



Celebrating Women in the Pacific with SPREP

International Women's Day

Inspiring Change for a Better Pacific Environment

Message from SPREP Director General, Mr. David Sheppard

Today we celebrate International Women's Day for 2014. The special day which commemorates women and their efforts around the world first began in 1911. As well as celebrating the economic, social and political achievements of women, International Women's Day is also a time to focus world attention on areas requiring further action.

The theme for 2014 – 'inspiring change' – encourages advocacy for women's advancement everywhere in every way. This provides a good opportunity to celebrate the role of women in Pacific societies.

Here at SPREP, we are proud to be able to celebrate the many different ways that women in the Pacific have helped to inspire change for a better environment. Increasing opportunities for women makes good sense for us at SPREP as sustainable development in the Pacific will not be achieved unless women are fully involved in all aspects of the management and protection of our Pacific environment.

Earlier this year, staff at SPREP nominated over 40 women from the Pacific islands region to be celebrated in this special publication. We sent out a request to all seeking further information so we could celebrate their work, together with you.

We would like to thank all the women who responded to our request, taking the time to fill out the profile questions and above all thank all women in the Pacific for their contributions to inspiring change for a better environment.

Much has been achieved in terms of women's rights and empowerment. A growing number of countries have policies and legislation that support gender equality and reproductive health. Women are also now more likely to participate in senior positions in government. However there is still much that should and must be done to ensure the effective participation of women in Pacific societies.

So today on the occasion of 2014 International Women's Day let us all reflect – with appreciation – on the role of women in the Pacific and at SPREP.

Happy International Women's Day!

Below are the edited profiles of the women who responded to our call, starting with one of our very own at SPREP, Dr. Netatua Pelesikoti. For the full versions of these profiles, please visit www.sprep.org/iwd2014 For more information on International Women's Day visit www.internationalwomensday.com



International
Women's Day



Dr Netatua Pelesikoti, Director Climate Change Division, SPREP

Career Highlights:

I have trained and facilitated national and community stakeholder events to help develop Integrated Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management Action Strategies in the context of national sustainable development plans such as in Tonga, Cook Islands, Tuvalu, Niue, Nauru, Kiribati and the Marshall Islands. I have also developed DRM plans and reviews in Vanuatu, Palau, Solomon Islands and PNG. I am a lead author in IPCC WG 2 – 5th Report – Small Islands chapter.

Overcoming Challenges:

Juggling family obligations with being a working mother and being away from home when the children were young was a real challenge. Now they are young adults I'm still away from home! Luckily I have a very supporting family and extended family network. For this International Women's Day, I would like to remember with fond memories and gratefulness my mother, mother- and sisters-in-law, aunts, grandmothers, and sisters for the roles they played in my life so that I could overcome the challenges I faced.

Words of Wisdom:

Your talents given by God could be used wisely to multiply and support the wellbeing of your family, your community and the people of the Pacific. Demonstrate with hard work and dedication to your profession and be a good role model to young professional Pacific women that you got to where you are with your skills and professional experiences and not through some pre-conceived views of Pacific women held by many people.

Ms. Christina GK Fillmed, Executive Director, Yap State Environmental Protection Agency, Yap State, FSM

Career Highlights:

My career highlights have included a clean-up of a disposal site by the US Coast Guard of a former USCG LORAN site in Yap, removal of derelict marine vessels, establishment of a container deposit recycling program, and rehabilitation of the only public open dump site into a landfill.

Overcoming Challenges:

Throughout the years I have been placed in various situations where I've been made to feel very little for being young or different or as though I was not of the right familial configuration or social status. I have tried many different things to try to overcome this. 'Just be yourself' was the advice I kept going back to but at points I was defensive prematurely rather than being mindful, observant, respectful, and most of all diligent. Diligence, I've been told, taught, and shown by others is best executed quietly and consistently because there is a lot to be said by doing. This is a lesson, task, and responsibility that I have not accomplished or mastered, but struggle with every day.

Words of Wisdom:

I do not think I am in a position to provide advice, genuinely because I see women around me that have more worthwhile and valuable words to impart because of the many things they have accomplished or take steps towards on a daily basis. These can sometimes be small, seemingly petty, but altogether important goals and activities. Everything can be said of you, but nothing can be disproved of what you do. This is one of the key lessons I have found to be true based on the things gathered and learned in my limited experience.



Ms. Titi Gabi, General Manager, PNG Edge

Career Highlights:

I love that my family, friends and relatives are now converts to environmentalism – they are mindful about where they throw their rubbish.

A career highlight is that the community beach clean-up initiative has influenced two other coastal villages to do their own. I have been doing this successfully with any funding from government, provincial governments, regional networks so it proves you can save the planet from just doing. Get up and get it done.

I involved my son's U20 rugby union team in the last cleanup (2012) as a fundraiser – and they were able to buy their shorts and socks and were then called 'eco warriors'.

Words of Wisdom:

To make a difference does not require a lot. Money certainly isn't the deciding factor. It shouldn't be. All it requires is a burning desire to make a difference. Anyone's inspiration to get up and do it should be the joy in the faces of our children and watching them play in a very different environment from the one we had – we had it all. Now let's give them a future to remember us by.

Ms. Ngedikes Olai Uludong, Lead Negotiator of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)

Career Highlights:

- Working to promote public education and awareness on the impacts of climate change to the people of Palau, the Marshall Islands and AOSIS member states.
- Providing summer camps in the northern Pacific to high school students on climate change and environment awareness.
- Helping community organisations apply for projects such as the Go KIO - women's club in RMI and the Adopt the Airport Park project.
- Helping people understand the UNFCCC climate change process at the international level and at the national level helping island communities adapt to climate change.

Overcoming Challenges:

Having to move to New York and being away from my daughter, family and home. This is still a big challenge for me but I believe in prayer, having faith in what I cannot see, doing what I do for my daughter and for all those people who don't know I am doing this for them.

Words of Wisdom:

Get an education, dream big and make it happen!



The Late Tania Temata, Former Deputy Director of the Cook Islands National Environment Service, 19th Feb 1970 - 8th Oct 2012

Tania started working for Cook Islands Government in 1992 for Conservation Service until 2012 for National Environment Service. Below is feedback from her colleagues as we commemorate her achievements to inspire change.

Career Highlights:

- Represented the Asia and Pacific Region as a member of the CBD COP Bureau.
- Organised and coordinated the 7th Pacific Islands Conference for Nature Conservation and Protected Areas held in Rarotonga, Cook Islands in 2002 bringing over 500 people around the Pacific Region.
- Was the Deputy Director for National Environment Service
- Represented the Cook Islands and was a lead negotiator at regional and international conferences stemming from Multilateral Environment Agreements such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, United Nations Framework to the Convention on Climate Change.



Words of Wisdom from Tania:

I have a strong belief that women serve as better stewards of our land, our sea, we understand mother nature, we are mothers after all...I find it easier to talk to women about caring for our environment, they have this maternal instinct about the land and its resources and nurturing it rather than destroying it...Tania Temata. For the Tribute to Tania Temata please [visit this webpage](#).



Akisi Bolabola, volunteer with YWCA and local NGOs

Career Highlights:

Making the decision to work in the environment field; the opportunity to work in government and non-government organisations and explore private corporate engagements; building networks around the country (Fiji), Pacific region and internationally; encouraging volunteerism and; understanding my local communities better than ever, it's all about changing behaviours.

Overcoming Challenges:

Working with a diverse range of individuals and most who are headstrong, it takes patience and understanding perceptions to tackle this sort of challenge.

Words of Wisdom:

At this point in time, everyone should be an environmentalist, it's everybody's business to take care of the environment, so work to win people's hearts and minds, and more importantly change their behaviour to at least care for their natural surroundings, doesn't have to be a forest or a river or stream, it starts at changing basic lifestyles at home.

Ms. Sue Miller Taii, Executive Director, Pacific Islands and Oceanscape Programme, Conservation International

Career Highlights:

I helped found whale watching tourism in Tonga in the early 1990s when few in Tonga thought tourists would pay to see whales and many in Tonga thought this activity quite funny and strange! Whale watching is now the centrepiece of Tonga's tourism and some of the best times of my life have been on the water with Tongans and whales.

I also helped Kiribati secure the world's largest and deepest UNESCO World Heritage site - the Phoenix Islands Protected Area in 2010. I enjoyed working with Kiribati and partners on the region's first large scale MPA for more than eight years. This site is still going strong and is a site which has inspired other Pacific states and the region in the form of the Pacific Oceanscape.

I secured support and worked with communities in the post-tsunami clean up – particularly the in-water clean-up and helped pick up much that had been washed into the sea in Samoa. In the midst of tragedy and loss the human spirit grows strong and resilient.

Words of Wisdom:

What would you do if you were not afraid or lacked confidence... believe in yourself, even pretend to if you can't have self belief, it will come.



Dr. Milika Sobey, Water and Wetlands Program Coordinator, IUCN Oceania Regional Office

Career Highlights:

I was appointed the Regional Project Manager for a project (MESCAL) that was struggling to get off the ground after 16 months and which had undergone several changes in key personnel. To have turned that project around in two years into one that produced some key outputs for the five regional countries in which it was implemented and whose success secured the funding for another major project for the office was very satisfying.

I was also part of the core group that established the Women and Fisheries network in the early 1990's. It is a group that has endeavoured to work with communities and to raise the profile of women's issues in the fisheries sector.

Overcoming Challenges:

Unfortunately because of cultural backgrounds, your worth as a professional female Pacific Islander can often be underestimated. Let your work speak for itself.

Words of Wisdom:

Don't let your career define you as a person. At the end of the day, it's the more important things like your family, values, spirituality and culture that define you.



Ms. Wendy Polo Beti, Environment Officer, Environment and Conservation Division, Ministry of Environment Climate Change Disaster Management and Meteorology, Solomon Islands

Career Highlights:

The fact that our Solomon Islands team won the 'Best Team Award in 2011' for our work under J-PRISM (Japanese Technical Cooperation Project for Promotion of Regional Initiative on Solid Waste Management in Pacific Island Countries) without a technical expert from the Japan International Cooperation Agency was really something special for us.

Overcoming Challenges:

One of the key challenges I faced in my career is the responsibility of being a team leader. I learned over time that one has to put more effort, time and require the support of all in the team in order to achieve whatever tasks or planned activities. I also learned that a team leader can be anybody and one has to understand the situation of each of his or her team players. Without the support of team players, there would be nothing achieved.

Words of Wisdom:

I believe that women are great advocates of the environment and are agents of change if given the change, time and support. I encourage other Pacific women out there to be great leaders in the society and to never give up or give in to any criticism. Criticism should be taken as advice and a way forward to improve further in your career.

Dr. Winifereti Nainoca, Environment Team Leader, UNDP

Career Highlights:

A highlight was being an Executive Committee member for the Fiji Locally Managed Marine Area (FLMMA). This was also a timely privilege since I gained such valuable experience in community conservation work while working with FLMMA partners. I was the Head of School for General Studies (later School of Applied Science) at the Fiji Institute of Technology/FNU from Jan 2003 – Jan 2009, a school through which the NZ Auckland University of Technology's Bachelor of Applied Science was offered. Some of the graduates of this programme now hold responsible positions in the government and in various environmental NGOs and are now my colleagues working together for various environmental initiatives – this is very satisfying and rewarding indeed!

Overcoming Challenges:

Pursuing a career while completing my post graduate qualifications (Masters in Environmental Science with Honors from Australia and PhD in Environmental Planning and Conservation from New Zealand) was a major challenge however this was overcome by a strong faith in God and also a loving and strong support from family, especially my husband.

Words of Wisdom:

All of us women need to know and appreciate the fact that we play such an important role in environmental management and conservation at all levels in the Pacific. Women in villages and settlements know a lot about the ecology of environment and have noticed and understood the consequences of anthropogenic activities on the environment, thus play an important role in environmental management and conservation initiatives at the community level.



Ms. Easter Chu Shing-Galuvao, Biodiversity Adviser, Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP)

Career Highlights:

Working with local communities is something that I always treasure and hold dear to my heart. I was very fortunate to have had many opportunities throughout my career where I was able to work closely with local communities in Samoa on their environment projects. It was through this work that I came to understand and appreciate more the values communities place on the environment not only for livelihood but also the cultural links to the environment.

Playing a key instrumental role in organising the 9th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas which was held in December 2013 in Suva. The organisation of this event was very challenging but the end results were very satisfying. This was the biggest event that I was ever directly involved in and I was glad to have played a great part in it.

Overcoming Challenges:

Creating a balance between work and life can be quite challenging especially when I was trying to raise a young family while at the same time responding to the demands of my work which often requires me to be away from my children. My approach to this was to ensure that I spend good quality time with my family and try and not let my work take over the precious time that I should be spending with my family.



Ms. Nunia Thomas, Director, NatureFiji-MareqetiViti

Career Highlights:

I was NatureFiji-MareqetiViti's first recruit in 2007, managing just one project. Implemented the first island-wide, multi-stakeholder awareness campaign on Taveuni in 2009 in collaboration with the National Trust of Fiji. This led to follow-up projects including the development of the American iguana eradication plan; consultations for the establishment of the Taveuni National Park; and increased awareness within Fiji and internationally of Taveuni's uniqueness and status.

I designed and implemented NatureFiji-MareqetiViti's first forestry related project: Creating Permanent Forest Estates for the benefit of Fiji's people and biodiversity.

Overcoming Challenges:

Maintaining a balance between field-based research and administrative work

– this is an ongoing time management challenge!

Words of Wisdom:

Be an evidence-based individual. Accept and acknowledge criticism – it will only help us grow to be better leaders. It is OK to say no.

Ms. Nafiza Ali, Health Inspector, Nadi Town Council, Fiji

Career Achievements:

The Clean School Program was introduced in 2010 and I have been strongly involved in the preparation of the awareness materials (guidebook, presentations) and promotion of this program to the schools in Nadi. From the implementation of this program, schools in Nadi have shown great improvements in their school environment. The benefit of this program, the success stories and activities of Nadi schools are now being adopted by the other schools in the western division of Fiji (Lautoka, Ba, Tavua, Rakiraki) and the Pacific Island countries (Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu etc).

Overcoming Challenges:

The practice of waste minimisation and recycling (3R) was a new concept for the people and therefore it was really difficult for people to grasp the changes in the waste management system. However behavioral changes were observed in our people after organising a series of meeting and pocket meetings with the community. Educational materials were developed and distributed house-to-house creating awareness on this new concept. Media awareness through television, newspaper and radio also played a vital role in disseminating the information.

Words of Wisdom:

Environmental work is exciting and very challenging. As women we have to be strong and willing to take on challenges. At many occasions we have to sacrifice our personal time and commitment to keep up with our work.



**Anne Rasmussen, Assistant Chief Executive Officer, Global Environment Facility/
Climate Change Advisor, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Samoa**

Career Highlights:

- Supported the Focal points and worked with Agencies to source funding under GEF and other related donors to implement the National Adaptation Program of Action for climate change intervention and also formed the first National Climate Change Summit in 2008 with our former CEO.
- Selected to co-chair the United Nations Framework for the Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) session on Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) on issues relating to national communications and reporting for the Non Annex 1 (Developing) countries.

Overcoming Challenges:

I have found that some people focus on your limitations whether it's your age, gender or past experiences. When I am faced with this I just try to focus on the task ahead, rise above it and know that I was placed on this earth to fulfill a purpose. No matter what we have a calling in whichever field we are placed.

Words of Wisdom:

Just remember you cannot please everyone, you will always meet different people with different perspectives, remain positive and see it from a holistic approach. If you learn to filter and understand the



Dr. Stacy Jupiter, Fiji Country Program Director, Wildlife Conservation Society

Career Highlights:

I led the marine working group of the Fiji national Protected Area Committee (PAC) to develop an innovative approach to reporting on national and international commitments that considers the differential ecological effectiveness of various marine management strategies in a national marine gap analysis for Fiji.

Overcoming Challenges:

When I began work with the Wildlife Conservation Society in Fiji in 2008, WCS did not have very good relationships with other environmental agencies in the country. I worked to develop the WCS Fiji Program's credibility by: (1) listening to valid concerns and criticisms, which I took on board as ways to improve our activities; (2) emphasising with WCS Fiji program staff the need to produce quality products and achieve objectives to high standards; (3) attempting to widen our collaborations

among broader networks of organisations in Fiji and overseas; and (4) defending our strategies with science-based evidence of effectiveness.

Words of Wisdom:

Women often tend to be less hot-headed in their approach, and thus are able to inspire insightful dialogue about issues that can sometimes be contentious. Pacific women should use this to our advantage in easing conflicts and building bridges between communities, governments and civil society.

Ms. Premila Chandra, Senior Assistant Health Inspector, Nadi Town Council

Career Highlights:

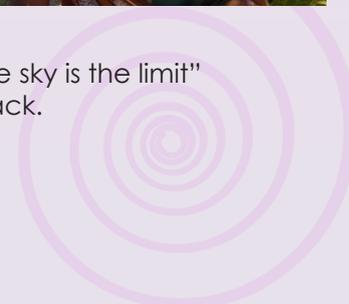
A highlight has been being actively involved in the Waste Management and Recycling Promotion Pilot Project of the Government of Fiji that was conducted in Nadi Town Council and Lautoka City Council, which has given me the opportunity to share this knowledge, data and experience with our counterparts at both national and regional level.

Overcoming Challenges:

I was the only female staff member in the Health Department of the Council from the time I joined the organisation in 1992. I showed that I can work equally as strong as my male counterparts by working side-by-side with them in my every day work.

Words of Wisdom:

Choosing a career in the environmental field is very exciting as we become very innovative to counter the challenges as time evolves. Like the saying goes "The sky is the limit" therefore we all have the capabilities to achieve our goals in life without looking back.





Agnetha Vave-Karamui, Chief Conservation Officer, Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology, Solomon Islands Government.

Career Highlights:

In 2011 we conducted the first ever Solomon Islands Provincial Government's Environment Roundtable – bringing in Nine Provincial Premiers or representatives and the Honiara City Mayor. This was a sector-forum to discuss our Provinces can assist national government in implementing and promoting community based resource management and also to have dialogue on opportunities for learning and sharing about new emerging issues and concepts.

Overcoming Challenges:

Looking at the bigger picture (global and national issues) and working with the community is always challenging. With limited technical and financial capacity by governments, I believe partnerships with NGOs, CBOs, academic institutions, tribal leaders and resource persons to implement the various programs are useful. I highly appreciate the various mechanism and protocols developed by the Ministry to ensure that communities have an opportunity to drive our national priorities and agendas. There are several community-based resource management guidelines, protocols and frameworks developed by various partners that I refer to for guidance in dealing with this challenge.

Words of Wisdom:

Working in the environment and conservation sector is a challenging but noble one, especially in the Pacific context. With our forests, oceans, rivers and streams, being the primary source of our heritage, food and livelihoods, our environmental concerns, strategies and government policies must be coined to include peoples needs and realities. This is not an easy task – this needs leadership, commitment, consistency and teamwork and trust. Increasing biodiversity losses from our islands, deforestations, destructive developmental practise, rising sea levels, invasive species and waste management etc are environmental issues facing our Region and must be advocated for. I salute women before us, our great grandmothers and mothers, who have instilled in us patience, goodwill and care to stand and assist in providing advice, information, skills and knowledge to our schools, communities and our governments to address these problems. I further praise women in the Pacific who paved so many paths for us young women today in this sector. The onus is on us – as one saying goes 'words are just words: they must be put to action.' We must continue to inspire change in our families, workplace, communities, governments, region and the world and importantly women of tomorrow. This is our challenge!

Brianna Fruean, Environmental Leader and Activist, Small Voices of Samoa

Career Highlights:

I have been doing community work since I was nine years old. I've been fortunate enough to rally large groups of people to do tree planting, beach clean-ups and carpooling.

I have also got students from as early as pre-schoolers to University level to start their own green projects such as composting, energy saving and planting sustainable vegetable gardens.

Overcoming Challenges:

My age has always been the biggest challenge. I find that some people have a hard time taking me seriously but that challenge has never stopped me. Whenever someone says no, I go to the next person and ask for their support or I give it a rest for a while then ask again. I never stop knocking on doors. The worst thing they can do is say "No". I just ask the next person or ask them again next week.

Words of Wisdom:

I always believe and have said this many times, Change starts with you, however little it maybe, it's a start and no matter how young or old you are. My first community work was just myself, my four friends and my parents and sister with our homemade banners but we did it and we've come a long way. Through the years I've had people say no to me but that never stopped me it just made me work even harder. If you want to make a difference, be the change that you want to see.

