

Case Study 9 Malololelei Recreation Reserve: a successful collaboration in Samoa

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*In 2010, an area of 12 ha was bought by Bluebird Lumber and Hardware Ltd (BBL) from the Catholic Church through the Church's Land Board. The forest condition at the time of purchase was very poor. According to the landowner, more than half of the forest had been destroyed, having been logged and replaced with rubber trees and African tulip tree (*Spathodea campanulata*). The owner of the BBL Company, Mr Tuiaopo Faamausili Andrew Ah Liki, began planting native trees and fruit tree plots. All adjacent lands are owned by the Catholic Church with a few isolated private residential areas nearby. The landowner has taken every opportunity to collaborate with other actors, including by aligning management efforts with the owners of adjacent lands, ensuring the best outcomes for biodiversity (Best Practices 2.5.2 and 2.5.4).*

Overview

Malololelei is a small upland community about 7 km from Apia, the capital of Samoa. It is located in one of the newly-developed areas of the central Upolu Island where a growing number of new residents are buying land in the cooler areas of the island. The land is fairly flat at its highest altitude (approx. 600 m), dropping down to valleys bordering the reserve on both the east and west, and two streams running to the coast.

The area supports native birds, including some endangered species. The site also harbours native forest patches remaining in some parts of the reserve that are sheltered from strong winds during the cyclone season, which would otherwise devastate the native forest in the uplands of the island. The landowner's motivations are: *"to increase the resilience of the Malololelei Reserve by sustainable management of the site [and] to ensure support for our native wildlife and biodiversity by working collaboratively with our partners. We are supportive of Samoa's efforts to increase our lands protected for the preservation of our rare and endemic species and ecosystems".*

Challenges

At the time of purchase, the degraded land had many open areas and agricultural fields. Invasive plant species were prevalent, as were invasive alien species such as rats. Two highly threatened and endemic birds are present in the reserve, the ma'o or giant forest honeyeater (*Gymnomyza samoensis*) and the manumea or tooth-billed pigeon (*Didunculus strigirostris*), and ongoing surveys had identified that the species are at risk of nest predation by rats.



A male ma'o (*Gymnomyza samoensis*) caught and released during research study at Magiagi village in 2008 © Rebecca Stirnemann

Finding solutions through partnerships

The success of Malololelei Recreation Reserve has been based on collaboration with a variety of other groups. Prior to the reserve's establishment, the current landowner Faamausili had been involved in the Central Savaii Uplands Biodiversity Rapid Assessment (BIORAP) survey in 2012, due to his close family association with the lands being assessed. This process was effective in engaging landowners, triggering their interest in sustaining biodiversity and the role they could play in ensuring that the resulting knowledge and benefits were shared amongst the local community. The success stories of the BIORAP in 2012 contributed to the decision by BBL to set aside its privately-owned 12 ha of land at Malololelei, conserved for wildlife and biodiversity in general.

In 2015, the Malololelei Reserve was first established as part of the Biodiversity Day commemoration as a National Reserve in partnership between the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE) and BBL. The recognition was in acknowledgement that Malololelei Reserve is home to the ma'o and the manumea. Since the establishment of the site, MNRE has worked side by side with BBL under a Memorandum of Understanding signed by both parties in 2015. Biodiversity assessments were conducted in 2016 to gather baseline information about the site, and the results indicated the presence of the ma'o and the manumea, which are now listed in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Major concerns over the critical population status of these species and the presence of rats inspired a number of interested partners to collaborate on a solution. Through



View north-west of Apia from the platform at Malololelei Recreation Reserve © Moeumu Uili

this partnership, a project was developed to control invasive pests in the area and further protect wildlife including the bird species.

In September 2017, the Malololelei Pest Management Project commenced with funding support from Auckland Zoo and the Government of New Zealand Public Development Conservation Trust fund, with technical assistance from PelGar International, Samoa Conservation Society and BBL. MNRE is currently leading and managing the implementation of this project, which will continue for the next two years dependent on the availability of funds.

BBL is keen to continue to work closely with a number of relevant partners and stakeholders. This includes the Catholic Church Land Board (Principle 5.5), Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, NGOs such as the Samoa Conservation Society, regional organisations and donor agencies to support and improve the management of the reserve.

The Chief Executive Officer of the MNRE has echoed this sentiment, saying: *“The Government of Samoa through the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE) appreciates the tremendous support and efforts of our key partners to conserve and protect our native biodiversity through partnership with the government. It is our mission to ensure [we] engage all our key stakeholders to effectively participate in the sustainable management of our critical landscape and the preservation of our land-based and marine*

resources, which therefore through this partnership with the BBL, we applaud the contribution of our private land owners such as BBL in achieving this milestone for Samoa.”

Summary

- Engage and appreciate community support in the sustainable development of protected areas (Best Practice 2.1.4).
- Include all different groups in a society, ensuring there is a gender balance when promoting biodiversity conservation issues: diverse voices lead to more resilient and effective decisions (Best Practice 2.5.4).
- Do not wait for funding to act; if possible, do something first and receive money to support where relevant (Best Practice 3.7.1).
- Start small and build bigger: protected areas can be a series of many smaller sites that together form a greater well-managed network (Best Practices 8.2.1 and 8.5.3).
- Provide opportunities to local communities and landholders to lead in conservation action (Principle 1.3), government, donor agencies and experts can then provide support and advice to sustain the efforts.