

Entry Points for Gender

Participation of women in the fisheries sector of Fiji throws up several challenges, especially in the search for potential entry points for gender integration and positive discrimination

Gender mainstreaming processes to achieve the Fiji government's commitments to gender equality are still not well integrated into the government institutional structure, planning, and budgetary processes. Despite considerable progress made in the various sectors, gaps in the implementation or achievement of government policy on gender are numerous, and need to be addressed in institutional arrangements and in planning and budgeting. Although Fiji's constitution guarantees equality, weaknesses in legal terminology, in policies and regulations, as well as existing

are largely for home consumption. However, in the past decade, what is kept for home consumption has decreased, and increasingly, the focus is on sales and income generation, even from women's fishing work.

In Fiji and in most Pacific Island countries, the small-scale fishing sector is commonly exploited through household units of production, utilizing the complementary roles of women and men. The sector also significantly relies on the use of traditional knowledge, skills and norms of both men and women fishers. Traditional knowledge and practices are often gender-defined. Gender often dictates where women and men work, and separates the traditional knowledge held by women from the knowledge held by men. Traditional gendered roles and associated local knowledge are important in any discussion on division of labour, and paid and unpaid work in communities.

Traditions and customary practices have, however, undergone substantial changes in recent years, and in some areas of fisheries, modified versions of what were traditionally practised have appeared. The changes include inclusion of women in leadership roles, and as members in community committees, and in small-scale business ventures.

Enhanced role

Women's inclusion in decisionmaking and leadership mechanisms could ensure putting in place measures for mitigation and resilience that are not only practical, but also sustainable. Greater access to education and increased participation in income generation have facilitated this enhanced role of women. These changes, however, do not undermine

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social and cultural norms, continue to discriminate women in all forms of work.

There has been some progress in work being done on gender in fisheries in the Pacific Island countries and in Fiji. However, huge opportunities remain untapped. Women's small-scale, inshore fisheries provide essential protein to a majority of Pacific Island citizens, yet the importance of these fisheries remains largely unquantified. This is because the participation of women in fisheries continues to be in the informal and semi-subsistence fisheries sectors, and these are not enumerated and do not get included in work or employment statistics of the country. Further, most women's fisheries activities fall into the unpaid work category because their activities

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the crucial role that cultural kinship systems, reciprocal practices and social capital play in sustaining people and livelihoods in Fiji.

Changes in traditional practices do not mean that women automatically find access to greater participation in decision making within fishing communities. Women fishers continue to face barriers and challenges to greater empowerment. These challenges are mostly related to cultural and social norms and practices, which, in many cases, limit women's progress in the fisheries sectors. In the context, fisherwomen have to depend on their male counterparts when trying to access financial support and to get their views included in decisionmaking.

Challenges that women face in fisheries work in the region are related to both the existing social context and the dictates of modern practices. Most women who live in rural locations are forced to conform to constrictive traditional rules and expectations. On the other hand, women fishers have also to adapt to the modern market in the fisheries sector. The difficulties and special concerns of women straddling two worlds, one of handling domestic chores, child rearing and other village responsibilities, and the other of engagement in the modern economy, leads to considerable pressure on their lives. The problem is further exacerbated, as the role of women is often not clearly defined and enumerated, either at the level of the family and community, or within the workplace in the sector.

To bridge the gender gap in fisheries participation in the offshore and inshore fisheries, there is need for training and capacity building of women fishers. Identification of key outlets, buyers and markets will ensure that women fishers have equal access to distribution and export opportunities. Steps to accurately define women fishers' work, to include women fishers in the enumerated sector and to classify unpaid household work under various heads, including self-employment, will help improve women status as fishers.

This will also assist in monitoring the changing participation of women in the different fisheries sectors. The shift in women's participation from the informal to the formal sector can then be addressed and facilitated, by the inclusion of women fishers in all aspects of fisheries training and capacity building.

In the past two decades, new entry points have emerged for empowering women within the fisheries sector. Greater access to education and leadership roles in businesses related to fisheries are exposing women to independent travel and diverse situations outside customary community life. Today, this experience can be used as entry points, to extend the participation of more community women in the fisheries sector. Here again, intervention in capacity building can substantially move forward the goal of empowerment and participation of women in decision making in the sector.

However, all this means systematic collection of information about women in fisheries. The lack of systematic research and collection of data to inform policy on fisheries development, especially where it relates to women's participation in the sector, is a big drawback to empowerment of women in the sector. The following discussion looks at some possibilities for strategic intervention, and how research can help define such interventions.

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Woman selling freshwater mussels at Delaidamanu village, Fiji. Women's small-scale, inshore fisheries provide essential protein to a majority of Pacific Island citizens

One important area for participation of women is in fish trade and marketing. Entry into fish trade however has its own challenges. Currently, most fish trade, however, is done on individual basis or at the family level. In some instances, as recorded in Fiji, women have set up networks at the village level to facilitate fish marketing. To cut costs, women in groups have taken turns selling fish at the market, and continue to develop their own networking mechanisms. This ensures pooling of resources and greater efficiency in marketing effort. Women are not only able to cut marketing costs, but also get more free time by taking turns going to the market. Finance is usually through village-based credit facilities, where women borrow money on a weekly basis and repay when they return from the markets. Although this credit system works for small-scale village borrowing, there is no opportunity to break out of the cycle, and few options to upscale activities to the next level. Most women have been engaged in these small-scale domestic selling for

lucrative products to win customers. The study also highlighted the extensive networks of buying and selling that already exist within communities, between communities, and between women operating out of the various market centres in Fiji. However, most of these activities and networks operate in the informal sector, without financial support, without risk factors being taken into account, and without health and safety standards built in. While women are willing to engage in value addition to improve incomes, they are limited by the small-scale of operations within which they are constrained to work.

Market dynamics influence fishing and collection patterns at the community level, and these, in turn, cause changes in gender roles within fishing communities. Where there is demand for a certain species, both men and women may participate in the fishing and selling of the product. An example is the increased involvement of both men and women in the sea cucumber trade. There are other instances, where men may take on commercial fishing activities, leaving women to fish for home consumption, and even be involved in commercial fishing. These role reversals speak of the dynamic nature of the fishing community and the small-scale fisheries sector. Further in-depth research into marketing and distribution mechanisms could further reveal the complex networks and systems that women have tapped into to remain competitive on the local market. Formal production has, in most cases, increased in intensity and volume, with processing and preservation adding value. There is a need for careful research to understand value adding and supply-chain development for fisheries and aquaculture products in Fiji.

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over a decade. Many of their daughters will continue to work within the same process of small-scale fisheries trade, in the absence of strategic intervention to change the situation.

A survey on women in fisheries in Fiji conducted by the Women in Fisheries Network, Fiji, revealed changes in the involvement of women in marketing. There has been significant increase in the number of women middle sellers who buy products from fisherwomen in the villages, and either sell at a slightly higher price, or cook and/or process the food to add value before re-selling at a higher price. This is indicative of a sector in transition from traditional selling and marketing techniques to participating in more

Range of activities

Within the ambit of fishing and fish trade, women have to deal with a wide range of activities, including transportation, networking with other participants along the value chain, and marketing, which involves

pricing, cash-flow management, budgeting and securing buyers. Often complicating this is the common problem of lack of access to useful and reliable information. Traditionally, communications at the household and community levels were handled by men. Today the situation is changing with the expanding role of women. Changes that have taken place include the development of market organizations, market shelters, roles of women vendors, need for legal training and other enhancement mechanisms.

Women's participating in fishing and marketing could be greatly enhanced by their adopting appropriate handling and processing techniques. This would require systematic training on value-added techniques. For the *kai* (freshwater mussels) fishery, for example, sales have been restricted to the domestic market because of the absence of training in quality handling of fish catch and landing. This means that the fish catch is not able to meet the requirements for export. The same situation holds for post-harvest handling of *beche de mer* (sea cucumber) where up to 45 per cent of the value is lost due to poor handling and processing techniques. With better training and access to systems, women can access more lucrative markets, and substantially increase value addition. There has not been much documentation of women's involvement in catch and export of fish species from the inshore areas.

Women participate in the collection and in post-harvest activities relating to *beche de mer*, trochus and ornamental species. Sex-disaggregated data is needed in these fishing sectors so that all the small-scale commercial activities that women are engaged in can be accurately enumerated and areas of their participation strengthened. Legal and technical enabling mechanisms can then be developed to further progress women's participation in the various fisheries sectors. Some of the changes will need policy interventions which will require collaborative work by non-governmental organizations

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(NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) with the Department of Fisheries.

Women are also entering into direct fishing activities in some areas. Women in most Pacific Islands do not participate in deep-sea fishing and offshore fisheries, although there are parts of the industry where women are either heavily involved or are starting to be involved. Cultural beliefs that women on fishing boats bring bad luck, traditional norms that inhibit women's ownership and use of large powered boats, and the belief that offshore fishing is a man's domain along with the social obligations of household and family, continue to inhibit the participation of women. In the offshore fisheries, women have just started to break in to some work areas. This is mostly as observers on fishing vessels. Work on fishing vessels is hindered by the length of days at sea, which usually range between three and six months, the harsh conditions on board and the safety of travelling with crew members who are usually men.

Traditional use

The inshore fisheries fall within *i qoliqoli* (traditional owned marine areas) and *i kanakana* (areas allocated traditionally for subsistence fishing-where there is no sale of catches), which involve traditional use mechanisms used by resource owners for generations. These resource-use strategies have sustained households, ensured food security and have been

the source of income livelihoods for people. Despite the state of decline of inshore fisheries, the importance of inshore fisheries as a means of sustenance remains critical for remote communities. What is important is examining how aquaculture can sustainably enhance and rebuild inland fisheries. This is where women fishers' roles become crucial as they are important holders of information on species, their habitats, seasonality, and use patterns. Women are able to gather substantial and in-depth species knowledge through their gleaning activities. This wide knowledge base could be used for the management and recovery of traditional fish species populations.

Recent studies have shown a decline in fisheries resources in Pacific Island countries. The new focus is on management of fisheries. The strategies include community-based fisheries development and management, and the ecosystem approach to fisheries management. Community-based management and development using participatory,

area where the rights of women as workers need defining, with tight regulation of employment conditions.

Another area where industrial fishing impacts women is the increase in the port based activity of industrial fishing vessels. For instance, in Fiji and the Pacific islands, there has been increase in offshore tuna fisheries, with transshipment activities. While increased transshipment activities and domestic basing of foreign vessels provide increased economic benefits to coastal communities, they also increase social problems. Studies and anecdotal information indicate an increase in problems related to alcohol and drug use, and also the rise in prostitution in areas where sea-port activities related to fishing fleets have increased. In all major ports throughout the Pacific Islands, wherever foreign fishing vessels berth, there is increased concern voiced by health authorities on the impact on the health of young women.

The foregoing describes the broad areas within the fisheries sector where women find employment. As is evident, the canvass of women's engagement is large, and often requires that the definition of the small-scale fisheries sector is revisited. We shall now try to examine what should be the strategic priorities that could drive gender mainstreaming within the fisheries sector and fishing communities.

To reiterate, traditional and social barriers that hindered the full participation of women have started to break down in some areas. Changes are taking place in fishing participation, with women using and owning boats and improved equipment.

Real benefits

Women also participate in more sophisticated marketing, involving processing with modern equipment and transporting processed and fresh fish to urban centres. Underlying all these are the questions of the real benefits and measurable impacts on women's livelihoods, and the changes to their position and role

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bottom-up approaches have, in many instances, been successful in involving the various sections of communities including women, at all levels of the decision-making processes. The question however remains whether gender inclusion is sufficient in addressing women needs.

Industrial fisheries also increasingly impact lives of women in fishing communities. For instance, women find extensive employment in fish processing factories.

However, the employment is mainly in unskilled, lower-paid menial jobs. Women generally are paid less than men in similar jobs in the factories. The employment is unregulated, leading to exploitation of the women workers. This is an

at the community level. The process of mainstreaming gender into national planning and integrating gender considerations into project development is slow, and the progress is not always linear. Policymakers have to grapple with rapid transformation and changes in the fisheries sector.

While policies should challenge restrictive traditional practices and taboos, they should also take care to encourage and preserve traditional systems that can promote gender issues in the fisheries sector. Traditional systems in many ways assist in delineating tasks that women and men engage in fisheries-related work. For example, in Fiji, traditional fishers can be obligated to involve women in fishing activities and decision-making processes. Within fisheries clans, there exist fishing roles and practices that ensure the protection of resources. Women have a specific role in these roles and practices. Modern fisheries management planning should take these beneficial social practices into account, and use the traditional systems wherever possible to promote sustainability. Further, these strategic interventions need to be developed with community participation, to further enhance women's positions in fishing communities.

Coastal communities face increasing risks today from both external and internal factors, including overexploitation of resources and the erosion of traditional institutional set-ups, on the one hand, and the impact of the market economy and of climate change on resources, on the other. Because women's fishing activities are concentrated in the immediate coastal areas, any resource change, depletion, or impact from natural hazards substantially affect women.

In 2016, a Category-5 cyclone devastated the Fiji islands. Many smaller islands completely lost their subsistence livelihood base, while others suffered varying degrees of damage to their natural resources. One major challenge to rehabilitation strategies after the cyclone was the

lack of baseline data on women's fishing activities against which impact could be assessed.

Changes in gender participation have mostly reflected broader patterns within small-scale fisheries, moving away from an exclusive subsistence focus to market orientation, with greater value addition. Women therefore are also part of the supply chain in targeted fishing for selling

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and export purposes. In some areas, fishing patterns have also changed from seasonal fishing to targeting lucrative species throughout the year. Improved technology, night fishing, improved diving gear, and the use of boats to move to other fishing areas have helped extend fishing boundaries and expand markets. Women also no longer just glean and fish for household consumption, with fishing for marketing taking precedence over household food needs.

In Fiji, *beche de mer* diving was largely a male preserve, but, in recent years, women have taken up diving, travelling long hours in boats to search for the species. Monetary benefits largely influence fishing patterns, with rural coastal communities relying more on fisheries resources as a primary source of income. With limited alternatives and opportunities in rural communities, this trend will continue unless there are strategic attempts to introduce other forms of income generation.

Climate change

The emerging changes include women becoming buyers from, and suppliers, to other women. Women are therefore actors across the supply chain in seafood production. Climate change is an issue that will overlap with fisheries work in many areas, and its impact on coastal communities can affect livelihoods across supply

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Roadside fish market, Fiji. Women have set up networks at the village level to facilitate fish marketing. To cut costs, women in groups have taken turns selling fish at the market

chains. Climate-change adaptation mechanisms will have to be multi-pronged, to include agriculture and forestry; the protection of shorelines and coastal resources; and inland water resources. The knowledge bases have to be integrated while responding to climate change and preparing disaster risk strategies. This potential for using traditional knowledge is still not fully achieved, because of the cultural and social norms that define inclusion and exclusion in the decision-making processes in communities.

Although research provides information on the roles of men and women in the coastal fisheries, there is limited sex-disaggregated data quantifying the numbers of men and women in different roles. Baseline quantitative data is required to assist in the allocation of resources that will promote gender equality. In order to be effective, the data must be updated on a regular basis so that a comparative analysis over time can be made. The fisheries sector has a narrow definition that includes fishing activities and distribution systems. There has to be a more holistic look at the sector, with associated household and food-gathering activities seen as the components of fishing sector.

In 2007, studies on the participation of women in Pacific island countries and Fiji by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) indicated that women's participation in fisheries science and

management only accounted for 18 per cent of total staff working for fisheries in science and management in government fisheries, environment institutions and environmental NGOs. In contrast, women account for more than 60 per cent of administrative and clerical staff in government fisheries divisions. The question to be asked is: would having more women employed in the Fisheries Departments in the region speed up the process of including women in fisheries sector policy and decisionmaking processes? Women are starting to be employed in the Fisheries Departments in the region, including in the work of dealing with fishing communities.

However, women are yet to find employment in large numbers in more technical aspects of the work. There exist numerous potential entry points for gender integration and positive discrimination for women in the small-scale fisheries sector. These include policy-making levels, national decision-making mechanisms, community-based interventions and at the local community levels. There is scope for mainstreaming gender into most areas of work in the fisheries sector, with a view to building capacity, extending services, opening up markets, increasing skills in processing and post-harvest activities, and raising the opportunity for education and training. Competing priorities at the national level often result in gender issues being marginalized. The challenge is to find ways to make gender mainstreaming more effective.

For more

<https://womeninfisheriesfiji.org/>

The Women in Fisheries Network—Fiji (WiFN-Fiji)

<http://womeninfisheriesfiji.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/The-Role-Engagement-of-Women-in-Fisheries-in-Fiji.pdf>

The Role and Engagement of Women in Fisheries in Fiji