

# Understanding the Incentive

## How One Community Conserves Turtle, Reef, and Forest

Picture this: a small coastal community—a bay fringed by rainforest abounding with biodiversity set amid one of the richest marine habitats in the world. As with many communities in the region, logging and destructive fishing offer a ready source of income for local villagers. Yet within a few short years, the flush of cash is gone. Its forests and reefs degraded, its culture shaken, the village finds itself worse off than before.

Now imagine this: a nearby community with the same rich natural resources as its logging and fishing neighbors. But in this community, cash and other benefits derive from an altogether different source: the conservation of nature. Villagers here have been trained in wildlife protection and sustainable farming practice. In exchange for concrete benefits from conservation, they have formally agreed to protect their terrestrial and marine resources, to fore go industrial logging, destructive fishing and all non-traditional resource extraction. Years down the road, the community's environs still appear pristine, forests intact, reefs alive with fish and corals, and people still follow a lifestyle of their own choosing.

This is not an imagined scenario. Conservation incentive agreements of this sort are taking hold in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and a variety of other places around the world.

In 1996, the community of Lababia, PNG, established the 47,000-hectare Kamiali Wildlife Management Area (WMA), a legally gazetted conservation zone, managed in accordance with a clear set of guidelines developed by the local community. In Kamiali, these guidelines ban industrial logging and fishing and allow for hunting only by



Gathering community support for conservation projects on the island of Malaita in the Solomon Islands, cetacean biologist Benjamin Kahn speaks to community members of Fanalei Village about local marine life. © DAVID WACHENFELD / TRIGGERFISH IMAGES

traditional methods. In addition, the community has now entered into an agreement to ban the harvest or sale of leatherback turtle eggs. In exchange, the community receives an annual cash payment of about US\$2,500, the going market rate for their unharvested eggs. Kamiali is one of PNG's largest leatherback rookeries, and its protection was a founding motivation for establishing the WMA.

Mirroring its turtle conservation payments, over the years the community has received a steady stream of benefits from the outside world in exchange for its commitment to conserve Kamiali's forests and reefs. These include a small guest lodge and training center; access to dinghies with coolers to transport fish to the nearest market (a two-hour commute), a small portable sawmill to provide lumber for construction, improvements in local schools, and a water distribution system, among others.

The conservation result? Kamiali now stands out as the only area of protected reef and forest along this entire coastline. A globally important sea turtle population is recovering from years of over-harvest. And other communities with valuable forests and reefs are now keen to replicate the Kamiali approach in adjacent areas. None of this, of course, has come without challenges along the way, but our hope and expectation is strong that in the years ahead Kamiali's success will be replicated in many vital areas around the world.

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Village scene from a conservation area in the Solomon Islands © EMRE TURAK

