

## Other news . . .

### Filling the gaps: Indigenous researchers, subsistence fisheries and gender analysis

by Drs Joeli Veitayaki<sup>1</sup> and Irene Noaczek<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the recent university break (30 June – 11 July), while most of Suva's population was enjoying the South Pacific Games, a group of 15 Pacific Island researchers could be found hard at work in the classrooms Marine Studies, USP. These researchers, drawn from Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Samoa, Tuvalu, Kiribati and FSM, were embarked on an exciting new project funded by the Canada – South Pacific Ocean Development Program (C-SPOD), entitled "Case Studies in Gender and Subsistence Fisheries".

For two weeks, under the leadership of Dr Joeli Veitayaki (MSP) and Dr Irene Novaczek (Institute of Island Studies, University of Prince Edward Island, Canada), the researchers studied, read, discussed and wrote about how issues of gender, sustainability and fisheries intersect. Invited resource persons (Aliti Vunisea and Dr Mecki Kronen of SPC, Neil White of the Biology Dept. USP, Margaret Leniston of Forum Secretariat, Dr Vanessa Griffen) provided inspiration, skills and knowledge through seminars and hands-on exercises. Project participants learned about and practiced research methods, examined a gender sensitive research framework for fisheries, and developed their own research work plans and research instruments.

By the end of two weeks of intensive work, each researcher was prepared to return to his/her country to develop a case study on some aspect of fisheries important to the Pacific region. Each case study will consider and analyse the roles of both women and men in fisheries activities. Most

will focus on the small scale fisheries that provide food security and livelihoods to many rural Pacific Islanders.

The case study writing project seeks to fill some of the gaps in the fisheries literature of the Pacific region. As has been repeatedly pointed out by SPC researchers, the activities of women in fisheries are largely invisible, as they are rarely researched or reported. The same can be said for artisanal and small scale, inshore fisheries where women often are heavily involved. Despite the importance of these fisheries for regional food security and livelihoods, there is little formal published information that could be used in planning for development, management or conservation. Yet, without such information, and without a gender sensitive analysis that recognizes the roles, knowledge and perspectives of both women and men engaged in fisheries, there is little hope of adequate planning for long-term sustainability.

In considering the current literature on fisheries in the Pacific one can see not only an emphasis on large scale, export fisheries but also a prevalence of foreign rather than indigenous writers. The case study writing project seeks to address this by providing opportunities for talented Pacific researchers to perform gender-sensitive fisheries research and have it formally published.

The case study writers involved include USP graduate and post-graduate students as well as fisheries officers, rural development staff, researchers attached to regional organizations and NGO staff.

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In the Solomon Islands, rural development officer Alan Agassiz will be researching the impact of the industrial bait fishery on a coastal community on Marovo Lagoon, Western Province. Meanwhile, Kristina Fideli and Cherie Morris, researchers supported by SPREP, will be documenting the shell money trade in Malaita, Solomon Islands. In a related case study, Alan and Setapu Resture will document the increasing importance of the ornamental shell fishery in Tuvalu.

Samasoni Sauni and Lilian Fay will develop a descriptive account of small-scale fisheries in Tuvalu, and Lilian will also look at the importance of a women's shell fishery in Kiribati. Aliti Vunisea will take a regional look at how gender roles are changing in Pacific fisheries. In some cases, subsistence fisheries are becoming commercialized. Women previously engaged in subsistence activities are now taking their catch to market. Often, when this happens, men also enter a fishery, sometimes with new and more efficient technologies. Resources that used to feed families are being converted to cash, with different and not always positive impacts on men, women and families.

In Vanuatu, Jean Tarisesei from the Vanuatu Cultural Centre will look at how rural fisheries in Vanuatu are changing with the increasing importance of cash markets and new enterprises such as the live fish trade. Kalo Pakoa of the Vanuatu Department of Fisheries, working together with Francis Hickey, will document the traditional fisheries management system on Epi Island in Vanuatu.

In Fiji, fisheries officer Stanley Qalovaki will consider the impact of changing rural fisheries on family life, while Aliti Vunisea and Samasoni Sauni of SPC will analyse a rural live rock fishery. Another Fijian study, by Jyotishma Rajan, will deal with

gender roles in the processing sector of the tuna industry. Recent initiatives by Fijian rural people, particularly women, to restore and conserve mangrove habitats will be the topic of a case study by Jese Verebalavau.

In the Federated States of Micronesia, researcher Moses Palik will look at the traditional mangrove crab fishery and how technology and gender roles are changing as markets open up for the resource. Maere Tekanene in Kiribati will team up with the Kiribati Council of Women to investigate the status of women in the fresh fish trade on Tarawa Island. Fisheries officer Siola'a Malimali in Tonga will do a preliminary assessment of social and economic impacts of the introduction of *Trochus* (a commercial shellfish) into Tonga. Malama Siamomua, meanwhile, will document whether and how women and men are involved in and supportive of recently developed local fisheries management institutions in Samoa.

The 16 case studies now under way will be published in 2004 by the Institute of Pacific Studies USP, in the form of a book. The long-term goals are to move Pacific fisheries towards greater sustainability by: a) providing information on gender roles in fisheries so that women's as well as men's contributions are recognized; b) focusing on small-scale fisheries that are increasingly under stress from over-harvesting, pollution and habitat destruction; and c) highlighting the need for equity in both fisheries development and fisheries management. Each case study will offer recommendations based on research results. Our hope is that in future, policy makers will be inspired by the case studies to develop policies and management strategies that target women as well as men, and that seek to conserve and enhance subsistence fisheries.



*Lutjanus gibbus*  
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