

JICA Fiji Office



Seema Chand (left)
Program Officer

In Fiji, the ocean is an integral part of daily life. The Pacific Island nation is comprised of about 322 islands and a surrounding Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of about 1.3 million square kilometers. JICA Fiji coordinates with other eight Pacific Island countries, helping improve the lives of the people while ensuring sustainable development to safeguard the marine resources.

Ms. Tavaiqia, who has been working with JICA since 2012 is supporting Pacific nations' quest for sustainable fisheries. In 2013, she joined fisheries officials and local community leaders from Tonga, Vanuatu, and Fiji for a workshop on marine protected areas and coastal resource management co-organized by JICA and the Fiji Locally Managed Marine Areas (FLMMA) Network. After visiting villages in Fiji to observe FLMMA activities such as eco-tourism projects and a sea cucumber ranch, Ms. Tavaiqia said, "JICA works with our partners to help villagers use marine resources wisely, while finding the delicate balance between maintaining traditional practices and striving for economic progress."

In the Pacific Islands, many projects are related to maritime development. Ms. Chand is currently working on an infrastructure project in Tuvalu to replace a sea-going vessel. The vessel is designed for fisheries research and training but it can also be used for emergency transportation between nine atolls spread across 680 kilometers. "We have faced setbacks in the management, operation, and maintenance of the vessel and port facilities," she says. "JICA also provides technical cooperation, and my role is to help the Japanese experts and their local counterparts work together to achieve smooth technology transfer."

Last year, Ms. Chand visited Kiribati. It was three years after a Grant Aid Project for the expansion of the Betio Port started. "I saw the large concrete jetty far ahead striking out from the edge of Betio, with a large cargo ship berthed to its end." Ms. Chand said she could

Adi Varanise Tavaiqia (right)
Program Officer

sense the social impact of the increase in the number of cargo ships calling at Betio when she witnessed the expanded variety of goods in the shops. "It was a pleasant moment. I felt proud of myself for being part of JICA projects that boost the well-being of the people."

Having worked at the JICA Fiji office, which liaises with other Pacific nations to understand their needs, Ms. Tavaiqia and Ms. Chand recognize that human resource development is one of the most important issues in the marine and fisheries sectors. JICA and the University of the South Pacific (USP) School of Marine Studies co-hosted a Symposium on Future International Cooperation and Human Resources Development in Marine Science and Fisheries in January as the lead-up to the 8th Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM8) to be held in May of this year in Japan. "The building of the School of Marine Studies at USP was constructed two decades ago using Japanese ODA. Since then, they have contributed to marine science development, and now we are enhancing research partnerships and networking with Japanese universities in the marine science and fisheries fields," explained Ms. Tavaiqia. The future prospects of international cooperation and human resource development in the Pacific Islands will also be a key topic in the forthcoming PALM8.

"Japanese assistance can be described in two words; quality and self-help," said Ms. Tavaiqia. "Infrastructure constructed by top-notch Japanese engineers through ODA is high-quality and designed to suit the local environment. The Japanese regard for self-help is demonstrated in the way that technical advice and training are given so that the people here become better equipped to address issues on their own." Ms. Chand added, "I believe that the national staff are the backbone of JICA and that we are as accountable for the outcomes of the project as our international partners are. I look forward to opportunities to play a leading role as a career woman so that we can reap the benefits of this assistance."