

Women's Empowerment Workshop Report

June 6- 7th 2013
Naruwai, Dama Bua



Photo: Participants outside the workshop venue in Naruwai © Akanisi Caginitoba, WCS

Funded by the Flora Foundation

Introduction

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) sees the development of environmentally – friendly economic activities as a means of empowering women to diversify their source of income to reduce pressure on natural resources. A Women’s empowerment workshop was held in Naruwai village in the district of Dama in Bua Province from the 6-7th of June, 2013. The main objectives of the workshop were:

- Developing business skills for women
- Envisioning the type of business they want
- Financial planning
- Developing a business plan
- Identifying barriers to sustainable businesses (e.g. cultural/gender, practical barriers)
- Empowering and fostering leadership amongst women
- Creating support networks for women with businesses

The workshop agenda and participants list can be seen in the Appendix to this report.

The Women’s Empowerment workshop invitation was extended to women who were known to the Provincial Office as having already established some kind of business. These women were from all 9 districts in Bua and their businesses include kuta weaving (round or straight mats), coconut oil (*sinusinu*), virgin coconut oil and other handicrafts made from pandanus, kuta or coconut frond. A total of 30 women from the districts of Wainunu, Nadi, Solevu, Vuya, Dama and Lekutu attended the workshop.

Participants brought samples of their products to the workshop, including a round kuta mat, ornamental bird nests made from coconut fronds and a necklace, bracelet and broach set made from kuta. Several also brought prototypes or unfinished products, including baskets made from a vine (*Wa me*) and bags made from Kuta.

Genesis of the businesses

The workshop began with a general discussion on how and why the participants started their business and chose their specific products. Some of the main points arising were:

The women have generally been producing one-off items to order (for gifts and for sale) or to raise income for specific occasions such as a church or community function. They aspired to turn these into businesses that generate income, but felt that they lacked the knowledge, skills and confidence to do so.

Art & Craft businesses were generally chosen because materials were readily available and easy to collect/preserve. The ladies already had the skills to make the products and felt that the work (harvesting, drying and weaving) was manageable.

Honey businesses started as a result of bee hives being provided by the Dpt. of Agriculture, Dpt. Women and Social Welfare and by Partners in Community Development Fiji. The Bee Farmers Association in Labasa also provided training in basic bee-keeping, but they lack the ability to turn these resources and skills into profitable businesses. The hives are considered to be low maintenance and the process of honey production is relatively manageable within their daily schedule.

A strong motivation for kuta weavers was that their businesses contribute to a longstanding tradition of women in Bua, who are well known for making kuta mats (straight, round and other shapes). They want to maintain and pass these skills on to younger generations.

Identifying challenges

Challenges were broadly similar across the 3 groups, with the main ones identified as:

1. Perceived lack of available markets to sell their finished products. Most were made to order, but these can often fall through for a variety of reasons:
 - customers do not have the money to buy;
 - the price was not agreed in advance and cannot be settled upon at the point of sale; and
 - sometimes a relative will just take the product without paying (although they may pay later).
2. Transporting the goods to market can be prohibitively expensive. This is particularly the case for honey, which can be sold in Labasa.
3. A lack of proper packaging materials (such as bottles for honey) and labeling.
4. A general lack of support from within families and communities.



Participants outlined their daily routines, recording the respective time spent on various commitments to their families, communities and their businesses. They went on to highlight the main ways in which they can address these challenges themselves.

Photo: Participants share their daily routine, including the time they spend on different activities including running their businesses © Akanisi Caginitoba, WCS

Addressing challenges

Participants suggested the following ways in which they can address the major challenges they face:

Building self confidence

This was a recurring theme throughout the workshop. Women were at first reluctant to present their products, but after encouragement from more confident participants, some managed to do so. The group provided constructive criticism to inform learning and identify areas for improvement.

As well as seeking to build their confidence, the sessions encouraged self-analysis and constructive criticism amongst participants as a means to support confidence building in future.



Addressing traditional/cultural barriers

Unforeseen social obligations such as funerals or church fundraising drives can require women to give away the products that they intended to sell.

It was suggested that participants prepare and account for additional products that they could give in such circumstances without affecting their business.

Photo: An incomplete sample of a kuta handicraft product © Akanisi Caginitoba, WCS

Business skills

Most of the participants had only considered their businesses from a production perspective and acknowledged the need to develop their basic business knowledge and skills.

To help frame this challenge, they looked at describing their products, the packaging, promotion/publicity and pricing and focused on developing their understanding of these '4 Ps'. During the workshop, participants demonstrated an understanding of these key concepts in relation to their own businesses. The next stage is for them to apply this understanding in a structured approach to developing their businesses. This should involve undertaking market research and identifying how they can improve the 4Ps for their particular businesses in order to make their products more marketable and profitable.

It was suggested that participants would all benefit from developing a marketing plan for their businesses.

Basic communication and leadership skills

Several participants had previously received some leadership training from the Pacific Centre for Peacebuilding, but felt unable to implement this in their everyday lives. Greater confidence and better communication skills were identified as the missing foundation required for them to become community leaders.

To address this, the women highlighted their need to become more engaged in village and district-level management processes to build their confidence as communicators. The more vocal participants suggested that women need to be proactive in seeking such opportunities, actually requesting the opportunity to speak and participate at meetings, workshops and other occasions - using this experience and supporting each other to further develop their confidence as communicators and leaders.



Photo: Women present their ideas and details of their businesses at the workshop, developing their confidence as communicators and local leaders © Akanisi Caginitoba, WCS

Management of time and money

Most participants were unused to managing money and many do not have a bank account. Many had little experience of formal budgeting or even budgeting at a household level, where rationing provisions is more focused on a daily cycle.

Participants highlighted a need to set aside time for their business amongst other competing priorities and also discussed the value that they place on the time they spend working on something. Many had not considered this in pricing their products and acknowledged the need to do so in order to become viable businesses.

Product quality and development

The workshop highlighted a need to ensure the quality finishing of products in order to meet customer expectations (particularly for the tourist market) and in some cases to justify a higher price. Participants sought to use other local women as 'critical friends' in this regard, highlighting the 'team-leader' model used by the local kuta-weaving groups for this purpose.

Opportunities for diversification of products were also discussed, highlighting potential for additional products that may add significant value to businesses. These included coconut soap (alongside coconut oil) kuta items which are highly sought-after in Tonga (short mats used in traditional costume) and bees' wax as a bi-product for hair removal & skin treatment (Spas & other locally-based companies are currently importing wax from China).

Conclusions

Participants started the workshop with little or no knowledge of basic business concepts. Once these had been introduced, they were able to consider their businesses in a different light – as businesses rather than occasional sources of income.

The ladies went on to outline their business aspirations, define goals, and identify challenges and opportunities. They reported having gained confidence, particularly in their ability to communicate about their businesses, and had more clearly defined what their business is and how they can make it profitable.

Therefore, whilst participants did not progress to developing financial or business plans they do now have a solid foundation from which to develop sustainable businesses.

Next steps

WCS will organise further workshops that to address specific skills needs (market research, pricing and financial planning), support development of individual business plans or marketing plans (providing a basic template covering products, packaging, promotion/publicity, pricing and markets) and provide practical assistance for businesses to identify/access markets.



The participants wish to extend their biggest Vinaka Vakalevu to Clare-Diane Giraldeau who was the main workshop facilitator and the Vanua of Naruwai for proving such wonderful hosts.

Appendix 1. Women's Empowerment Workshop Agenda

Thurs 6th - Fri 7th June 2013

Time	Topics Titles	Activities/Purpose
DAY 1 JUNE 6TH 2013		
11.30am	Welcome Introduction of workshop's purpose	Presentation to special guests (influential men) It's important to get their support
12.30	What are your expectations?	Group exercise
LUNCH BREAK		
14.00	Earning revenue vs. being in business	Presentation & group exercise & recap
15.30 to 17.00	Manage time, manage money, manage your life... let's work it out	Tell us your daily schedule Group & individual exercise
DINNER BREAK		
19.00.....	Building Self-confidence for women	Talanoa informal session
DAY 2 JUNE 7TH 2013		
8.30	Challenges of traditions/culture	Ref. Talanoa & group exercise
10.00	Marketing tools 4Ps for products/services	Presentation
MORNING TEA		
10.30 To 1pm	Everyone produces a marketing project Products description, Packaging, Promotion/Publicity, Pricing,	Participants will actually do their own 4P's They will prepare their project
LUNCH		
2.00	Learning basic communication skills & Leadership skills	Tell us about your products
4.00	Networking funding for increasing revenue	If needed will continue after dinner/
GROUP DINNER		

Appendix 2. List of workshop participants.

Name	Village	Ph #	business
Emā Rarogo	Navakasali	7801183	Handicrafts & mats
Mita Malo	Nasawana	9821181	Handicrafts, kuta & mats
Mersiana Ate	Sawani	7376657	Handicrafts
Laisa Lewanavanua	Navakasali	8649213	Handicrafts & mats
Alanieta Draudrau		8396798	Handicrafts & mats
Jowana Tokalaulala	Namulomulo	7121889	Handicrafts & mats
Siowana Dimasei	Naruwai	9514292	Handicrafts
Vani Dimate	Naruwai	8751614	Handicrafts
Nunia Loga	Naruwai	7170038	Handicrafts
Adi Vani	Naruwai	9146483	Handicrafts
Susana Liga	Naruwai	8482805	Handicrafts
Leba Masi	Navunievu	8499677	Handicrafts, kuta & mats
Mereani Vuvuni	Bua	7174693	handicrafts, kuta,mats, baskets
Merewalesi Kabu	Bua	7174693	handicrafts, kuta,mats, baskets
Kinisimere Donu	Naruwai	9053392	Handicrafts, kuta & mats
Ateca Samuwai	Cogea	8649213	Handicrafts, canteen
Losena Batulele	Vuya	8342581	Food seller,market vendor
Maria Drekece	Vuya		chicken coop, vegetable garden
Brooke McDavid	Vuya	7420249	chicken coop, vegetable garden
Varanisese Nailawe	Naruwai		
Seleima Dreunikarawa	Daria		kuta & mat weaving, sewing, baking
Katarina Berababa	Kavula		small canteen
Akesa Sita	Kavula	8292067	Handicraft, kuta weaving
Seruwaia Nasuva	Kavula	8500752	small canteen
Lusiana Baleisuva	Kavula	8500752	Womens Honey Project
Tokasa Turaga	Naruwai	9800324	Handicrafts, kuta & mats
Sereima Rokowati	Dama	7676357	Handicrafts, kuta & mats
Inise Viniana	Nabouwalu	8283701	Handicrafts
Silivia Marama	Banikea		Handicrafts, kuta & mats
Elenoa Raibe	Banikea		Handicrafts, kuta & mats