

Empowering Kiribati women in seafood safety and quality

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Background

The University of the South Pacific (USP) is one of four key regional partners currently implementing the Pacific-European Union Marine Partnership (PEUMP) programme to fisheries professionals in 15 countries. USP's responsibility within PEUMP is to build capacity through education, training, research and development for key stakeholder groups involved in fisheries and marine resource management. The education component encompasses technical vocational education and training as well as continuing professional development programs. These programmes provide tailored technical and generic upskilling opportunities to address existing and emerging issues in the Pacific. One of the key principles underlying the overall approach of the PEUMP programme involves integrating human rights and gender equality through a rights-based approach. This is reinforced by recommendations from the Institute of Marine Resources training needs and gaps assessment (IMR 2019) at USP, creating opportunities to incorporate gender equality into USP programmes.

Geographical location, language and finance are key barriers to entry into high-level formal tertiary education programmes. Through in-country training, the PEUMP project provides an enabling environment where women and men, young and mature, from diverse cultures can thrive, contribute their unique perspectives and participate fully in decision-making processes in their country. Furthermore, professional development training enables fisheries professionals to address challenges in food security, livelihood and economic growth, and advocate for meaningful change at

the local and national levels. Fishery resources are essential to Kiribati for government revenue, food security, employment, and livelihoods. However, there is a real challenge to long-term food security from population pressures (Campbell & Hanich 2014). Recent movement of some I-Kiribati residents from central Tarawa and other islands of the Gilbert group to Kiritimati Island presented a unique opportunity to support upskilling of the fisheries industry and institutional development initiatives. Such capacity building aligns to the Kiribati vision 20-year plan, government manifesto, national fisheries policy and the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources Development strategic plan.

About the micro qualification and sponsorship

In 2019, regional experts developed the micro qualification in maintaining seafood safety and quality which was accredited under the Pacific Qualification Framework. This professional qualification is intended for people who work in the seafood industry to ensure quality is maintained throughout the supply chain. This includes deckhands, fishers, unloaders, vendors, market intermediaries (traders), small-scale processors, seafood retailers and/or suppliers (SPC 2019). This micro qualification programme aims to strengthen knowledge, skills, and competencies by demonstrating basic post-harvest seafood handling skills, outlining causes of seafood spoilage and quality control factors and applying inspection techniques and guidelines to maintain seafood quality.

After advertising scholarships in Kiribati and receiving applications from interested fisheries professionals, the selection of eligible candidates was conducted by a committee

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Kiritimati Island trainees of the seafood safety and quality micro qualification with their certificates in professional development. © Lore Croker





1 Filleting



2 Marinating



3 Arranging on tray



4 Sun drying

Steps in processing tuna jerky in Kiritimati Island. © Lore Croker

comprising senior staff from USP, including subject specialists. The committee found an equal number of females and males eligible. The eligibility criteria included: (1) satisfactory completion of year 12 level of education or equivalent; (2) a good command of English reading and writing skills, including basic numeracy skills; and (3) be involvement in seafood handling and/or processing activities. Twenty successful candidates, 11 of which were female were offered scholarships for the micro qualification programme.

Delivery in Kiritimati Island

The micro qualification in seafood and quality programme was delivered by USP in Kiritimati Island, Kiribati from 13-17 February 2024. The facilitation team included Ms Tereere Tioti, Director Kiribati Seafood Verification Agency, Competent Authority, MFMRD, Ms Shirleen Bala, PEUMP

course developer and trainer and Ms Lore Croker, PEUMP communications assistant provided the communication and visibility support.

Twenty trainees in Kiritimati Island attended the training which comprised of theory and practical sessions focused on how to ensure quality and safety of seafood products throughout the supply chain from fishers, processors, market vendors to the consumers' plate. Topics included seafood spoilage, types of seafood hazards, quality control measures (including identifying critical control points) and good hygiene practices. Group exercises required trainees to identify the products of interest and map the supply chain from "hook to plate". This allowed them to identify steps that are important for fishers, processors, and market vendors to implement for reducing or eliminating seafood spoilage and significant risk hazards.



Erimwa (left) and Materetia (right) pose with their certificates at the end of the programme. © Lore Croker

Practical sessions included the observation of good and bad hygiene practices of fish vendors along the roadside and at a fish processing facility. While at the Central Pacific Producers Limited facility, the trainees were also required to observe methods of maintaining the cold chain, and proper methods of packaging and storage. According to the trainees (both women and men), key challenges in Kiritimati were inaccessibility of ice, the difficulty of visually detecting fish with ciguatera, lack of understanding on seafood spoilage, quality controls and proper hygiene practices to maintain safe and quality products for the public. The final practical session focused on product development, where trainees learned to craft items like smoked milkfish and sundried tuna jerky. All 20 trainees successfully completed the micro qualification with 55% being women involved in training and formal seafood fishing, processing, and sales.

Evaluation and Conclusion

The micro qualification in seafood safety and quality feedback through a post-evaluation survey was encouraging and indicated that 100% of the trainees agreed the programme was informative and thought that the training materials provided were good to very good. The trainees' general perspectives on the programme included: the theory and practical sessions were highly informative; group sessions shared valuable insights; the use of simple language made the content easy to understand and the presentation was exceptionally well delivered.

Erimwa Teinging, an officer at Central Pacific Producers Limited (CPPL) in Kiritimati, found significant value in undergoing the micro qualification training: "This training has strengthened my knowledge and will be useful in my current role at CPPL where we export lobsters and fish while also supplying local markets." Materetia Abaiota, the officer in charge of the Solar Salt Division at the Ministry of Line and Phoenix Islands Development, participated in the seafood safety and quality training alongside Erimwa

Teinging. Materetia stated: "These trainings have equipped me with knowledge and skills to strengthen safety and quality practices at the Solar Salt Division, (a government-owned enterprise). It has also motivated me to venture into establishing my own seafood business." Materetia's involvement in the training signifies a proactive approach to enhancing safety and hygiene practices within the Solar Salt Division. Erimwa and Materetia showcase how specialised training empowers professional women to enhance both individual expertise and community development.

Providing Pacific Islanders, especially women, with access to quality education, training and mentorship opportunities can empower them with the knowledge and skills needed to overcome barriers and pursue fulfilling careers in fisheries and related sectors. Evaluating the impact of the micro qualification learnings on Erimwa and Materetia six months down the line would involve assessing their performance improvement, skill development, personal development, and career advancement.

References

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