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SUCCESS STORY
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Mobile app brings cutting-edge data gathering to Solomon Islands

Patrick Ketete, surveyor for the Ministry of Fisheries, interviews a vendor at the Honiara main market as part of the Happy Fish Happy People mobile app project. Ketete's work helps refine the data fields for the new mobile fisheries app.

Photo: © Tory Read/Tory Read Studio

"The mobile app is amazing. I can't wait to use it."

– Patrick Ketete, Fisheries Surveyor

Good fisheries management requires good data. The administrators at the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources in Solomon Islands felt constrained in their work by the lack of information on the current use of inshore fisheries around the country. Ben Buga, marketing director and chief fisheries officer at Fisheries, summed it up: "For resource management programs and to support the fishing communities, we need accurate data on production, species, origin, how, when and by whom the fish are being caught." Leaders from Fisheries explained this need at a CTI Regional Business Forum in 2012, and USAID's Coral Triangle Support Partnership (CTSP) stepped up to help the Ministry meet the challenge.

With CTSP support, Fisheries tasked Buga with making an information-gathering plan and hiring and training eight people to work as market surveyors. With CTSP support, Dr. Robert Pomeroy from the University of Connecticut Sea Grant Program and Dr. Kevin Rhodes, a professor of marine biology at the University of Hawaii at Hilo, were brought in with the help of CTSP consortium members WWF and CI to develop surveys to close information gaps, supervise and train market surveyors and assist Buga in managing the program. Training in how to administer surveys was conducted in the main market at Honiara, the capital of Guadalcanal Island.

Similar surveys have been done in many places, and the Achilles heel of all of them has been the use of paper forms to record the interviews. Paper can be damaged or lost, and the information from the forms must be transcribed manually to computers, creating the potential for mistakes and posing considerable challenges to timely use of data. To clear this hurdle, CTSP worked with the US NGO Ecotrust and developed a mobile application to enable surveyors to capture and input data on site. The mobile app, called *Happy Fish*, will allow accurate recording and instantaneous wireless transmission of survey information to a database programmed to analyze the data and generate useful reports for managers, on demand. This exciting program is setting an example for other Coral Triangle and Pacific countries to use technology to support local economies and food security for inshore fisheries.

Patrick Ketete is part of the surveying team, one of four recent graduates in Environmental Studies being trained to identify the fish and interview the vendors and fishermen. He noted that handling the paper forms is burdensome. "The mobile app is amazing," he said. "I can tell already it is user-friendly. It's very, very powerful. Very reliable. It makes our work easier." A co-worker, Shaun Konaga, enthusiastically supported his words, adding that the mobile app streamlines the survey process, increases efficiency and reduces the time needed for each interview. Better yet, Solomon Islands Telekom is donating wireless data transfer through a public-private partnership facilitated by CTSP with the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources.

The program aligns with the Solomon Islands National Plan of Action under the Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security (CTI-CFF) and is making good fisheries management easier. It is also creating a powerful new tool that will be used throughout the Coral Triangle and perhaps the world.