

WHAT'S HAPPENING WITHIN THE REGION?



Women and community-based fisheries in Samoa

by Lyn Lambeth, Women Fisheries Development Officer, SPC

In the previous issue of the *SPC Women in Fisheries Information Bulletin* an article appeared entitled 'Role of women in Samoan society: The sacred covenant'. Included was a detailed look at a case study of an aquacultural project in Auala, a village on the island of Savaii. The information given was confusing and contradictory and the conclusion especially disturbing to the Fisheries Division of Samoa.

Part of the concluding paragraph reads 'From this research, it is evident that women in Samoa are still being excluded from the decision-making process when it comes to rural fisheries development. Nowhere in the Fisheries Management Plan was there any mention as to how women's actions could play a valuable part in the development of rural fisheries or in the conservation and management of the marine life in Auala. It is believed that the situation is similar in most other Samoan villages.' The Fisheries Management Plan is not referred to or explained anywhere else in the article.

According to the Samoan Fisheries Division, Auala has never had an aquacultural project such as the one described in the article. The author, when questioned by the Fisheries Division, admitted making up much of the information contained in the article. The Fisheries Division is concerned that the article detracts from some very good work being done by a group of dedicated and enthusiastic young fisheries extension workers in Samoa and that it gives the impression that women are not being included in this work. Auala village is actually part of a fisheries extension and training project being conducted by the Fisheries Division, with funding by AusAID, the Australian Agency for International Development. A Fisheries Management Plan has been developed by the

Village Fisheries Management Committee (VFMC) of Auala and this sets out the resource management and conservation undertakings of the community and the technical and servicing support to be provided by the government.

Women's groups were involved in every step of the extension process in Auala, as in all other villages participating in the programme, and the elected VFMC included representatives from each group consulted in the process—titled men, women and untitled men. As of August 1998, a total of 51 villages in Samoa had approved Fisheries Management Plans; 46 had set aside areas of their lagoon as 'No Fishing' zones, and all implemented a range of management and conservation measures designed to ensure their lagoons have a chance to recover from overexploitation, harmful fishing practices and environmental damage. Women have played a large part in designing those management and conservation measures and continue to be active in maintaining the programme in their villages.

The following article was written by the new SPC Women's Fisheries Development Officer, with the approval of the Samoa Fisheries Division, in response to the article on the role of women in Samoan society published in the last bulletin.

Subsistence and commercial fisheries production in the South Pacific

Most South Pacific countries have an estimate of their commercial fisheries production but few have an accurate estimate of their subsistence fisheries production. Those figures that do exist show the subsistence fisheries production in terms of weight

to be, on the whole, substantially more than the commercial fisheries production. It has been estimated in the South Pacific that 80 per cent of the catch from inshore fisheries (including reefs, estu-

aries and fresh water) is taken for subsistence purposes with the remaining 20 per cent going to commercial markets. This is production by men and women, though the data is rarely separated.



Women are involved in fisheries activities . . .

Women are involved in fisheries

Most people living in the Pacific are aware of the large role that women play in harvesting, processing and marketing marine resources. A look at many lagoon and inshore areas will show the most visible people on the reef are often women. Women do much of the processing of marine species harvested by both men and women.

Many of the market and roadside sellers of marine produce are women. So to talk of fishing and fisheries as something that involves mainly men is to ignore the very large contribution that women make to harvesting marine resources.



. . . and men are involved in fisheries activities

Nevertheless, when people talk of fishing, they usually think of fishermen and male-dominated commercial fisheries.

In development and management programmes, priority is often given to assisting large-scale operations and production—areas dominated by men—in order to encourage activities that will bring in an income for the country.

The role of subsistence fishers in ensuring the well-being and health of their families and community is often overlooked. Extension and training programmes have usually been aimed at men since they promote commercial fishing through upgrading fishing boats and technology.

It has been said that women's economic role is undervalued and ineffectively supported. It should equally be argued that women's environmental impact has been just as underestimated.

There has been little information previously collected on the involvement of women in fisheries; the problems they face; or the problems they cause.

Including all parts of the community in development and management

These factors have been part of the rationale behind establishing programmes that specifically target women. It has been recognised however, that men should not be excluded from the development process for women. Any development aimed at women will undoubtedly affect the men of the community; without support from men it can be difficult for women to take full advantage of development projects. For the same reasons women must also be included in any development process that is mainly aimed at men. A step beyond this is to include the community as a whole in any fisheries development and management project. Instead of individual projects aimed at separate parts of the community a more inclusive project would have the whole community as the target group. This can be very important when considering sustainable development, and especially the management of resources under pressure. Addressing the impact of one part of the community without considering the impact of the others will not result in effective management and may lead to conflict.



Fisheries management and development should involve the whole community

Samoa Fisheries Extension and Training Project: a community-based fisheries project

Any development or management programme must consider the needs and the impact of all marine resource users when promoting sustainable development. A fisheries extension and training project in Samoa has been following this approach since 1995 and the results have been very encouraging.

The Samoan Government has become increasingly concerned about the state of its reefs and lagoons and the decreasing fish catches. It also recognises that fish stocks and the environment cannot be effectively protected simply by passing national laws. The Samoan Fisheries Extension and Training Project is a good example of effective, community-based fisheries development and management. The project encourages coastal communities to produce their own management plans. Participating villages have taken on the responsibility of defining problems, discussing causes, proposing solutions and deciding on the most effective actions, while the Fisheries Division provides technical support and advice. The project has been very successful in including women in all parts of the process, ensuring that they not only contribute to the discussions on problems, solutions and actions, but that they also have access to training and the development of small-scale business opportunities. This was achieved by working within the traditional village structure, following the Samoan way, or *fa'a Samoa*.

Women do have a lot of influence in Samoan village life, as in many traditional communities. It is however, more subtle and informal than the men's influence.

Working within the traditional structure of the community

Successful community-based fisheries development and management should work within the existing structures of the community. In the words of the Canadian International Development Agency (1993) 'It would be a mistake in most instances to treat certain issues as 'women's issues' and to go around the normal community organisation and leadership. Similarly, when women are to be the main beneficiaries of a new technology or other intervention, project planners and implementers should work along with men in the sector and community, ensuring their cooperation and assistance.' In the Samoan project the benefits were directed at the whole community, on a village-by-village basis. Full community participation was achieved by first seeking the approval of the *fono*, or council, at a formal village council meeting. Following this, the *fono* was asked to arrange separate meetings of several village groups, including women. This meant that the formal ruling body of the village, the *fono*, approved of and had control of the process from the beginning, but that the rest of the community, including women and untitled men, were given the opportunity to put forward their opinions in separate meetings.



Work within the existing structure of the community

Broad knowledge of development and management measures

The process, after a series of separate meetings, resulted in the selection of a village Fisheries Management Committee, made up of representatives from each of the groups, so again the women were included and their inclusion was agreed to and accepted by the other groups. This ensured that any step taken by the fisheries management committee, whether it be the introduction of a village regulation or the development of a new income or food-generating project, involved broad community knowledge and support and was therefore more likely to succeed.

The final copy of the Fisheries Management Plan was then presented to the *fono* for approval, again ensuring broad-scale acceptance and success by following the traditional community structures.

More interaction between community and the Fisheries Division

Strong links were also forged between the village and the Fisheries Division in the process. In the past, women and village-women's committees have tended to look to church groups or women's organisations for assistance in fisheries-related matters. A similar situation existed with the men of the village. There is often little contact between subsistence or

artisanal fishers, both men and women, and Government fisheries organisations.

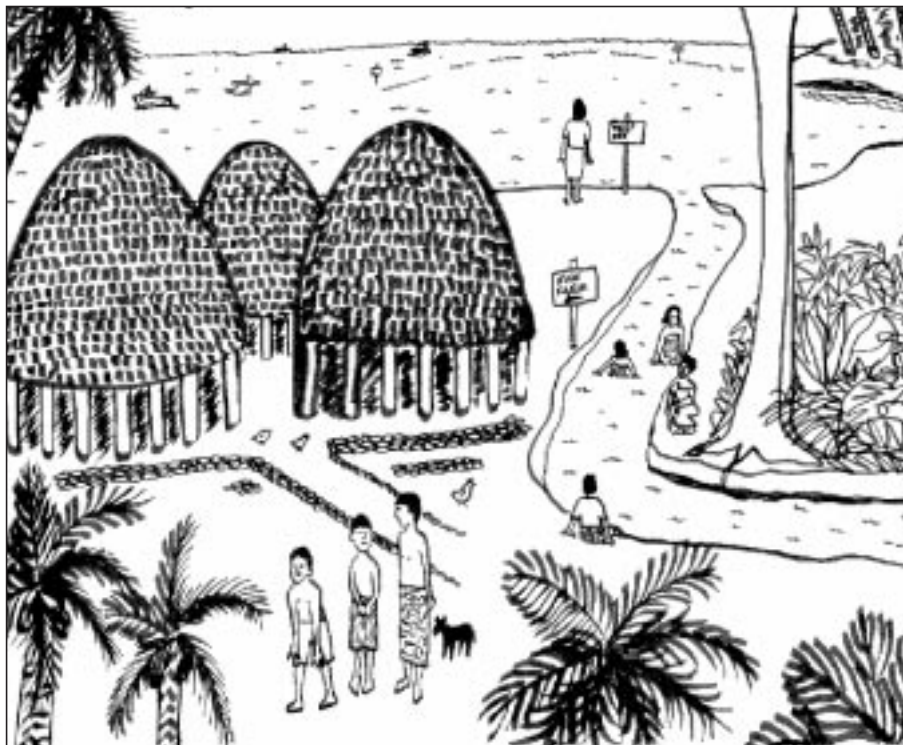
There is now much more contact and communication between villagers and the Fisheries Division in Samoa. This is an important consideration when the Fisheries Division is the logical provider of technical expertise and information to do with the harvesting, processing, marketing and management of fisheries.

Equally the villagers are an important source of the information and data needed by the Fisheries Division for resource assessment, management and development.

Women's groups and church organisations are still important providers of support and advice but the Fisheries Division is now the one most likely to be approached for technical assistance and information on marine issues.

Sapapalii, an example of community-based fisheries management and development

An example of broad community-involvement can be illustrated by looking at the village of Sapapalii on the island of Savaii. Representatives from Sapapalii first approached the Fisheries Division with a request for help in setting up a tilapia pond. From this the village became interested in the



Sapapalii: community-based fisheries management and development

extension and training project and went on to develop and implement a Fisheries Management Plan for their village.

The cost of hiring the excavator to create the tilapia pond was met by holding fund-raising activities within the community – raffles, dances etc. Women's groups, youth groups, and church organisations were all involved. The Fisheries Division provided advice and, when the pond was completed, stocked it with tilapia fry. The whole community provided their skills for work on and around the pond, erecting and decorating buildings, establishing gardens around the pond for plants to feed the tilapia, and building fences. At the same time the village introduced bans on damaging fishing methods, marked out a fish reserve, brought in restrictions on harmful environmental practices and started raising funds to buy small aluminium boats for fishing outside the lagoon.

These measures would not have been possible without the support of the entire community. A project which aimed to work only with the women of that village might have resulted in putting an end to a particular harmful practice—such as dumping rubbish on the beach—but a whole host of other problems caused by other parts of the community would have continued to add to the degradation of the lagoons.

The fact that the entire village had a part to play in identifying the problems and seeking the solutions has meant that they now feel responsible for them. Similarly, the tilapia pond has enjoyed success because everyone has played a part in its creation.

The village still has a long way to go in reversing much of the damage done to its lagoon by past fishing and environmental practices and overexploitation.

Recovery will be slow and there is always the danger that the community will lose its enthusiasm for following the Fisheries Management Plan. There are still parts of the community which do not agree nor voluntarily comply with all that has been done, but expecting 100 per cent agreement would be unrealistic in any community.

It is still an encouraging example of what can be achieved with broad community participation.

Acknowledgements

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In memory of Siamupini Iosefa who passed away on 2/1/98. Tofa Soifua Champ.



**Checking the progress of giant clams
in Satoalepai fish reserve, Savaii, Samoa**