

## *Memories of my Lagoon.... Rotuma in yester years!*

I remember hues of many blues and green along the shores where I lived my childhood days. I remember many sunny days back at the home island where participation was the norm. There would be the Saturday net-fishing trips or re-thatching the neighbor's cooking house, the communal feasting and the full house during a Sunday service. Such good memories brought to present with the feel of sea breeze that could cool any hot day under the cover of greenery. The sound of waves softly clapped against the barrier reef before rippling into a clear lagoon spotted with colorful coral, fish and plant life that carpeted white sandy bottom. This was the fabric of my upbringing on Rotuma, an island northwest of mainland Fiji. I vividly remember my grandmothers and cousins, family, friends and village life.

This second article on Rotuma of yester years shares insight of island living reminisced by many today. Hence, our work to empower the island community to keep that essence is important for our future which must be sustainable. Seemingly, the Rotuma remembered was more self-reliant than the present island community. Transportation and communication continues to cripple the island economy. Despite the warmth it brings me remembering those social niceties, the face of change in Rotuma today stem from a subsistence economy leaning more towards monetary dependence with services provided and paid. This created a ripple effect on the opportunities raised on the monetary value of natural resources and inadvertently influencing social change on the island.

I retell a fish story from my lagoon that depicted an idyllic lifestyle of how the norm is changing life on Rotuma today. My village is situated on the southeast corner of the island fringed by the widest lagoon and the beachfront used to be a hive of activities. Families used to own at least a canoe per household usually anchored at the foreshore but now devoid, with the occasional sight of abandoned vaka. Noatau is a place re-known for its long stretch of white sandy beachfront now riddled with exposed beach rock and pockets of coral rubble sand lining the shoreline where a coconut tree-line of roots lay exposed. Sand movement is understandable but erosion signs signals a change. There used to be stone heaps in the lagoon shallows, fashioned as fish houses for the women to fish daily using hand nets or placing fish traps catching just enough for sharing and the family meal on a daily routine.

Evidently, the pounding questions were, where have all the fishers and their *vaka* (canoe) gone or what happened to the customary practice of sharing our catches from fishing. Bewilderment was the word to describe my day when there was no fish for dinner despite knowing whilst being out on the beach that my family next door were out fishing. There seems to be an erosion of customary practices that has been taken for granted. The shift in practice has somehow allowed for trade off by an island community moving beyond subsistence. The moral of my fish story is that these yester years growing up on Rotuma defined character to embrace the imminent changes but be strengthened to keep what is good. Hereafter, it has been mostly fishy stories about my lagoon with issues central on how best to harvest the beche-de-mer and lobsters for value of money or the irresponsible discard of household waste along the foreshores that captures the attention.

For many of us with an affinity to our birthplace, can relate to these shared thoughts, for it is what we do presently that shapes our direction in life. The concerted efforts with an enhanced understanding of the undercurrents of change felt by every Rotuman, gives insight on the future we want for a better tomorrow. LājeRotuma<sup>1</sup> envisions that challenge and for this 10<sup>th</sup> year of existence, the team of volunteers celebrate these efforts to mobilize our island and trans-national community in our culture of biodiversity and Rotuman heritage.

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<sup>1</sup>More details about LājeRotuma Initiative (LRI): [www.rotuma.net/laje](http://www.rotuma.net/laje)