

“Community-based Sea Cucumber Aquaculture in the *Velondriake* Locally Managed Marine Area: A community centric approach to governance”

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Adoption of alternative livelihoods is a crucial challenge that isolated coastal fishing communities must face due to rapidly declining fisheries. However, novel livelihood development is plagued by traditional top down governance from implementing practitioners, creating dependency of farmers on the continued support of their livelihoods by foreign actors, reducing farmers’ capacity for ownership of these models and reducing the long-term sustainability of these much needed alternative livelihoods. This is the case for a community based sea cucumber aquaculture model originated in southwest Madagascar, that although was producing significant levels of income and generating high levels of farmer engagement, after a period of 7 years, was not yet able to be managed by farmers themselves and required the day to day management by implementing partners and private businesses.

Spanning the course of several years, farmers and their Locally Managed Marine Area (LMMA) governance association, with support from the iNGO Blueventures, developed a novel aquaculture livelihoods model governance system. This system relies upon a lease agreement that obligates the best practice aquaculture techniques required of farmers engaged in this livelihoods activity. Those not abiding by these contractual obligations are held accountable, not by implementing livelihood developers or their commercial partners, but instead by other farmers and their community. Crucially also, this system was developed by farmers and their wider community through a collaborative process that included the voices of a wide spectrum of stakeholders engaged in this farming model.

This paper details the development and methodology used to create this innovative aquaculture livelihoods model governance system, which has proved to be the key element that has defined its recent successes.

Keywords: sea cucumber farming, community based aquaculture, Locally Managed Marine Area (LMMA), *Velondriake*, governance, sustainability,