

# Ten women learn to build boats through the Women in Fisheries Network – Fiji

*Fiji Ministry of Fisheries and Forestry<sup>1</sup>*

Globally, small-scale fisheries are an important source of food and livelihoods for rural communities, and women play crucial roles in these fisheries, as they fish and glean for their families. If there is a village boat, they are then able to make trips out to the deeper waters to fish for bigger fish species which is often sold to interested buyers or taken to the nearest markets. The huge transport challenge remains, and these are the same in communities across Fiji as priorities often lie with the men and their programmes for fishing.

The Women in Fisheries Network – Fiji (WiFN-Fiji) plays a huge role in facilitating networks and partnerships to enable opportunities for women to be informed about all aspects of sustainable fisheries in Fiji. A lot of work must be done in addressing the challenges that women face, especially as they try to make ends meet for their families.

WiFN-Fiji Director Adi Alani Tuivucilevu explains, “We work in partnership with other NGOs, government ministries, and national and regional agencies in deciding, designing, and delivering our activities. We also focus on helping to build an environmentally sustainable, socially appropriate, and economically viable fisheries sector in Fiji, in which the contribution and role of women in this sector is recognised and valued.”

WiFN-Fiji signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Centre for Appropriate Technology and Development (CATD) in Nadave in June 2022, with the common desire to explore synergies that will assist and promote capacity building for communities and CATD students in Fiji and the Pacific Region. The MOU included an agreement to provide opportunities for learning and enhancing community development based on ocean-related knowledge and skills, especially in the maritime areas of Fiji. Under this new partnership, CATD applied for funding under the Blue Accelerator Grants Scheme, with WiFN-Fiji as its implementing partner and was successful. Part of this project included a Fishing Canoe Building Workshop.

WiFN-Fiji introduced CATD to 10 women fisher participants who learned to assemble a canoe using lightweight material (15–19 kg) that would make it easy for women fishers to handle. They were able to provide feedback on the pilot canoe design during the workshop. It is hoped that these women might in the future be trainers and teach other women fishers interested in assembling their own canoes. At the Women in Fisheries Forum conducted in March 2023, some women had shared that they currently pay FJ\$50 to get someone to construct a bamboo raft for them to be able to fish. Accessing a boat is expensive given the fuel prices, not to mention the social construct around women fishers not being allowed to control a fibreglass boat with an engine.



Workshop participant learning to build boat. ©Ministry of Fisheries, Fiji

## Salote grateful for opportunity

Salote Tadokai is from Naikawaga Village in Namara, Tailevu, and was part of the week-long training in Nadave earlier this year.

“I am a mother of six children and when I was called to participate in the training, I did not hesitate as I knew that it would assist me in the future. Most times, we have to wait for the men to assist us in traveling out to sea as they are good boat masters. Sometimes, there can be excuses so we have to look for alternative transport. This training has been an eye-opener for us as we can now build our own canoes and use it whenever we want.”

## Harryproa imparts life-long skills to participants

Trainer during the week-long training, Ron Denney started Harryproa 20 years ago to design a cruising boat which solved some of the problems most cruising boats had.

“Since then, we have developed a range of low cost, easily built and sailed cruisers which are being built around the world. I also designed and built a 24 m cargo-carrying solar/wind powered boat, the prototype of which is at CATD to be tested. It was important for us to teach these women in building boats so they can catch fish to feed their families and provide income

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from any surplus. This program aimed to show that women could build their own boats which are light enough to carry home to avoid the inevitable damage from leaving them on the beach. The importance of building their own boat is that it gives them pride and ownership, plus teaches them how to maintain and repair the boats, something often missing from donated boat programs.

The boats were built from polyethylene terephthalate (PET) the same material as soda bottles, foam, fibreglass and epoxy resin. The point of these boats is that they are, to all intents and purposes, everlasting. If they are damaged, they are easily repaired. They will not rot or deteriorate. While 'everlasting' is a problem with most products, it is not for these boats, as long as somewhere in the world, someone needs a canoe to fish from. If when this is no longer the case, the material in the boats could be recycled. It is as simple as I could make it. The boats are not pretty, but they are functional, light and easily built. The hulls are each made from two pairs of rectangular foam panels and one or two bulkheads.

The foam is fibreglassed on a flat surface. The panels are then glued together. The shapes are self-forming, there are no frames or jigs required. The beam joining the hulls and the paddle are also built on a flat table, with no measuring required apart from the length. Power tools are not required as they are built with a utility knife, scissors, scraper, tape measure, sheet of sandpaper and a square. Future boats will be owned by the women who build them. That is the purpose of

the 'train the trainer model'. The ones we built in the workshop will be given to the participants to test and alter if required. They will also get a prototype I built which we are modifying. The women have certainly gained confidence and the ability to build a boat from which they can fish and the capacity to teach others."

### Ministry applauds concerted efforts

In closing the week-long workshop, Director for Fisheries Ms Neomai Ravitu expressed the Ministry's gratitude to the facilitator and trainer, Mr Robert Denney.

"Your guidance and support have been invaluable in ensuring the success of this workshop. To the participants, I want to commend you for your hard work, determination, and resilience. You have shown us that women are capable of achieving great things when given the opportunity and support they need. Your commitment to learning and applying new skills will undoubtedly have a positive impact on your communities, and we look forward to hearing about your successes in the future, through the Women in Fisheries Network. I encourage you all to continue to work together, share your knowledge and skills, and support one another in your endeavours. Let us build on the foundation that has been laid here and continue to empower women in our fishing communities, industry and beyond."

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Successful workshop participants were presented with a Certificate of Competence in Sustainable Fishing Canoe Building. ©Ministry of Fisheries, Fiji