



## Women in fisheries profiles

### Tooreka Teemari

Tooreka Teemari was born on Maiana Atoll in the Gilbert Island group in the Republic of Kiribati. She has fond memories of her early childhood living near the sea with her mother, older brother and younger sister.

She moved to Betio in South Tarawa when she was quite young. Her father worked as a seaman so the whole family relied heavily on gleaning as a source of protein. She recalls going out at low tide to glean, and then swimming with her brother and sister among the mangrove roots.

Tooreka holds a Master of Science degree in Marine Science and Resources Management from the National Taiwan Ocean University, and a Bachelor of Science from the University of the South Pacific in Fiji. She is the Director for the Coastal Fisheries Division at the Kiribati Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources Development, overseeing the development of coastal fisheries, mariculture and aquaculture. Since joining the Ministry in 2014, she has gained extensive 'hands-on' experience with market chains, including fisheries harvesting, post-harvest processing, value-adding and sales. In addition to fisheries, she has worked on climate change issues in Kiribati throughout her career, and led a project for the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation after Cyclone Pam in 2015 to restore community livelihoods on Arorae Atoll by providing training on value-adding of fish products through drying and smoking techniques. The project assisted people on Arorae to better prepare for future disasters by ensuring there is enough food available that will not spoil quickly.

Tooreka sits and advises on a number of project committees, including the United Nations Development Programme-funded 'Enhancing Food Security in the face of Climate Change'; the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade-funded 'Tobwan Waara', which focuses on coastal fisheries development and sustainable management; and the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research Pathways project on community-based fisheries management

to improve the wellbeing of coastal communities through more productive and resilient fisheries and better food and nutrition security. She is a member of the Scientific Advisory Committee that oversees all research, monitoring and data relating to the conservation of marine and terrestrial resources in the Phoenix Island Protected Area, and is the Secretariat to the National Task Force for Coastal Adaptation Project, which was established to advance access to climate finance to protect Kiribati's coastal areas from climate change impacts.

In Kiribati, 30–40% of the land and inshore waters are owned by communities through traditional tenure. Tooreka explains that: 'A community-based management framework is critical for natural resource management in Kiribati. I envision a better future for our people that involves communities managing their own resources. Given that our natural resources are critical to our wealth and health, involving communities will ensure that people are committed to putting in place the best management measures and strategies.' She further explains that: 'In terms of I-Kiribati traditions, every decision was historically made by chiefs and unimwanes (elders), but this practice has been slowly diminishing. I believe by relighting this ember and focusing on coastal fisheries management, we will all be rewarded with sustainable livelihoods and a rich abundance of fish for both current and future generations to come.'

Asked why the engagement of women in fisheries management important to her? She answered 'I find it important to have women involved because it is women's nature to care and nurture. If engaged in discussions, they will be highly committed to looking after their fisheries. Engaging women means everyone in the whole community will benefit.'

