
Solomon Islands: The alternative to large scale operations

A new report on the social impacts of development on Solomon Islands' communities has found village-based enterprises strengthen family and village life. The report, "Caught Between Two Worlds", concluded that, in contrast, large-scale industrial enterprises such as logging and plantations often create tension, more work for women, and damages villagers' way of life.

Director of the Solomon Islands Development Trust (SIDT), Abraham Baeania, said the findings in the report are important as Solomon Islands seeks to rebuild its economy. Baeania said, "It's clear that village quality of life is improved by small enterprises and damaged by large-scale (commercial activities). Village businesses create a lot of employment and economic activity that also generate income for the government. The study reinforces the need as we rebuild the nation to support village-based development."

The report is a joint project of SIDT, Greenpeace and researcher and author Pam Oliver, a social impact specialist. It is based on interviews carried out with the Marovo people in 1999.

"Caught Between Two Worlds" offers solutions to harm done to families and communities by industrial logging such as the adoption of small to medium scale business models. It recommends an end to funding and promoting large-scale plantation developments and industrial logging, the setting up of a community compensation and restoration programme for villages badly affected by logging or plantation development, and to provide financial support from donors for governments who move away from reliance on industrial logging.

Recent government statistics show that logging has continued at only a slightly lower rate than before the Solomons crisis. Small-scale economic activities such as ecotourism and ecotimber have suffered heavily due to tourists staying away and internal infrastructure collapse.

Greenpeace forests specialist, Grant Rosoman said, "While industrial logging may provide some quick money in the short term, the Marovo study found the social costs to be very high with little real wealth generation and long-term benefit. We urge donors to consider conditional financial packages that help Melanesian governments to move away from reliance on unsustainable industrial logging."

"Caught Between Two Worlds" is a companion report to "Islands Adrift", an economic study that found small-scale development options (like reef fishing, bechedemer collection and ecotimber) were worth three times as much to landowners than industrial activities.