



Women in fisheries profiles

Ulusapeti Teleasau Tiitii

Ulusapeti Teleasau Tiitii is from the village of Savaia Lefaga on the island of Upolu in Samoa. Ulusapeti spent her childhood living, enjoying and eating seafood fresh from the sea as any young village girl does.

She completed her final year of secondary school at Wesley College, Pukekohe, Auckland, New Zealand then graduated with a Diploma in Environmental Resource Management from Northland Polytechnic in New Zealand). She then earned a Bachelor of Applied Science degree from Southern Cross University in Australia, with a double major in Marine Science and Fisheries Management and Aquaculture.

Sapeti is a Principal Fisheries Officer within the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, overseeing the implementation, research, monitoring, and evaluation of activities for the development, conservation and management of coastal fisheries and aquaculture in Samoa. However, she is currently taking a small break from the Ministry while she is pursuing a Master of Science at the University of the Sunshine Coast in Australia, looking at restoring and understanding traditional use and knowledge of edible seaweeds in Samoa by evaluating cultural values, consumer preference and nutritional benefits. Her studies are sponsored by the John Allwright Fellowship through the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR).

Sapeti has coordinated the implementation of multiple national plans, including the Samoa Sea Cucumber Fisheries Management and Development Plan 2015, Samoa's Aquaculture Plan 2012-2017, and Samoa's Coastal and Fisheries Plan 2013-2016. Over her 20 years with the Ministry she has helped to highlight fisheries and environmental issues through radio programmes and other awareness campaigns. Some of the topics Sapeti enjoys sharing her knowledge on includes climate change, fisheries, aquaculture activities (e.g. seaweeds, giant clam farming, tilapia farming, trochus), ecosystem and species management, and community-based fisheries management. Those topics were promoted through her leadership role managing ACIAR-funded projects such as: i) seaweed diversification, ii) community-based tilapia aquaculture, and iii) reef colonisation and socioeconomics of trochus in Samoa reefs. She was also involved in the project 'Coping with Climate Change in the Pacific Island Region' funded by the GIZ.

Sapeti is an unstoppable force of nature, and a role model for women in science in the Pacific. Recently, in partnership with the Pacific Community (SPC), she led a gender analysis of the fisheries and aquaculture sector in Samoa and has helped to review a Pacific handbook on Gender and Social Inclusion for Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture launched by SPC at its Heads of Fisheries meeting in 2019. She also led socioeconomic surveys on Samoa's fisheries in 2013 in collaboration with SPC, and for fish aggregating devices in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization in 2018. With a rich and diverse professional background, Sapeti has received a number of leadership awards, including the John Dillon Fellowship in 2015 and soon will complete the John Allwright Executive Fellowship (JAFel) award in 2020 from the prestigious ACIAR.

Why did you choose to work in fisheries?

As a village girl living close to the sea, I have always been passionate and had an interest in sea creatures and the natural environment they live in. After completing my diploma in New Zealand, the Government of Samoa through the Public Service Commission had a system at the time where graduates were directly appointed to ministries according to their qualification. So they placed me to work for the Fisheries Division of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. I believe that it was my call and a dream came true as I was aware of the difficulties our people face in sustaining food security and livelihoods. With the passion I have of the environment and the primary resources, working with fisheries is the right choice, because this is a great opportunity to serve our people through working collaboratively with communities in providing support where necessary.

Why is the engagement of women in fisheries management important to you?

The engagement of women in fisheries management is very important as we are living in a world where a 'balance' to everything is essential, including gender equality. Engaging all village groups (men, women and youths) in developing management plans and decision-making is crucial as each gender plays a huge role at the community level, organisational level, and government level. Each gender does different types of fishing activities. So, including both men and women and all age groups is vital in the management of resources. Women often refer to their roles as preparing food or household production; however, those duties give women a fair idea of how to make decisions and give advice. For instance, if they see undersize fish and invertebrates brought to their house, or their husbands and children catching small fishes. If they are good with household activities and cook food for the family, no doubt they are able to see changes over time, and that can bring to the table where decision is made for the sustainable of the resources. Therefore, I feel that engaging women in fisheries management will help with food security and livelihoods of our families, communities and the country as a whole.

What message do you have for women wanting to work in fisheries or aquaculture in Samoa?

My message for the women who would like to work in fisheries and/or aquaculture in Samoa to 'go for it', as the future of our fisheries resources are in your hands. With your passion, courage and commitment you are able to provide support and utilise your expertise and knowledge to help manage fisheries resources and promote aquaculture activities for our people today and for future generations.