

## Driti Women's Tilapia Project

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Driti is a small village in Bua Province, Vanua Levu, Fiji. This isolated village is 140 km from Labasa town. The women of Driti have been successfully involved in tilapia breeding since 2003.

The Fisheries Department introduced tilapia farming into Bua Province in the mid 1980s. A total of 30 farms with several ponds, ranging in size from 100–1000 m<sup>2</sup>, were established during this period. Most of these farms were operating at subsistence level, with tilapia fingerlings supplied free by the government. Production of tilapia was good until 2002 when the supply of fingerlings was stopped.



Satya Nandal, the SPC Aquaculture Officer, helps out the Driti community in setting up the tilapia ponds.

and breeding facilities were built; farms were fenced; and a three-day workshop was held on tilapia hatchery operations and grow-out of tilapia and freshwater prawns.

The achievements to date provide strong evidence that village women can raise tilapia and prawns to meet the needs of their village and can market them efficiently if given the opportunity and support to do so. An important aspect of the project is that people are no longer relying on canned fish, mutton and beef from the village store.

The project opens up the opportunity to pilot other such projects in rural locations for both food and a source of income. It also highlights the important role that women can play in the development of aquaculture in the region. Women are now doing more than their traditional roles of working in gardens and attending to domestic chores; many are now venturing into development enterprises. It is therefore necessary to recognise that women contribute significantly to the social and economic livelihoods of communities. Driti women have proven that, through women's own initiative and hard work, projects such as the tilapia breeding venture can be an important economic activity for the village. The latest record of production was 2.6 tonnes of tilapia, which sold for FJD 9100 (December 2003). With part of the money earned from the project, the women have invested in shares from the Unit Trust of Fiji.

Although the men's group in the village abandoned the project, the changed circumstances did not deter the Driti village women's club; instead this 36-member club sought help for the project.

In 2003 a member of the women's club attended a week-long workshop on tilapia farming, sponsored by the Canada–South Pacific Ocean Development program, at Nausori. The women's club also sought assistance from the University of the South Pacific, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Ministry of Women, and Fisheries Department. With the assistance that was then forthcoming, existing ponds were improved; three new ponds, tank



Community members beside the Driti ponds: this growing community project can be implemented in other areas of Fiji.

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