

*Story developed for Communications for Change (cChange)

FOR ten long years, the people of Sawani Village in Bua, Vanua Levu faithfully observed a fishing ban.

That sacrifice has paid off. Today, they rake in thousands of dollars from the once tabu waters, have made significant development and the success stories in their lives keep unfolding.

Fishing warden Asaeli Drugu, 40, recalls the early stages of their conservation efforts and the backlash they faced as they began consultations in the village.

“I’ve been a fish warden for six years and I’ve seen a lot of changes take place, particularly with our fishing habits. Our methods of fishing have changed, we are more informed about protecting our resources both on land and in the sea and our MPAs are healthy. The difference is evident in the abundance of resources we now see in our waters,” he said.

“The only time we allow people to fish in the MPAs is when there’s a village function but even this period of fishing is limited. We are thankful that the people have respected the tabu.”

The collective sacrifice of the people of Sawani has resulted in the completion of multiple village projects including a \$200,000 church, a community hall valued at \$100,000, purchase of a truck and upgrades to the village school.

Drugu believes much of the projects would be unachievable without the introduction of bans on certain fishing areas.

“With all that we have achieved, our biggest setback is the theft of our resources by poachers. Some of them are from neighbouring villages and it frustrates us because we have pledged to respect our tabu for the sake of projects that benefit the entire village and not individual interests.

“Even with this challenge that we’ve faced since the introduction of our MPAs, we continue to observe the tabu to meet our project needs and for the future of our next generation.”

It seems as if nature is reciprocating Sawani’s protection of the life brimming in the blue around it.