

Rauti Para Project Rakahanga 2015



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Acknowledgements

Thank you to the Adaptation Fund through SRIC CC for solely funding this stage of the Rauti Para Tablet Training in the Northern Group islands of Rakahanga and Manihiki.

We thank the Mayor Mr NetiTarau and the Island Council for welcoming and hosting the Rauti Para project on Rakahanga. To the EO and SRIC CC Focal Point Mr Nga Takai with the administration staff for organising all logistic arrangements for the training.

'Meitaki korereka' and our heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to the caterers for providing the fantastic lunches for the workshop and to all the people of Rakahanga for the warm hospitality, great friendships and for supporting the Rauti Para project.

Finally, we extend our gratitude and a 'Meitaki Korereka' to our host papa Takai Hagai for accommodating and taking good care of us.

Meitaki Korereka!



Photos provided by Apolo and Mahiriki Pihou Tupou

Introduction

The Rauti Para Project Team finally landed at Rakahanga harbour on Wednesday 13th May after a two and a half hour rough crossing from Manihiki. On arrival, the team was greeted by the island Mayor Mr Temu Tarau who escorted the team to the island government centre where the people were waiting with a big kaikai ready to welcome the team. After the formalities and lunch, the team had a meeting with the Island Council to discuss and confirm the program for the training. This was the last leg of the Rauti Para Tablet Training in the Northern Group which was solely funded by the Adaptation Fund through the SRIC CC programme and implemented by Climate Change Cook Islands and ICT, both divisions from the Office of the Prime Minister and the NGO Rauti Para Kumiti.

Background

According to oral traditions, '*Tapua'hua*' meaning up growth of coral was the traditional name of Rakahanga given by the warrior navigator *Huku* who discovered the coral up growth and laid claim to it. He made a few visits at the growth stages of the coral and on one of his visits he left his sister *Tapairu* and husband *Toa* to populate the island. Stories are told of regular crossings to Manihiki to forage for food until the arrival of the missionaries who discouraged the practice and encouraged the people to settle permanently on the two islands because canoes were getting lost at sea. Prehistoric stories told of a large population close to four thousand living on the tiny islet called '*Kainga*'.



Motu 'Kainga' pictured in the background on the left, Rakahanga students learning reef monitoring (Photo by Teina Rongo)

The people settled on this tiny islet to shelter from the natural elements particularly the strong easterly winds. Settling on this small islet was also a defence strategy against invading enemies since the only access is via the channel that is visible from a distance. It was told that the occupants of Rakahanga would venture to the other *motus* including Manihiki to forage for food and then return to the '*Kainga*' for the night.

Rakahanga is a raised coral atoll with a rectangular shape of nine islets encapsulating a total land area of 4.1square kilometres. The highest point is less than five metres above sea level with a reef circumference of 13 kilometres. Main vegetation is coconut trees, pandanus, *tamanu*, *toa*, *ngangie* and breadfruit. Stable root crops are mainly *taro* and *puraka* with the recent introduction of *maniota* (arrowroot). At one stage there was an attempt to develop a hydroponics which is still waiting to be completed. The people depend on fish as the main source of protein which sometimes is supplemented with pigs or chicken at special occasions.



Source: <http://www.cookislands.org.uk/rakahanga.html#.VXne9mL3CM8>

Population Trend

The earliest record of the population only goes as far as 1902 to which the table below show a steady decline in the population since then. However, the sudden plummet in 2011 clearly indicate the lack of economic activity as one of the major contributing factor to the decline.

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Source: Census Report 2011

Through the SRIC CC programme the Rakahanga outboard motors project was approved and implemented in 2014 to provide five outboard motors, one for each of the five villages on the island for fishing. The initiative was to generate economic activity by producing dried fish for the Rarotonga market which Rakahanga is renowned to make the best dried fish products in the Cook Islands.

Transport

Distance from mainland Rarotonga is 1,248kms with the closest island Manihiki of 44 kilometres. Main mode of transport to and from Rakahanga since the destruction of its airport by hurricane Martin in 1997 is by outboard motor boats from Manihiki or the regular shipping service which can be once in three or four months.

Objectives of the Rauti Para Project

There are three components to this project:

1. To deliver Tablet training
2. To receive feedback on the climate change indicators documentary
3. To promote climate change awareness

Tablet Training

The Cook Islands national vision of *'Te Kaveinga Nui'* elaborates the desire of the government of the Cook Islands... *'to enjoy the highest quality of life consistent with the aspirations of our people, and in harmony with our culture and environment'*. This dream is further echoed in the Cook Islands National Sustainable Development Plan 2011 – 2015 under *Goal 5: Resilient and Sustainable Communities*, and *Goal 6: Environment for Living*. The Climate & Disaster Compatible Development policy 2013 – 2016 also mirrors these views through its strategic objectives of building *'...climate and disaster resilient development...'* as well as *'building capacity of people through education and training'*. The tablet training for the mature-aged population in the *Pa Enua* aims to address some of these ambitions. Since the mature-aged remain in the *Pa Enua* with some caring for their grandchildren, it becomes a priority to up-skill these seniors as in this instant they are the lifeline for the survival and sustainability of their particular island, their culture, and their future generations. Although they possess local and traditional knowledge and practices that have worked in the past, their knowledge and skills may not be sufficient to meet or overcome the impacts of climate change. Thus, introducing them to accessible information via the tablet will allow seniors to build upon their existing knowledge and practices. The training will certainly open new horizons for them to communicate with their families and friends living abroad while encouraging the sharing of information.

The Rauti Para project is a valuable and an historical moment for seniors in the *Pa Enua* as previous computer training have focused largely on Rarotonga; the *Pa Enua* are often overlooked due to funding restrictions. It is arguable that the existence and future survival of these islands may not depend on government or foreign aid, but rather on the ability of the *Pa Enua* seniors to interweave their traditional knowledge and practices with new knowledge that will ensure a more resilient population to both economic hardship and particularly the impacts of climate change.

Documentary on climate change indicators

Documenting the experiences of seniors are useful to capture their thoughts and lifetime skills and local knowledge that otherwise will be lost. The video documentary was shown to the community in order to get their feedback on the information presented from their island to ensure the relevance of the information.

Climate Change Awareness

The climate change awareness component is very important for the *Pa Enua* (outer islands) as they are at the receiving end of the adverse impacts of climate change. Therefore, sharing information, discussing climate change issues and helping the communities understand climate change in Maori is assisting to build capacity and resilience against the adverse impacts of climate change.

Delegation

Team leader was Dr Teina Rongo the Climate Change Advisor, Celine Dyer both from Climate Change Cook Islands and Mitchell Tutangata from ICT, both divisions from the Office of the Prime Minister.



Mitchell Tutangata, Celine Dyer, and Dr Teina Rongo

Methodology

The tablet introduction workshop was conducted over three days. Those in the Rauti Para category were taken by Celine Dyer whilst Mitchell Tutangata took the rest of the class. The Rauti Para climate change documentary was also shown to the community to receive community feedback and endorsement of the information that was presented. Climate change awareness presentations were held in Maori by Dr Teina Rongo. Dr Rongo also spent time at the school to talk on climate change with the senior students and teach them to do reef monitoring.

Logistics

All logistics were organised by Celine Dyer from Climate Change Cook Islands, Akaora Temu administration officer of Rakahanga, NgaTakai Executive Officer and SRIC Focal Point for Rakahanga and Jane Kaina Executive Officer of Manihiki.

Outcome

Tablet Training

There were thirty eight people who turned up for the tablet training with ages ranging from twenty four to seventy. Those who turned up for the training expressed their appreciation of the opportunity to learn to use the tablet particularly the older participants (Rauti Para). The training also presented an opportunity for government workers to update their computing skills, computer maintenance and other technical aspects to which Mitchell Tutangata from ICT was able to provide. The local school also benefitted as Mitchell was able to fix some of the computers at the school which the school principal was really grateful.

The training enabled the participants to create an email address and a facebook page so they could access the climate change and Rauti Para facebook pages to read the updates and make comments or post stories and photos from Rakahanga. They also browsed the internet, learned to use the camera and video feature to take photos to post on the internet. Some of them were emotional from excitement to see photos of their children and grandchildren living abroad.

Considering that the Rauti Para participants never had previous experience on a computer, they did really well in learning to use the tablet given the short time frame.

Another aspect of the training which we had never trialled before was to let the participants take the tablets home so they could have more time to practice their skills. We anticipated that if they needed help the younger members

of the family would be able to help them. This probably helped speed up the learning process because when we received the tablets back they were loaded with photos and videos that the families had put together. If anything it had drawn families to learn together, particularly the older folks taking instructions from the younger members of the family which in Cook Islands culture is intolerable.



Participants at the Rauti Para tablet training workshop in Rakahanga (Photos provided by TiataTupou, Rakahanga)



Participants at the Rauti Para tablet training workshop 14, 15 & 18 May Rakahanga (Photo by Teina Rongo)

Climate Change Awareness

Two climate change awareness presentations were held in Maori by Dr Teina Rongo at the government centre. The community, especially, members of the Island Council were interested to learn more about areas in Rakahanga that they could identify as future climate related projects for the island. Dr Rongo also spent time with the school talking to senior students about climate change impacts and how they relate to Rakahanga. As an activity, Dr. Rongo taught the students how to examine the state of their reefs using a quadrat. The activity will provide students the opportunity to use their class room knowledge in the field. In addition, the activity will be carried out every year as part of a long term exercise for the school. Students thoroughly enjoyed the field exercise and couldn't wait to analyse the data they collected. According to Dr. Rongo, children in the outer island seem to be more aware of their natural environment than their counterpart in Rarotonga, largely because they are always out fishing or swimming, giving them the opportunity to observe their marine environment more. For this reason, he believes that future scientists of the Cook Islands will come from the outer islands. Although coral reef surveys are usually taught at the university level, introducing such activity early will hopefully interest these children to pursue careers in the area of marine science, which Cook Islands need considering the shortage of such expertise in the country.



The SRIC CC project also donated a hard drive to the school with climate change information that will help the students identify a climate related project on their island that they could develop as a proposal to be implemented under the SRIC project. In this regard, the senior students in the Northern Group will have the opportunity to work with their communities and community leaders to identify, devise and propose possible solutions to specific problems or areas they envisage will benefit their island community in the future.

Rakahanga students learning reef monitoring skills under the watchful eye of Dr Teina Rongo (Photo by Teina Rongo)

Climate Change Indicators

The Rauti Para climate indicators documentary was also shown two times to the community to which the community whole heartedly supported and confirmed the information that was presented in the documentary. The community was excited that their views were reflected in the documentary and also thankful that this type of information is documented.

Recommendations

Several areas on the island were identified that could potentially be developed as projects under the SRIC CC programme;

- The abandoned hydroponics project on the island should be rejuvenated and completed to provide green vegetables for the people
- Repopulation of Rakahanga lagoon with pa`ua from Manihiki for conservation and food security purposes
- The walkway at the fish pond should be re-designed to allow better water flows and access for fish (especially milkfish) that are using this area as a nursery and feeding grounds
- Consider the high density of coconut trees on the island that are easily accessible, establishing a coconut oil press factory on Rakahanga should be considered
- Island Council members should have training on climate change awareness making it relevant to their local situation

References

1. Google <http://www.cookislands.org.uk/rakahanga> 25/1/2015
2. *Census Report 2011, Ministry of Finance and Economic Management, Government of Cook Islands*

Photos: Apolo&Mahiriki Tupou

