PRACTICAL HELP FOR THE SEAWEED FARMERS OF KIRIBATI

The seaweed farming industry in Kiribati has been provided with new educational material, thanks to the financial support of the European Union and the assistance of the SPC. A booklet titled "Farming seaweed in Kiribati: a practical guide for seaweed farmers" has been published by SPC. The booklet was designed and compiled in Kiribati by Antoine Teitelbaum (Technical Advisor with the international technical consultancy company Oceanic Développement) and staff from the Research, Extension and Development group of the Atoll Seaweed Company. It was translated into Gilbertese by Ienimoa Kiatoa and Kamatiie Kautu from the Kiribati Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resource Development. The illustrations were done by Sebastien Lesire in Noumea, for the SPC. Although the book is designed to suit Kiribati, it will be useful throughout the Pacific in islands where the seaweed industry is being developed, such as Fiji Islands or Solomon Islands.

The book is in cartoon style, showing the lagoons, the farms, the landscapes and the people of Kiribati and their traditions. We follow the story of Teborou, the wife, and Taira, the husband, who are a young farming couple keen to revive seaweed farming on their island. They take us on a trip in the lagoon of their atoll and demonstrate all the activities required to farm seaweed. Site selection, seedling handling, farm layout, plot construction and also harvesting, post-harvest, marketing of the dried products in the outer island station and all the other steps of farming cottonii seaweed are illustrated. Taira and Teborou also show the reader the different problems encountered while farming, such as rabbitfish grazing, epiphytes and ice-ice disease. As this book is designed for the farmers themselves, the illustrations are very comprehensive and the text is written in a humorous way, avoiding long sentences and complicated Latin names!

This booklet plays a key role in the Kiribati Support to Seaweed Industry Project (SSIP). The SSIP is a four-year project financed by the European Union and implemented with the help of Oceanic Développement, a French company. The overall aim of the project is to increase the production of cottonii seaweed in Kiribati. A large component of the project is dedicated to research, extension and development (RED) in order to improve working conditions of the farmers and the buying agents in the outer islands and also to avert environmental damage on the farming sites in the lagoons of the atolls.

Extension officers and seaweed agents work in the field with the farmers. This book will help them in extending their seaweed farming skills to as many people as possible. The booklet will be of great support to the farmers and the agents in the outer islands, as there has been little educational material available to the farming communities in the last 20 years of the industry. This booklet is the third educational tool since the 1991 manual by James Uan from the Kiribati Fisheries Department published with the FAO entitled Aron Unikakin Te Tiwita
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("How to plant seaweed") and the 2001 video produced by SPC titled Grow seaweed, grow your money.

Atoll Seaweed Company and the SSIP team have introduced the new booklet to farmers in the outer islands seaweed farming communities of Kiribati and the Line Islands. Two-day workshops were organised for farmers, who gathered in the mwaneaba (the communal village house) at Nukamotu village in Nuotaea island, Borotiam in Abaiang, Tabiag in Abemama, Aiaki and Otoae in Onotoa and Buota in Tabiteuea North. More workshops will be held in the near future.

Extension officers Linh Nguyen Quoc and Vincent Potier (from the international volunteer development charity VSO), Oceanic Développement Technical Advisor Antoine Teitelbaum and Atoll Seaweed Company RED staff Jenimoa Kiatoa and Tealoa Sese led the theoretical and practical sessions with groups of farmers. Between 10 and 40 people attended each workshop, both male and female farmers (whether ex-farmers or future farmers but all very keen!) as well as the unimwane and the unaine, the men and women elders of the villages. The participatory learning approach and games were employed to make the workshops lively. All the steps of seaweed farming were demonstrated in the mwanaeba and in the field.

Farmers who received the booklet all seemed very excited to recognise their islands, houses and boats and be offered their first cartoon in I-Kiribati. Lots of questions were asked. Particular issues raised by the farmers included marine tenure in Nuotaea, seedstock supply in Abaiang and equipment purchase in Tabiteuea.

Several attendees were so convinced by the booklet and the workshop that they purchased their own farming equipment after the sessions.

With the increase of the seaweed price to AUD 0.60 and the arrival of the booklet, it is expected that more and more households of the Gilbert Islands and the Line Islands groups of Kiribati will start their own farms and contribute to making the industry sustainable. Surely, Teborou, the main character of the booklet will soon get her motorbike and her store in the outer island!

Top left: Abemama elders having a look at the booklet
Top right: Bringing seedlings ashore, Tabiteuea North
Bottom left: Checking the seaweed plots, Tabiteuea North
Bottom right: Tying lines, Onotoa

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Seedlings, Tabiteuea North

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