
FROM THE PACIFIC

What's 'fishing'?

The way fishing is defined in the Pacific islands often omits women's role

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The SPC Women's Fisheries Development Project, now the Community Fisheries Project, was set up in 1991 at the request of Pacific Community member governments, to provide assistance and support to women in the fisheries sector. It was recognized that the needs of women had often been overlooked in development projects undertaken in this region. Pacific island women have traditionally been involved in fisheries activities, in the collection and processing of seafood for family consumption and small-scale income generation, but little has been done to document their activities and identify their potential for development or to understand the problems of overharvesting.

This lack is not necessarily the result of 'men's development' as opposed to 'women's development'. It is more a result of the nature of the fishing areas and the type of development involved—traditionally in the Pacific islands, men have fished with boats offshore, while women have concentrated their activities on the inshore areas, collecting or gleaning a number of species from the reef and inshore areas. Pacific island States have been keen to encourage the development of offshore fishing activities, to generate income and to reduce the pressure on inshore marine resources, and have naturally targeted the people most involved in this type of fishing—men.

The lack of recognition and support of women's roles in fisheries has been further highlighted by confusion over the meaning of the term 'fisheries'. Many local languages in the Pacific islands have different words for different types of fishing. The idea that fishing predominantly involves men going fishing in boats (therefore overlooking a huge range of inshore marine resource use) is common throughout the world, but is especially strong in the Pacific where different words may exist for the various types of fishing. For example, there may be numerous words for the different types of 'men's fishing', such as trolling or bottom-fishing and separate words for 'women's fishing', such

as collecting clams or sea cucumbers, etc. The English term 'fisheries' is often translated and understood as meaning 'men's fishing'. This affects the way the fisheries sector is supported, and the manner in which the management and conservation of marine resources is approached.

The work of the Community Fisheries Section includes research and assessment of those involved in subsistence and artisanal fisheries. Based on this, further development support is provided. This support may be given by means of national and regional training activities as well as the provision of resource materials such as manuals, bulletins and videos.

Recommendations that have resulted from the national assessments include improving information services for small-scale fishermen and women, increasing the involvement of women in the work of the government fisheries agency, improving training for small-scale fishermen and women, and increasing education and public awareness of the importance of fishing communities to the overall health and well-being of the country.

The SPC Community Fisheries Section also produces, in collaboration with the SPC Information Section, a twice-yearly bulletin, 'Women in Fisheries'. This includes news of interest concerning fishing communities around the region. This bulletin, along with other SPC bulletins is now available on-line (<http://www.spc.org.nc/coastfish/>).