

Climate Resilient Islands Programme

Case Study: Handicraft preservation for income, Vanuatu

In the Climate Resilient Islands programme, communities reflect on local assets and risks in order to prioritise actions that will increase resilience by protecting local knowledge, local ecosystems and local income-generating activities. This case study outlines how one community in Vanuatu has successfully chosen a pathway that protects all these things at once.

Pandanus in the Malaliu community

In Malaliu, Vanuatu, the community have selected a pathway that focuses on women earning income through handicrafts, a good example of a pathway that interlinks these key considerations. We can see how the identification of community values in the profile has led to plans that reinforce this value and touch on other, linked values as well. Based on learning from their profile, this pathway targets the specific needs of the women of Malaliu, providing income and reinforcing bonds between women and the generations, as well as reinforcing the need to protect local resources in local ecosystems.

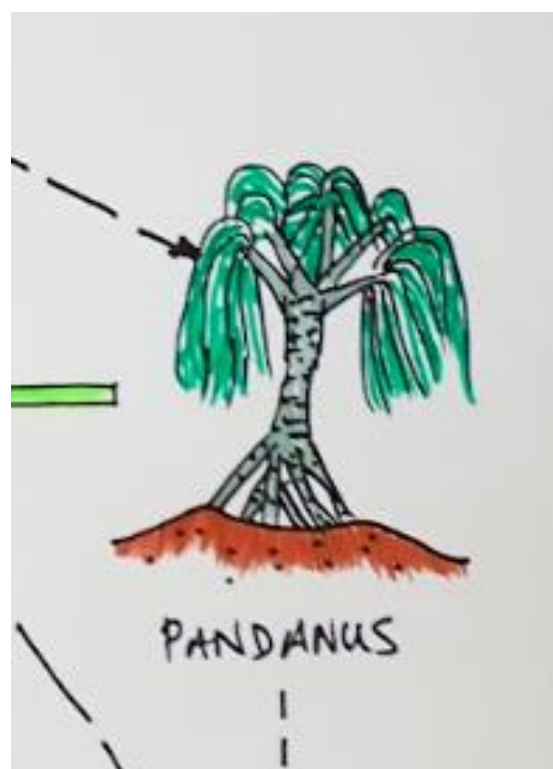
Traditional handicrafts are an important cultural touchstone for the community, a woven mat even featuring as the women's resilience picture:



The women view resilience as a mat. A mat is made of Pandanus leaves, collected from different trees planted at different sites; we have planted them before and still plant them now. We weave and sell mats to pay for school fees. We also use mats to sit and discuss issues affecting our family and community.

During the *Web of Life* activity that the Malaliu community conducted as part of construction of their resilience profile, pandanus was identified as an important part of the local ecosystem. Culturally it is used in peace ceremonies as well as to produce handicrafts. One of the women stated, 'When there is a custom ceremony, we also use the mats. Women weave mats, baskets, Fans and also small handicrafts that can be worn on our hands and trivets used for teapots at the table. We also weave handicrafts for our chief to wear during custom ceremonies.'

Community members also stated, during the facilitation process, that there is not enough pandanus in supply and that crops are being damaged by cattle that are allowed to roam in the area where it has been replanted. This is partly a result of a difference between what men perceive as important and what women perceive as important, with men possibly underestimating, until the process of documenting this knowledge in the resilience profile, the significance of this resource for the women.



Currently the main source of income for households in Malaliu (according to their resilience profile) is selling vegetables. However, the CRI programme recognises multiple sources of income as a resilience indicator for households and communities at large. Malaliu listed this as significant, and they selected a resilience pathway that aims to diversify income streams, specifically for women. This includes preserving their traditional handicrafts. This outcome won't replace any primary sources of earning money but will create additional opportunities.

A place for knowledge transfer

In the activity *Keeping us strong (community strengths and hazard assessment)*, the women of Malaliu identified the 'Women's Hall' as an asset/strength of value to the community. They commented that it should be extended, 'to include a kitchen, bathroom and toilet to provide better services to the community.' Places for women to congregate under shelter provide venues where the transfer of knowledge between women, youth and elders takes place. In this case, the weaving of handicrafts with pandanus can be conducted and the knowledge passed on in the women's hall.

Pathway activities

The activities developed as part of the resilience pathway of strengthening handicrafts for income include the sharing of Indigenous knowledge and the preservation of tradition, securing resources needed for handicrafts (regeneration of pandanus – a sustainable

local resource) and retail opportunities for women as a means of increased financial support for households. While the actions (as seen in the table below, taken from the community's planning document) are protecting local ecosystems, they are also protecting resources women will use for their livelihoods.

The community has expressed the desire to set up a group devoted to the passing-on of handicraft techniques. The passing-on of traditional knowledge is vital for the resilience of communities for a variety of reasons. First, passing on traditional knowledge reinforces interpersonal relations, the strength of which is vital for community cohesion and successful resilience-building. This is especially the case between generations, where there can be a conflict of values and approaches, as indicated by many participating in the CRI programme. Second, resilience-building grounded in the traditions of the ancestors is more likely to be ecologically sustainable, through the use of local resources and low-impact activities. Third, linking resilience-building to tradition inevitably gives increased ownership to communities and gives activities longevity.

The Malaliu community already has a conservation area which is important for their wellbeing. They will undertake replanting program for pandanus. The chief says, 'The idea of Pandanus planting is what we need because we know our community well, therefore, we have decided and agreed to plant more pandanus.'

Pandanus is a part of this ecosystem, so identifying the value of pandanus provides further incentive for management and preservation of the conservation area. More pandanus in the conservation area will offset other pandanus being damaged by cattle elsewhere in the community's landscape. Further, the community has identified that regeneration of pandanus within the conservation area will be a beneficial strategy for the area and the resources within it.

The last action as part of the community's resilience planning for this pathway is the investigation and set-up of market opportunities for the women's handicrafts. In this action, the community will, with Live & Learn's help, seek the assistance of outside bodies, who may be able to provide advice on best practices for marketing the community's products.



Elders in the community have spoken about how climate change is increasing heavy rainfall in the area, which is in turn eroding local roads. 'The impacts of climate change in our community are seen through this, small roads have been damaged due to water,' said the chief. This makes access to markets difficult, so it is increasingly important that additional income sources such as weaving can be marketed. These complications are an indication of how resilience means efforts in various areas that are interconnected.

Assist women to earn income through handicrafts made from traditional materials grown in the conservation area	Encourage weaving within the community by forming a group and instructing younger women <i>Who: community, women</i>	Use the conservation area to plant Pandanus and Napera trees that can be used for handicrafts and foods. <i>Who: community, cultural centre, Forestry Dept</i>	Develop a management plan for conservation area that includes conservation and replanting of plants for handicrafts. <i>Who: community, cultural centre, Forestry</i>	Build a mama's market at Emua for mothers who would like to sell their pandanus products and handicraft products. <i>Who: community, chamber of commerce, dept of agriculture?</i>
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The pathway of using handicrafts for income generation sits within a wider framework that includes another pathway focussed on building knowledge of planting for the management of the conservation area. There is a recognition within the community of the importance of local ecosystems.

The CRI process in Malaliu has established the vital links between preserving local ecosystems, preserving traditional knowledge and the generation of additional income, all to the benefit of the women, a group who are not always prioritised in community planning.

Additionally, the pathway of planting pandanus has focussed the community on cooperation. The chief said, 'The way we live has changed, but through cooperation it brings people together. If there is separation in our community, where there is no unity, things won't become better.'



Climate Resilient Islands aims to strengthen community resilience and adaptive capacity to the impacts of climate change through nature-based solutions working with rural communities in Vanuatu, Fiji, PNG, Tonga, and Tuvalu. The project is a New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade initiative implemented by Live & Learn Environmental Education.

