation. Middle: Dugong in the seagrass. Bottom Left: Local with a clam. Bottom Right: Rocket stove demonstration