

The Christensen Fund is delighted to announce the appointment of Catherine Sparks as its new Melanesian Program Officer charged with the growth and development of its culture and environment grantmaking program in the region.

Catherine Sparks is a Canadian born gender and community development specialist who has spent seventeen years working with peoples' organizations in Melanesia and the South Pacific tackling the linkages between land, environment, culture and development. She started with The South Pacific Peoples Foundation (now Pacific Peoples Partnership) of Canada where she compiled materials around militarism and colonialism in the South Pacific, and then worked as the Associate Director of the Indonesia-Canada Research Project collaborating with Indonesian indigenous environmental groups (WALHI and YPMD) to assess the impact of Canadian aid and corporate involvement on the environment and indigenous people of West Papua, producing a video and contributing to a monograph on the issue. She then moved to Papua New Guinea as a CUSO Cooperant where she first worked with a women's group called the Gembogl District Women's Council in the highlands, and then with the Melanesian Environment Foundation (on such things as a campaign around the proposed Forest Act amendments) and the Melanesian Trust (putting together a critical literacy training manual). Meanwhile she started working as an editor and publishing manager of Papua New Guinea's National Research Institute in Port Moresby. In 1996 she moved to Lou Island in Manus Province to live as a subsistence farmer, during which time she also supported LICDAT, a local community development organization. Following a period of further study at the University of Victoria in Canada, during which she also served as Board Secretary to the Pacific Peoples Partnership, she relocated to Ambrym Island in Vanuatu in 2002 to undertake community-based field research and then to Port Vila.

Prior to joining TCF Ms. Sparks served for four years as the Country Representative for CUSO in Vanuatu partnering and posting volunteers with a wide variety of government, civil society, community and international development agencies, focusing particularly on the revival of Melanesian culture particularly with respect to land, sea and traditional economies. Ms. Sparks holds a BA in Pacific and Asian Studies from the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada and an M.A. in Dispute Resolution from the same institution with a thesis entitled *Rural Women and Everyday Resistance to Structural Adjustment in Melanesia*, based on field research in Vanuatu.

Ms. Sparks will join the Fund as of September 10, 2007 and can be reached from that date at [Catherine@christensenfund.org](mailto:Catherine@christensenfund.org).