



## Women in fisheries profiles

### Arieta Rasiga

"If I had a fishing boat, I would get my licence, quit my job and fish all day long. There is nothing else I prefer to do."

Arieta Rasiga was born in Lamiti Village on the island of Gau in Fiji. She is 62 years old, is married with five children and has 19 grandchildren. She has been fishing since she was eight years old when her mother started taking her out to the river and the sea.

She remembers fondly her mother, who was a very talented fisherwoman, waking her up at 4:00 a.m. in the morning to head up Waibote-i-Gau River. Her mother explained they needed to hunt for prawns in the dark before the sun rises and the prawns hide away. It would take them two hours by foot to get to her favourite fishing spot, and they would spend the day fishing for prawns, eels and shellfish (*vivili*) from the river. Her mother always carried a spear to catch eels and fish, and Arieta would carry a coconut basket around her waist to hold their catch. Her mother also taught her to fish in the sea for seaweeds (*nama, lumi*), sea cucumbers (*dairo*), land crabs (*lairo*), mud crabs (*qari*) and reef fish.

When they returned home, her mother would go straight to the priest's house and share some of their catch with him. Next, they would give some of their catch to the teachers in the village, or elders who were too old to fish. Arieta feels incredibly emotional when she remembers how generous her mother was with the people in the village. She tries to keep up this tradition and shares her own catch with the priest and her neighbours in her current village of Wainaloka on Ovalau Island where she moved to when she got married.

On her days off, her favourite thing to do is to go fishing. She normally fishes all day, or until there is enough fish for the family. If she needs money, she usually sells her fish to other people in the village, particularly those who are working at the PAFCO cannery in Fiji's old capital Levuka.

She has a wealth of knowledge about the sea. For example, she explained that when it is the cold season it is a good time to fish for trevally, although, she laughs, she has to compete with the sharks. She uses shrimp from the mangroves as bait and heads out to deeper water where trevally are found. She also tries to teach her children and grandchildren the fishing knowledge she gained from her mother.

#### What are the challenges you face when you are out fishing?

One of the challenges Arieta faces is getting enough small shrimp from the mangroves that she can use as bait for fishing. She has to invest time catching the bait before she can begin fishing. Hooks and line are more expensive now, and fishing is harder than it was in her youth. Arieta explains, "before, we used to catch a lot of fish, and big fish. But now we have to look around for fishing spots. This is because people are using lots of small nets that catch the very small fish. Or people are using spearguns and scare the fish away".

#### What kind of assistance would you like from government?

Arieta's dream is to own her own brand-new boat. Two years ago, she saved up her money and bought an old village boat and a small second-hand engine. She does not have a boat licence so has to rely on her husband or son to take her out on the boat to fish. She does not want to go far, as she is aware that the boat and engine are old and she is afraid of it breaking down at sea. If she got a new boat and engine, she would get her boat licence, quit her job, and spend all her days fishing.