

Assisting coastal communities in the Pacific Islands with alternative sources of livelihood and income

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Introduction

Over the last two years, the International Ocean Institute's Pacific Islands Operational Centre (IOI-PI) and the Marine Studies Programme (MSP) at the University of the South Pacific (USP) in Suva, Fiji, have been supporting integrated rural development in areas where the communities are undertaking resource management activities. IOI-PI and MSP are engaging the communities in the pursuit of alternative sources of livelihood and income. The results are encouraging and worthy of support.

The fact that the communities have demonstrated a commitment to resource management alleviates some of the concern surrounding the nature of engaging partners and collaborators in rural areas. These communities have decided to adopt an integrated and adaptive approach to complement the recovery and rehabilitation of resources taking place in their locally managed marine areas. In addition, the search for alternative sources of livelihood complements the management activities and ensures that the people are improving their living conditions without being tempted to break their management activities.

Women and youth have been specifically targeted in these initiatives because of their potential as community members who can contribute more to upgrading conditions in their areas. In this initiative, support from IOI's Women and the Sea project and from MSP has provided welcome opportunities. The results augur well for the communities and the Pacific Islands in general.

Alternative sources of livelihood

Young people in Malawai, in the tikina (district) of Vanuaso, Gau, in Fiji were the first to undertake the initiative. The villagers expressed their desire to have a cattle farm to ensure a reliable source of cattle. The animals were required during social ceremonies but up to that time had been obtained externally.

The young people were subsistence farmers who relied on the sale of *yaqona* (*Piper methysticum*) and

copra as their main sources of income. The people had a lot of land in the village and wanted an economic activity that would not increase the use of their fisheries resources. In addition, the cattle project would open up new opportunities for food and income. The project would also attempt to protect farmland and the river the people used.

The cattle were put together in a suitable area away from the river and the village. The people provided the land, labour and fence posts, the last of which was the most costly of the required items. The French Embassy provided financial assistance to purchase wire and the stock. On 30 December 2003, the young people took control of the project after the handing-over ceremony, which was officiated by the outgoing French Ambassador, Mr Vidon.

The search for alternative sources of livelihood in coastal communities has been boosted by financial assistance received from IOI's Women and the Sea project. The fund, although small, has allowed communities to get capital they would not otherwise have been able to access because they cannot meet the required conditions. Assistance is given directly to women and youth groups who require a little capital to realise their hope of making a difference. Assistance has been given for a range of activities that attempt to meet the needs of people in different areas. The activities that have been supported include the organisation of gender workshops in the Coral Coast area of Fiji and in Upolu, Samoa; the opening of a women's souvenir shop in Rennell and Bellona, Solomon Islands; the setting-up of a mat-buying venture in Vanuaso, Gau, Fiji; the establishment of a honey-making venture by women and youth in Daku, Kadavu, Fiji; and the recording and sale of CDs and tapes by youth in Naboutini, Cakaudrove and Malawai, Gau in Fiji.

The disbursement of the fund is dependent on the partners who work at the different sites. The partners submit simple proposals, which are taken as requests from the people. Women and youth have been particularly targeted, although the expectation is that whole communities will benefit from the assistance.

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The organisations that have been given support for income-generating activities are being asked to repay the funds they are given. This condition is to allow assessment of the performance of these income-generating activities and to contribute to a revolving fund that can be used to assist other communities.

Future support

Discussions are in progress with other potential local partners in Kiribati, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. The hope is that the Women and the Sea fund can be

made available to coastal groups in these countries. IOI-PI and MSP look forward to receiving proposals from interested local partners.

The partnership seems to be working well. Some of the income-generating projects are beginning to make repayments – which is the real measure of success. These communities have the opportunity to show how well community groups can do with a little financial support and to enjoy the benefits of self-determined development. IOI-PI and MSP are committed to supporting effective community activities that allow local communities to improve their lives.

Cattle project in Malawai, Vanuaso, Gau, Fiji



Left: Mats for sale from Vanuaso women, Gau, Fiji



Right: Printed design from Matangi, Rennell and Bellona, Solomon Islands

Women from Rennell and Bellona with their tie-dyed sulu (lavalava)



Women from Daku Village, Fiji, with their screenprints and pot plants

