

## Impact Story

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# Learning Innovative Techniques: Plans to Boost Coconut Plantation Management in the Pacific

*“In Sri Lanka, the average number of coconuts in a bunch is 17. In Vanuatu it’s only 8. The difference is huge and something we can improve on by using organic fertiliser, as they do in Sri Lanka. This is will help our coconut rehabilitation work in Vanuatu and increase production.”*

This is just one of the many ideas Mr. Italo Baroroa, a Coconut Specialist with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, plans to implement in Vanuatu.

Mr. Baroroa was one of the six participants from the Pacific to attend a two-month international Coconut Plantation Management Certificate Course in Sri Lanka, from 11 June - 03 August last year.

Run by the Coconut Research Institute (CRI), under the auspices of the Asian and Pacific Coconut Community, the course also had participants from Sri Lanka and Jamaica, making it a 15-member class.

Participants from the Pacific included those from Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. All are attached to government agricultural departments in various capacities in their home countries, and work



**Coconut farmers in Sri Lanka.**  
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closely with local farmers. Their participation was supported by the Coconut Industry Development for the Pacific, a joint initiative of the Pacific Community (SPC) and the European Union, which aims to strengthen the coconut sector in the region.



**Coconut Specialist Italo Baroroa from Vanuatu out in the field in Sri Lanka.**

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The course aimed to provide participants with a wider scope of scientific knowledge and strength their skills and capacity with practical training utilising up-to-date and advanced technologies. The course was facilitated at CRI’s headquarters and research substations by its highly qualified staff, and experts from other scientific institutes and the private sector. The course program included around 145 hours of lectures, 20 days of practical demonstrations, 3 days of field visits and 10 days of on-site practical training at CRI’s coconut estates.

Prior to joining the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mr. Baroroa studied agriculture and farm management in New Caledonia. For the next 10 years his work in the Department focused on agribusiness until 2016, when he was appointed to lead Vanuatu's coconut rehabilitation program.

"My work on coconut is new, so I was happy when I was chosen to attend this course and learn more. One of the innovative things we are already working on is switching from black copra to white copra processing," he said.

Copra is the dried meat of the coconut. Coconut oil is extracted from copra, making it an important agricultural commodity for many coconut-producing countries. It is also used as feed for livestock after oil has been extracted from it.

"White copra is premium copra and is valued at a higher price. When I came back to Vanuatu, I found a domestic buyer in Santo who was willing to assist me to train farmers to process white copra, and purchase the copra as well. It was encouraging to run this training with farmers [and see the outcome]. We plan to continue this work with the farmers."

However, volcanic eruptions in Vanuatu last year deviated the Department's priorities to food security, which also involved Mr. Baroroa's time and expertise. He hopes from February this year, he will be able to refocus on the Department's coconut rehabilitation work.

For Mr. Robert Tautua, a Horticulture Research Officer from the Ministry of Agriculture and

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**The course helped broaden my thinking on how to control pests. Like for example, the rhinoceros beetle. At the moment farmers use cans, which is not the most effective method to trap them. Using buckets is better. At the beginning of the month [at the time of this interview], I will go to the islands, check all the traps and discuss with this with the farmers. We're also planning to test the larva [from the samples we take] for viruses.**  
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Fisheries - Crops Division in Samoa, learning more about diseases and pests affecting coconut plantations was critical.

"In Samoa, I work in the entomology section and before coming to Sri Lanka I didn't have access to a lot of information that I needed for my work on coconut management. We learned a lot of important things in this course, and coming from a research background, the technical information was not hard for me to understand."

Like Mr. Baroroa, Mr. Tautua has already started planning on the best way to use the knowledge and skills gained from his time in Sri Lanka.



**Students from all over Asia Pacific learn at the Coconut Research Institute (CRI).**

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**CRI trainers teach innovative techniques derived from world class coconut research.**

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Like Vanuatu, Samoa and other Pacific Islands Countries are working on increasing their coconut yield, Kiribati is also planning to establish a seed garden on Christmas Island this year.

Mr. Tiake Tanako, an Agricultural Assistant with the Ministry of Environment, Lands and Agriculture, will lead this project.

“This was one of the main things I learned during the course in Sri Lanka - how to look after the coconut seedlings - how to manage it. I learned how to select the mother palm for the seedlings. This is very important. All this was new to me and I’m looking forward to sharing it with the farmers and setting up the seed garden.”

For all three participants, the course was beneficial in better understanding coconut management, being introduced to new and advanced technologies, and supporting their rehabilitation work, most of which will be planned and initiated from early 2019.

### **More about the Course:**

Course material covered looked at new technological developments on increasing coconut yield and productivity through varietal improvement, soil nutrient management using organic and inorganic fertiliser, efficient water management in coconut plantations, reducing field losses through managing biotic stresses using biological, chemical and integrated systems, climate smart coconut cultivation, climate hazard mitigation, yield prediction, coconut-based farming systems, post-harvest techniques and many more.

It also covered technology updates in the manufacture of emerging high value coconut products, maximum utilisation of energy efficient systems, organic coconut cultivation, labour management and estates accounting systems and record keeping.

Issues and topics related to the global coconut industry and physiological impact of global warming on coconut development including the carbon credit market was also included in the course.

## **About Coconut Industry Development for the Pacific (CIDP):**

Coconut Industry Development for the Pacific (CIDP) is a joint initiative of the Pacific Community (SPC) and the European Union (EU) as part of a broader economic partnership between the EU and the African Caribbean Pacific (ACP) states. The aim of CIDP is to bolster the coconut sector in the region through improving the competitiveness of small producers engaged in the coconut value chains, strengthening regional integration of related markets and the intensification of production across the Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. The programme runs from 2016-2018 and is valued at 4 million Euro.

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