

SOPAC helps build Kiribati Environment Division capacity

Written by Administrator

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As a part of the Kiribati Government's commitment to achieving sustainable land management on Kiritimati Atoll, (Christmas Island), staff of the Environmental Division recently undertook training conducted by the Pacific Islands Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC), in Global Positioning Systems (GPS) and Geographic Information Systems (GIS).

"We are so fortunate to get this training," said Ms Ratita Bebe, of the Kiritimati Conservation Department. "The Kiribati Government recognizes the need to map land degradation sites and protected conservation areas so that we can identify ways to achieve sustainable land use practices."

Ms Bebe explained that Global Positioning Systems (GPS) use information gathered from satellites circling the earth to locate the correct co-ordinates of any location, while Geographic Information Systems (GIS) combine maps and data to manage, store, analyze and display all forms of geographical information.

"We had six days in the field, gaining training and practical experience in data collection from our SOPAC colleague, Ms Elizabeth Lomani-Whippy.

"Discussions between Environment Officers from Kiritimati and Tarawa identified the main factors contributing to land degradation as beach erosion, mining, rubbish dump sites and oil spills. We also identified protected bird sanctuaries as being important to map, for future conservation activities," explained Ms Bebe.

SOPAC, which provides assistance to 19 island countries and territories in the Pacific region through applied geoscience and technology, was requested by the Kiribati Government to carry out the training, and with funding provided by the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

"I have just been in Fiji for a further week of follow-up training with SOPAC," continued Ms Bebe. "This work entailed collating and customizing the data we collected, so that it can be used for planning and decision-making. We will continue to update and organize our databases.

"Although there are only about six thousand people living on Kiritimati, the island represents 70% of the landmass of Kiribati. It is the largest atoll in the world. It is important that we plan for

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the future sustainability of our land-use practices, and identify and correct any problems. The GPS and GIS training we received from SOPAC is key to helping us to do this,” concluded Ms Bebe.



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Photo caption: Ms Elizabeth Lomani-Whippy and Ms Ratita Bebe at the SOPAC Secretariat in Fiji.