

Tongan women learn how to process fish

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Following a request made by the Secretary for Fisheries in Tonga in 1997 during a UNIFEM and UNDP joint mission, arrangements were made with Fisheries in Fiji to facilitate a workshop for women of Tonga (Vava'u, Ha'apai and Tongatapu).

The workshop took place from 26 to 30 January 1998 and was attended by 14 participants altogether, 12 women and two men; eight were selected by the Ministry of Fisheries and six by the Women's Development Section of the Prime Minister's Office and Langa'fonua-'a-Fefine Tonga. There were three participants from Ha'apai Island, two from Vava'u and nine from Tongatapu. Four participants were Fisheries Extension Officers, four were from the private sector and six were representatives from village groups. The participants were selected because of their roles in their various communities. It was planned that they would go back and train others who may be interested in the technology of fish smoking.

This workshop was initiated and funded by UNDP in collaboration with the Ministry of Fisheries and

Women's Units, Prime Minister's Office. The training sessions were participatory in style, but included lectures supported by audio-visual materials. The participants gained their first hands-on practical experience assembling the smoke house. Most of the sessions were conducted in groups, so that each participant could have a chance to either scale, clean, loin, skin and finally fillet the fish. They were also given a small exercise to work out the recovery rate and, finally, the yield of their final product.

During the closing address the Secretary for Fisheries mentioned the important role the women played in the economy of the country. He was hopeful that this humble beginning would develop further and contribute positively to the economy of the country. He also looked forward to further close working relationships with regional countries.

Finally, he said a big *malo 'aupito* to the Ministry of Fisheries, Tonga for hosting of the workshop, to Fiji Fisheries for providing technical assistance and to UNDP for sponsoring the workshop and helping us achieve such a successful result.



A tale of smelly worms

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While working on a dried fish project in Tuvalu, I observed several unusual fishing techniques. One of these was on the northernmost island in the Tuvalu group, Nanumea, situated approximately 5.5°S and 176°W. This particular fishery, which is undertaken by women, was not for fish, or in fact for any seafood at all, but for worms.

Ponu ponu worms are prized by the people of Nanumea for their smell. These worms are collected by women in the sand at low tide, on the beaches on the ocean side of the atoll. The women stand in a sandy intertidal area on the seaward side of the island, in 15 to 30 cm of water. They create a small whirlpool current by swirling their foot in a circular motion. This causes the sand, and underlying *ponu ponu*, to become suspended for several seconds. When the sand settles out again, the *ponu ponu* are left lying on the surface, from where they are easily collected.

They are killed by submerging them in kerosene or cheap perfume. Alternatively, they may be smoke dried. They are used mainly as a source of pleasant smell in the flower garlands worn by the locals.

They are also added to coconut oil, which is rubbed into the hair and body, again for the smell.

I collected some samples of the *ponu ponu* from one group of ladies, and dropped them into my small bottle of spirit I carry around for cleaning the floppy-disc drive heads of my note-book computer. They were subsequently delivered to the Australian Museum in Sydney for identification.

Their response: *These are not worms but members of the phylum Hemichordata, and are commonly known as 'acorn worms'. I was interested to read in your letter that they are used for their pleasant smell—they smelled none too pleasant when I tipped them out!! However the tissue is in good condition and they have been incorporated into collection.*

Acknowledgments: I would like to thank Tafito, Tagivasa, and Lina, the ladies from the Nanumea Community Fishing Centre, for collecting the *ponu ponu* and for the information concerning their use; and Kate Attwood, Technical Officer (Inv. Zool.) at the Australian Museum, for identifying the *ponu ponu*.

