

Interlinked Roles for Conservation of Language and Biological Diversity Among Ririo and Babatana Speakers of Lauru, Solomon Islands

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The island of Lauru in the western Solomon Islands is a high (up to 1060 meters) volcanic island with at least seven distinct culture groups who still maintain traditional languages and distinctiveness. The island is almost completely covered in forest except for small areas where traditional gardens are maintained. People have inhabited the region of Lauru for at least 20,000 years and have developed complex taxonomies of plants, animals and landscapes. Ethnobotanical and linguistic research conducted in 1999 among Ririo and Babatana speakers has resulted in identification of the major indigenously recognized vegetation zones and plant species as well as traditional and recent strategies for interacting with the environment. Indigenous-led conservation strategies will be discussed particularly as they relate to conservation of the Ririo language, tribal lands, and plant knowledge.