

A review of Pacific gender and fisheries literature

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Introduction

A review of Pacific gender and fisheries literature was conducted under the Pacific-European Union Marine Partnership (PEUMP) programme this year to provide an evaluation of the “big picture” of gender and fisheries issues most relevant to understanding women’s and men’s roles, contributions and challenges in the fisheries sector.

The review provides a summary of country-specific information that was available for the following Pacific Island countries (PICs): Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

The review found that a large amount of work and reports on gender and fisheries were conducted pre-2008, with a hiatus until a re-emergence in 2014. Fiji, FSM, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste have all had recent studies done on gender issues in the coastal fisheries and aquaculture sector. FSM and Solomon Islands, in particular, have had comprehensive gender and fisheries assessments conducted with a focus on governance structures and gender mainstreaming capacities of various government agencies. Fiji’s literature on gender and fisheries is more fragmented, with specific gender analysis work available within sub-sectors that have mainly focused around women’s economic activities in a specific fishery. Samoa’s recent gender and aquaculture assessment highlights the significant role of women in aquaculture. Future gender and fisheries assessments that will follow a similar style and methodology to the ones conducted for FSM and Solomon Islands are recommended for the Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, RMI, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. This will enable a comparison across countries and help identify similar challenges and opportunities to better address gender equity and social inclusion in the fisheries sector.

Recommendations

Recommendations from the review are aimed at addressing economic empowerment, community-level management and skills development of women and men.

Recommendation 1

The PEUMP programme should prioritise gender and fisheries assessments in PICs that have outdated literature or little to no data or information. Where gender and fisheries assessments have been conducted more recently, the PEUMP should focus on the implementation of recommendations from these assessments and continue to advocate for the inclusion of systematic gender analysis into upcoming fisheries research.

Recommendation 2

Fisheries data currently gathered by national fisheries agencies tend to have a greater biological focus (e.g. size-length frequency data for fish species). When commissioning further gender and fisheries assessments, research activities should also include the collection of specific sex-disaggregated data on coastal fisheries use and access. This information can then be used to inform appropriate policy and the types of practical assistance that can be provided to various fishers. As part of this, effort should be made to include information from other sources, including national censuses, household income and expenditure surveys, poverty surveys, nutrition surveys and any specific fisheries sector socio-economic surveys that have been previously conducted.

Recommendation 3

The inclusion of national fisheries agencies, government women/gender affairs agencies and key women’s groups should also be part of future gender and fisheries assessments in any country. This is considered vital to support effective implementation of recommendations made, in particular entry points for gender mainstreaming, the development of gender policies or appropriate legislation, and exploring post-assessment support services.

Recommendation 4

There is also a need to investigate fisheries value chains where women are predominantly involved. This is important to identify areas where women can be better supported for greater participation, better efficiency, increasing higher economic returns, and general safety at all points along the fisheries value chain. As part of this, there is also a need to explore private sector engagement as well as investigating alternative or supplementary livelihood opportunities that could be expanded into small businesses for women. This can include but is not limited to various post-harvesting and value-adding processes, packaging and retailing.

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Recommendation 5

Women and men mobilise fishing effort either individually and/or in groups in varied ways based around household needs, social and cultural obligations, labour requirements and access arrangements. The opportunities for groups to be more organised and formalised into associations or cooperatives needs to be supported to coordinate effort and market opportunities. As part of this, investigation of existing women's groups is also important to determine what organisational capacity these groups may have to support various initiatives that increase women's participation. There is also a need to investigate women's access to suitable financing mechanisms and assess basic financial literacy training needs.

Recommendation 6

To raise the profile of women in national fisheries agencies there is a need to highlight women successfully engaged in these agencies as a vehicle for encouraging other women and girls to enter the fisheries science, management and development arena and pursue careers in this area. In addition, there is a need to identify and map pathways for women into the formal fisheries sector, particularly management positions within the tuna processing industry. The tuna industry allows for much opportunity, but there is a need to identify if women are being exploited, harassed, and fairly remunerated compared to their male colleagues. Further, there is also a need to ascertain if women have suitable representation and opportunities for training support and counselling.

Recommendation 7

Explore ways to increase gender perspectives in fisheries management and marine conservation initiatives by non-governmental, civil society and faith-based organisations. As part of this effort, research conducted should explore women's roles and contributions in fisheries management and marine conservation initiatives, their level of advocacy engagement, their level of awareness, their level of participation and the extent to which gender roles are being analysed to inform these initiatives.

Conclusion

The review has highlighted a need to conduct specific gender-focused value chain analyses (VCAs) in the fisheries sector. To date, there has been very little to no focus on PICs outside of Fiji to further explore gender perspectives within VCAs.

A common activity that was identified from the review, which could be developed as a specific cross-PICs activity, is to have VCAs conducted on small-scale tuna catches and to identify supplementary livelihoods opportunities, in particular value-added processes for smoking, salting, drying, canning, loining and jerky products. Such a designated activity can also be supported by a designated fish aggregating devices programme. The viability of commercialising such business opportunities needs to be carefully investigated in individual PIC contexts, however, where purchasing power may be low, infrastructure limited, market access difficult and subsistence lifestyles disproportionately favoured. In addition to prioritising VCAs that have a greater gender focus, skills

development programmes will be important as will financial literacy training and access to gender-friendly credit and saving schemes.

In terms of empowerment and agency, strengthening women's groups such as associations, cooperatives, fishing clubs or similar institutions needs further investigation. By supporting such groups, women would have a stronger platform to participate in decision-making, raise concerns that affect them and take on board additional responsibilities outside of traditional roles. This inclusion would also assist with obtaining perspectives from women on changes in the marine environment and fishing activities and increasing their involvement in local-level management activities.

The review has shown that there is both challenges and opportunities to gender equity and social inclusion and associated economic empowerment, food security and resilience in the Pacific Islands region's fisheries sector. While previous gender and fisheries assessments have gone some way to enhancing our understanding of issues within specific PICs, there is still a lot of work to be done.

