

EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH COMMUNITY-BASED FISHERIES MANAGEMENT IN KIRIBATI: A GENDER-INFORMED APPROACH

Toaiti Vanguna*

Community-Based Fisheries Management (CBFM) Officer, Kiribati Ministry of Fisheries
and Ocean Resources (MFOR)

*toaitiv@mfor.gov.ki

The Community-Based Fisheries Management (CBFM) Project, implemented under the Ministry of Fisheries and Ocean Resources (MFOR) in Kiribati and funded by ACIAR in collaboration with the University of Wollongong, was initiated in 2014. Its primary focus was on introducing CBFM and supporting the development of fisheries management plans using a bottom-up approach.

I joined the project in 2019 during its second phase under ACIAR Project FIS-2016-300 “*Strengthening and Scaling Community-Based Approaches to Pacific Coastal Fisheries Management in Support of the New Song.*” At this stage, the program expanded to reach 16–20 additional communities across the islands of Kiribati.

Currently, in the third phase under ACIAR Project FIS-2020-172 “*Coalitions for Change in Sustainable National CBFM Programs in the Pacific,*” the project is advancing towards the formalisation and legalisation of fisheries management plans.

Throughout my involvement in this work, gender inclusion has been a central priority. By designing inclusive consultation processes such as advocating for flexible meeting times and organizing sex- and age-based group discussions, the program ensures that women and youth actively participate in fisheries planning and community decision-making.

Some key highlights of CBFM initiatives in Kiribati include the establishment of Women’s Associations in several island communities. These associations have supported the implementation of village fisheries management plans by:

- Encouraging compliance with Marine Protected Areas by reminding their husbands not to fish inside restricted zones.
- Organising weekly beach clean-ups.
- Introducing home gardening and vegetable cultivation for households.
- Taking leadership roles in preparing communities to receive government or NGO visits.

These efforts demonstrate the critical role of women in strengthening community fisheries management, promoting environmental stewardship, and enhancing household livelihoods.