

## Inspiring profile

### Lavinia Pupuru

by Lavinia Pupuru and Cynthia Nakozeete<sup>1</sup>

*In April 2020, I had the privilege of interviewing Lavinia Pupuru a tremendous local woman from Choiseul Province in Solomon Islands who is leading local efforts in sustainable management of her community's marine and forest resources. This is her story.*



**Lavi, tell us about yourself – where have you worked, where do you live, your family/parents – how has this influenced your care for nature?**

My name is Lavinia Pupuru and I am lucky to live with my family, a loving husband and three beautiful children, in the beautiful islands of Lituni, southeast Choiseul, Solomon Islands. I attended up to high school in Choiseul and I am self-employed; managing my homestay business and I am leading conservation-oriented women's groups, including Lituni Paddle Women's network and KAWAKI. These are voluntary roles. I am interested in meeting new people and leading conservation work.

Personally, waking up every morning with the view from my home of the blue mountain "Sabe", I was amazed by nature. I thought about it and realised that the only way my grandchildren and future generations would enjoy the same view is if I worked on conservation. Growing up on this beautiful island of Lituni, I saw my parents rely heavily on the environment – the sea and land – for food and their livelihood. They went to the sea to fish and to the bush to collect vegetables or made a garden to sustain our family; therefore, I believed that nature cared for my family, thus I should care for nature in return.

A few years ago, the conservation coordinator from the Arnavons came to our village and did an awareness programme about the importance of managing our resources. They gave us practical examples. After that my community had a tribal meeting and decided to conserve and manage our reef. Since we conserved the reef, we do not want to destroy the bush because it will destroy or have an impact on the sea. As result of our conservation work our children enjoy swimming in a clean sea and the community has enough resources to enjoy and

sustain their families. The whole Lituni village supports and educates their children to look after the sea and land as well.

Since my community put in place *tabu* (no take) areas on the reef, we have directly experienced the spillover of fish and trochus, which we collect to sustain us. Managing this tabu area can be difficult when other groups see how well it is doing and want these resources, but we persist for future generations. This continually inspires me, seeing directly how managing our inshore fishery can benefit my family and community.

**Why else are you interested in conservation - what inspired you to care about nature?**

After school, I had experience working at a logging company, this is one of the few paid jobs where I come from. I kept the accounts, but through this job I witnessed firsthand how destructive logging is; It broke my heart and I realised that if it continues what we in this generation, will not be seen by future generations, our children. Logging, in my personal view, is very destructive; it has effects on fisheries, and I saw how it destroys mangroves and rivers. Logging companies and landowners do not observe buffers zones, and this leads to a lot of environmental damage. For example, we can no longer find shells (*pego ni vuru*) in the river. In the future, I see that there will be a shortage of logs to build houses. When I returned to my village, I discussed with the chief of my community that we should discourage destructive development such as unsustainable logging. I am so very glad we have a very supportive chief who supports sustainable development and us women. Even my dear father before he died told us not to venture into destructive development projects on our tribal land. I hope to honour his wishes.

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***You worked for a logging company to make money and get skills. This is the reality for many people that these are the only jobs, ways of getting cash sometimes. Do you have any ideas of what to do about this so people have other choices?***

I encourage people to venture into something that lasts; jobs with logging companies go when the logs go. People should be encouraged to promote conservation, expand their networks and build their skills. Sustainable fishery industries, specifically on a local scale, should be encouraged and initiated where people can make a small income. Tourism should also be encouraged, both locally and for overseas visitors so the people can sell their agricultural crops and earn money.

***Tell us about your work with women such as KAWAKI and why you think working with women is important?***

I believe that empowering women is vital for community development and stability because women are strong, active, listen and make things happened. We are cooperative and have love and heart for caring for our children, home and nature. It is seen today that community development occurs as result of women standing in the frontline in community leadership.

Women feed the family; women gather food for the family. Women know best where to collect food and how to get it home. They need to know how to manage those areas so they can have more in the future. In our traditional knowledge our father would say, Botu bi kasi baruea, meaning no garden should be made where the water source is. Thus, traditional management is in place and in this changing world, women combine this with science.

Our partnership with The Nature Conservancy has helped our community to manage their natural resources. As a result, we still have virgin forest and conserved reef systems compared to other places near us. Since I joined KAWAKI women's group, it has helped build my capacity and skills on natural resource management, cooking, finance and hospitality to mention just a few. I have now been able to open my own homestay. It also helped expose me to the outside world through filming and travelling to Australia, and expanded my network locally. I build my knowledge and experience, and have the courage to build my personal life, community and tribe and be a leader in my community.

These experiences have given me the confidence and support to work together with women in my village to form a localised network called Lituni Paddle women's network. This will be part of our larger KAWAKI group. The Paddle Women's Network was formed to unite women of Lituni to support their marine managed area (reef conservation - no take). This helps us bring lessons we learn from the Arnavons and other far away places to touch down with our local women in Lituni.

***What is your hope for the future?***

There is hope for the future for my tribe. I hope that people unite for conservation; that we work together to manage our resources so future generations can benefit. I hope that future generations stand united together like our generation today to manage nature. Everyone must have equal shares and benefits from our resources in the future and care for nature.

Lituni Paddle women with Lavinia, second from the left in the front row. © Cynthia Nakozeote



View from Lavinia's house, Lituni village, Mt Sabe in background

