

Gender and social inclusion training for aquaculture enterprises, a first for the Pacific

A first-of-its-kind regional gender and social inclusion training for small- and medium-sized aquaculture enterprises by the Pacific Community (SPC) took place 24–26 November 2020. The training was tailored to captivate the enterprises and build on their understanding of gender equality, social inclusion and, more broadly, human rights. The training provided a basic understanding of what gender and social inclusion (GESI) issues are and what these fundamental principles mean in the aquaculture and fisheries sector.

The training was planned, designed and conducted in a highly collaborative manner between SPC's Fisheries, Aquaculture and Marine Ecosystems Division under the Sustainable Pacific Aquaculture Development Project (PacAqua), the Pacific-European Union Marine Partnership (PEUMP) programme, and SPC's Human Rights and Social Development Division. Due to travel restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, training was delivered online for most participants that could not attend in person, albeit a few attended the training at SPC's Suva office.

GESI refers to how resources are accessed and used in a manner that allows everybody to benefit from them. A people-centred approach is particularly important for entrepreneurs because it is about shared and equal opportunities of working together to build Pacific businesses that can use the full potential of its people in order to grow and provide benefits for its employees, their families and the greater community.

Sixteen participants – representing eight enterprises from Fiji, Kiribati, Tonga, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands – completed the three-day training. These small- to medium-size enterprises are mainly family operated, some are women led, and most provide employment opportunities to a wide range of people. Most of these enterprises produce goods for export or domestic markets.

During the training sessions, the various barriers that are often faced by specific groups – because of their gender roles or because of their age, ethnicity or other characteristics – were highlighted. Examples, stories, lessons were shared to illustrate the barriers, but also to provide solutions that aim for making positive changes towards more equal participation of all players. The training presented GESI from an entrepreneurial perspective, which highlighted specific barriers, issues and solutions that matter in the private sector. For example, GESI issues within value-chains were presented, as well as stories of change from a lead business in Fiji that has embraced GESI in its community-based tourism work. The enterprises were then asked to develop an action plan to include in their day-to-day activities.

In addition, a panel discussion was held on gender-based violence (GBV) to sensitise participants from a personal and entrepreneurial point of view. A presentation of Pacific legal frameworks allowed a better understanding of the normative base, and support services were highlighted while also stressing the impacts of GBV on individuals, the community and the

enterprise itself. Given the sensitivity of this topic, GBV was approached carefully during a question-and-answer session.

Guna and Lency Yogomul from Papua New Guinea, both of whom participated in the training, said they found it very useful to be aware of the obstacles in their partnerships and the need to use open and inclusive dialogue. Additionally, they highlighted the need to encourage women to be equal partners and to empower them to lead according to their capacity and skillsets in aquaculture. They stated that “... issues surrounding GESI in our Pacific culture is engrained into our cultural belief systems. Stronger linkages between awareness programmes, community trainings and relevant authorities engaged in awareness and regulating can lead to slow change.”

One of the learnings from the training was that it makes good business sense to utilise various people's skills, including women, youth and people with different abilities to maximise everybody's talents and contributions. For example, it was stressed that by building the capacity of one employee, the trust, loyalty, performance and dedication of this employee will contribute to the business. As a result, this can lead to a lasting long-term and mutually beneficial relationship. Diversity is important not only to grow a business, but to relate to and meet different customer needs. In addition, gender inclusive corporate structures may also be embedded in Pacific legislative frameworks, such as health and safety standards or maternity provisions. By applying these, enterprises implement and enforce minimum human rights standards, and promote equality. Proactive social inclusion considerations will further prevent unintended marginalisation of vulnerable groups while allowing them to access employment opportunities and showcase their talents. In this way, enterprises can prevent discriminatory practices and empower diverse community members who will pay back the business, a win-win situation for all.

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For more information:

Avinash Singh,
PacAqua Aquaculture Officer, SPC
avinashs@spc.int