



Inspiring profile
Josephine Kalsuak

by Josephine Kalsuak

Josephine Kalsuak is from Vanuatu and is a Senior Human Rights Adviser at the Human Rights and Social Development Division at the Pacific Community (SPC) based in Suva, Fiji.

I have a Bachelor (Honours) of Human Service with Distinction from Griffith University in Australia; my honours thesis focused on supporting Ni-Vanuatu rural development. I also attained a Graduate Diploma in Not-for-Profit Management from Unitec Institute of Technology in New Zealand, and I am in the final stages of completing my Master's thesis on social policy at the University of the South Pacific.

My professional career started in 2005 in Vanuatu, where I ignited and instilled my passion for human rights. At the time, I was a Youth Project Coordinator for a non-governmental organisation called the Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific. I supported a coastal gardens project focused on the inclusion of young people in the governance structures of community-based coastal initiatives. This provided me a foundation of knowledge and experience for a career focused on human rights.

As a Senior Human Rights Advisor at SPC, one of my key roles is supporting civil society organisations under the Pacific People Advancing Change (PPAC) programme from Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Tonga and the Federated State of Micronesia, to build their capacity for advocacy, and especial-

ly to run advocacy campaigns. We do this through a package of assistance that includes advocacy training workshops, ongoing mentoring, and the provision of small grants for advocates. Civil society organisation (CSO) advocacy campaigns range from environment and waste management, to youth empowerment, age of consent, domestic violence prevention, to rights of people with disability, and climate change adaptation. The common approach applied in all these campaigns is that we place people at the centre of planning and implementing these advocacy campaigns. Examples of some of the achievements of CSOs in the grant year 2019 to 2020 include: 1) the Jojikum and Marshall Islands Conservation Society, advocating for single use plastic and promoting reusable bags to enhance the right to a clean and safe environment; 2) two CSOs collaborated with the Marshall Islands Environmental Protection Authority and other government agencies and formed the Eniwot Juon (*say never mind, no need to single use plastic*) campaign; 3) the Tonga Centre for Women and Children obtained support from district officers on the island of Va'vau to raised awareness with community leaders about domestic violence prevention strategies; and 4) in Solomon Islands, Auki market vendors successfully acquired provincial government commitment to support an Auki market waste management system. For the next grant year 2020 to 2021, the Wai Hau Conservation Foundation in Solomon Islands aims to improve women's participation in conservation and raise awareness about logging impacts in Malaita Province, and the Ahetaha Water Conservation Association plans to advance gender-sensitive water, sanitation and health awareness in Malaita.

Another key part of my job is to work with SPC's Fisheries, Aquaculture and Marine Ecosystems Division to mainstream human rights and people-centred approaches into their existing programmes. For example, I contributed to the review of the "SPC Handbook for Gender Equity and Social Inclusion in Fisheries and Aquaculture", to ensure appropriate approaches were being promoted and the language was sensitive to basic human rights. I also helped facilitate sessions at a workshop in July 2020, which looked at national legislation in six Pacific Island countries (Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu) and identified existing biases or barriers that may inhibit the realisation of human rights, including gender issues, for small-scale fisheries.

Why does human rights matter for fisheries and aquaculture in the Pacific?

Managing fisheries is not about managing fisheries resources, but about managing people, their aspirations, attitudes, and their behaviour. Therefore, understanding the people side of fisheries and aquaculture in the Pacific helps inform the development of effective policies, programmes, and practices for these sectors, and will ultimately improve their long-term outcomes. Human rights matter for fisheries and aquaculture in terms of effective decisions and policy implementation.

Human rights principles and frameworks provide an enabling environment to understand the different capabilities and concerns of men, women, young men and young women, elderly, people with disabilities, children and other groups residing in a coastal community. It promotes the participation of fishers and all other stakeholders in these sectors in decision-making processes to ensure fisheries services are tailored, especially from government agencies, are done in partnership with the people involved, and ensures a sense of ownership. A human rights-based approach to fisheries

and aquaculture also ensures that the people involved are respected, informed, engaged, supported, and treated with dignity and compassion. Human rights promote the interconnectivity between people and their environment, which comprises natural and marine resources to ensure equitable outcomes.

What has been the most interesting thing you have learned, working with fisheries and aquaculture practitioners?

Collaborating with practitioners in fisheries and aquaculture is interesting and a learning process. It involves active listening, creativity and finding entry points to advance dialogue and engagement. An important lesson I have learned is the need to contextualise human rights terminologies to the fisheries and aquaculture sectors. This means starting with the terminologies that fisheries and aquaculture practitioners are familiar with, for example food security and livelihood, and making the linkages to these fundamental human rights.

From a gender and human rights perspective, what are the areas in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors that need attention?

From a human rights perspective, I think an area that needs attention is recognising and understanding that human rights are essential in order to achieve sustainable development goals in these sectors. I also think the sectors need to apply a gender lens to their work. It is important to understand that both men and women are involved in these sector in different capacities, and valuing the contribution of both men and women equally is important. Lastly, fisheries and aquaculture initiatives, projects and programmes, are unlikely to be fully successful unless underlying issues of inequality in these sectors are addressed.

