

## **Media: Critical Player In The Conservation of The Pacific's Marine World**

### **Introduction**

In the Pacific the media interacts daily with its people, traditional owners of coral reefs; playing a key role in educating, informing and empowering them: a necessary relationship in the conservation of the Pacific's marine world.

### **Melanesia**

Melanesia is one of the three groups of islands in the Pacific – the other two being Polynesia and Micronesia. Melanesia consists of Fiji, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, Solomon Islands, and Papua New Guinea with New Caledonia a protectorate of the French government. Melanesian culture, as much as Polynesia and Micronesia, is historically tied to the ocean and marine life, a connection which remains strong today. Most coastal communities in Melanesia are traditional owners of fishing grounds.

### **Common coral initiative that cuts across Melanesia**

- **Marine Protected Areas** – MPA is a term that would define the protection of marine areas, and I stand here proudly to say that this is carried out across Melanesia, one common denominator in this equation of coral conservation. MPA in some places is known as SPA (Specially Protected Area), MR (marine reserve), MP (Marine Park), NTZ (No Take Zone), or ASC (Area of Special Conservation). A recent study by Nature Conservancy concluded that restoration of local resources, fisheries or coral reefs increase fish catch, economic opportunities, improve community health, and directly reduces poverty. (I will come back to this later in my presentation).

### **Work on Coral Reefs in Melanesia**

#### **Fiji**

An archipelago of 362 islands scattered in 200,000 square miles of ocean where coastal communities make up 60 per cent of the population

#### ❖ MPA

- Fiji aims to have 30 per cent of the country's in-shore fisheries declared Marine Protected Area (MPA) by 2020. To date there are more than 200 marine protected areas within Fiji's 410 customary fishing grounds, known as i qoliqoli.
- In Fiji MPAs are monitored by fish wardens or reef police. The wardens are the villagers from coastal communities or villages. The Fisheries Act, gives these trained fish wardens powers to seize catch, boats and fishing equipment of anyone caught fishing illegally in MPAs. But they do not have the powers to arrest the fishermen.

#### ❖ Great Reef or Cakaulevu

❖ Studies by University of the South Pacific

**Vanuatu**

- ❖ 9 MPA - Chiefs and their people set aside an area of village-owned reef to be considered 'tabu' or off-limits. Volunteer MPA representatives conduct reef surveys, plant corals and run ongoing environmental awareness in these areas.

**Solomon Islands**

- ✓ MPA
  - ✓ Coral Triangle/PNG
    - The coral reefs in the area are a source of livelihood and a source of regional economy with money in circulation reaching US\$2.3 billion a year. The initiative aims to conserve and sustainably manage coastal and marine areas within the triangle region. (Dr Jane Mogina elaborated on this coral triangle)
- **Papua New Guinea** (Dr Jane Mogina)

**The chain Corals, Pacific People and Journalists**

- **Corals**
  - Also known as the Amazon of the Seas, it is rich, colourful and magical beauty. The Amazon means exotic plants, animals, so as the corals that we have in the Melanesian countries – luxuriant, thick, colourful, and just sheer beauty.
  - Coral gardens attract tourism - islanders now know that people are willing to pay to fly over to their island homes and view their corals earning their communities money to pay for their education, medical, food and so forth.
  - Savings Bank – it is one place where fish multiply setting the pace for healthy supply of food to the people. Healthy corals breed healthy food for islanders to take from. Poverty eradication.
  - Islands - This I think we all know, corals are eaten by fish creating sand, which make up islands.
- **Journalists**
  - Heritage – Journalists one way or the other identify themselves with the sea, corals – either they are traditional owners of the fishing rights, or have some association with these areas –or the traditional owners. End of the day, a great party of their identity and traditional obligation as Pacific islanders lie with these corals, nature.
  - Traditional knowledge

- **Coastal Communities/landowners**

- Gender mainstreaming – it is a difficult word if we are to say it in the context of coral conservation – but it is just another word defining the roles that gender play in our coastal communities. If we can identify the individual roles that our women and men play in the conservation of their corals, we are making work lighter for our people, we are avoiding any overlapping.
- Most of our Melanesia women are the coastal ‘managers’, they wade the waves, they collect shellfish, they collect fish and they wander in the coral garden every day in their traditional role of being mothers and caregivers to their family.
- These coastal areas are so affected by land pollution for all our 8million people that live in the Pacific Ocean. So there has to be a holistic approach to the land management, coastal protects and gender awareness.

- **Media**

- **Current role**

- ✓ Mirror - in the battle ground of politics every now and again the leaders will look to the media to gauge their performance. Some of them will not like what they see while some will jump for joy. But that is the reality – it is the Fourth Estate and word the media use matter to the people.
- ✓ Marine and Coral Reporting in the Pacific – at the moment newsrooms in Fiji or any Pacific Islands country are mere couriers, runners that relay honest information to the people. Newsrooms are only brought to the attention of any conservation work be it in corals or any other, when they want publicity. Journalists cover the launching, the signing of MOUs, the training programmes etc.
- ✓ Most conservation groups prefer to write the features or lengthy stories for the local newspapers because they feel that they have a better understanding of their work than a journalist.

- **Proposed Role**

- ✓ Pre ‘coral’ work
  - Training – and this where I step in as coordinator of a media network in the Pacific islands region to identify the need for special training. Journalists need to have a sense of belonging to this work, the conservation of our marine world. They have to be recognised by conservation, scientists, government and experts that they have a critical role of educating and

informing the coastal managers, coastal communities, villagers, wardens and so forth.

- In order to have a marine protected area commitments have to be shown by both the government and the coastal communities, but in most places government are seen as bureaucratic, and at times very suspicious of their motives. Even though the initiative is noble, in most cases, the villagers do not see it that way. But if the media is part of the campaign they come in as a peacemaker, they deliver the noble initiatives via their columns.

✓ During 'coral' work

- Coverage

✓ Post coral work

- Evaluate and report – donors, or funders will obviously want to know how their project is getting on. The world will want to know how those corals are doing, so when the newsroom is involved in the project they do not wait to be told, they will go and do their own evaluation, being a mirror again.

## **Conclusion**

The conservation of the marine world must include the media. In the conservation of any natural resource, it must be inclusive; it must include the caretakers of this land and it must include the media to create that awareness. Pacific WAVE Media Network is the fruition of Pacific media women's vision that to advance the Pacific communities is to educate their local media, for they have a natural bond - they speak the same language, share the same culture, breathe the same air and take food from the same ocean.