

Tonga fish handling training

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Introduction

In September 2003 under New Zealand's development assistance programme with Tonga, I was contracted via People and Projects Ltd, to conduct in-country fish handling and processing training in the outer islands of Tonga. Training was conducted in Niuatoputapu from 11 to 17 September 2003 and Neiafu, Vava'u from 19 to 25 September 2003. The goal of the project was to enhance the utilisation of marine resources in Niuatoputapu and Vava'u. The objectives of the project were to develop locally-appropriate fish handling, preservation and processing techniques; to improve local business skills.

The training was coordinated locally by Mr Tatafu Moeaki and Ms Fatai Soakai from the Tongan Training Centre, Ministry of Education. The local training counterpart, Ms Silika Ngahe, Director of Fisheries for Vava'u, was exceptionally valuable and instrumental in the coordination and implementation of this training and it would have been very difficult to conduct the training in both locations, especially in Niuatoputapu, without assistance.

Workshops

In Niuatoputapu 16 participants attended: 10 women and 6 men. Six participants were from NGOs, mostly church groups, and the remaining ten were from the private sector. Participants in Niuatoputapu were particularly interested given the recent concerns on food supply caused by Cyclone Waka in January 2002. Participants were taught how to build appropriate technology fish processors (smoker and solar dryer) using locally available materials. In Niuatoputapu a number of participants indicated that they were going to build their own processors. The only material not readily available is the UV-treated plastic (that stays subtle for extended periods of time). It was recommended that they use regular transparent plastic, but that this would need replacing every few months as it becomes brittle or they could use readily available glass panels.

Simple preservation and processing techniques were demonstrated. In Niuatoputapu, participants were more interested in preservation methods such as salting and drying or hot smoking. The most

popular product was fish jerky, especially chilli flavour. A rough market trial was conducted on several persons from cruising yachts in the area and they indicated they would pay 10 pa'anga for 100gm bags of good quality jerky. Locally available materials were encouraged for the formulation of jerky marinades.

In Vava'u 21 participants attended the training: 4 women and 17 men. Three participants were fisheries officers, two were educational officers and fifteen were from the private sector. Vava'u participants were less interested in preservation probably because of the availability of electricity and refrigeration. There was particular interest in smoked fish products and business skills perhaps because of the significant tourist market in Vava'u. The majority of participants were fishermen who appeared less interested than Niuatoputapu participants in value-adding but were very interested in the session on Business Skills which demonstrated how they could increase their profit considerably by value-adding.

Interest in utilising sea plants as a dietary supplement and to help with health ailments was of particular interest to participants in both locations.

Through the training it was obvious that locally-appropriate fish handling, preservation and processing techniques is necessary to improve local business skills. Men and women in rural locations have access to fish and other marine species, which could be developed through proper processing and preservation techniques to facilitate business development and income generation opportunities.



Photo: Tony Chamberlain

Tonga workshop participants