

Practical ways to implement gender-sensitive fisheries and aquaculture research in the Pacific

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Want to do gender-sensitive fisheries and aquaculture research but not sure what this means, or where to start? Do you wonder if gender matters for the work you do, and want to explore these ideas? We provide some practical ways to get you started on your journey to implementing gender-sensitive social science research. Although we have developed this tool through a Pacific lens, this easy-to-use, step-by-step guide can be adapted and applied to other regions.

Introduction

In the past, it was assumed that the priorities and perspectives of women and men were similar enough that there was little or no added value in collecting and analysing sex- or gender-disaggregated data.⁶ However, studies have shown that women and men use and understand natural resources differently, yielding unique knowledge and perspectives. It can also help to highlight differences in knowledge and the distribution of resources, power and opportunities. Failing to understand these differences can lead to the exclusion of individuals or groups of individuals, particularly those that are marginalised, in some cases worsening existing inequities or creating new inequities. This has been especially well documented for women, particularly in strong patriarchal cultures and societies.

Gender-sensitive research and methodologies recognise that gender is a significant variable or factor in shaping the use, knowledge and management of natural resources. Gender-sensitive research considers gender dimensions at every step and in every component of the research, from the initial idea through to the sharing of findings and recommendations. It also gives *equal value* to women's and men's unique perspectives. Decades of learning in the development sector has shown us that the inclusion of gender considerations in the planning and implementation of socioeconomic research is a critical step to understanding individuals' needs, roles, vulnerabilities, opportunities and contributions to society. It is important to note that *gender norms* and *gender relations* are context-specific and can vary at different governance levels (e.g. national, subnational, community).

The information gathered from gender-sensitive research will help us to better design projects, improve the formation of national policies, and deliver more meaningful, impactful and gender-equitable interventions on the ground. Sex-disaggregated data allow us to better understand, measure and monitor gaps between women and men, and their

Useful definitions

- Sex is the biological characteristics of being male and female (e.g. reproductive organs, chromosomes).
- Gender is a social identity – that of being a man or a woman, boy or girl, or other gender identity. Society associates certain roles, responsibilities, entitlements and behaviours with those identities, and also has expectations for them.
- Gender research involves the collection of sex- or gender-disaggregated data.
- Gender norms are the accepted attributes and characteristics of being a woman or a man, defined at a particular point in time for a specific society.
- Gender relations are the way a society defines the relationship between women and men, including their rights and responsibilities.

similarities and differences in different geographies and social-cultural contexts. It helps ensure that both women and men are included in fisheries and aquaculture projects, or the sectors more broadly; and ensures that the benefits or impacts of development projects are considered.

We provide an easy-to-use checklist that can be used by Pacific Island managers and practitioners who want to design and implement gender-sensitive fisheries and aquaculture research. We recommend going through the checklist in a group setting to get diverse views and perspectives that will help better shape your research.

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⁶ The authors wish to recognise and acknowledge that gender is not binary (meaning women and men), and there is a diversity of gender identities that people self-identify with in the Pacific. However, our target audiences are managers and practitioners who are new to gender-sensitive research, and we have focused on sex-disaggregated data and, therefore, on women and men as the primary units.

Research planning

Before starting, ensure that you have a good understanding of the social, cultural and gender relations in a community, and in existing governance structures. This will help you to better plan your research and prepare researchers. When defining research goals, objectives and scope, consider the following:

- Did both women and men from your research team help define the goals, objectives and scope of the research?
- Do the researchers designing or implementing the research have relevant expertise to understand and integrate local gender dimensions into the study? If not, can a gender expert be engaged to advise or assist you?
- Why are gender differences and inequalities relevant, and how might they impact the design and implementation of your research?
- Are your research questions and hypotheses gender-sensitive?
- Does your research answer questions that are relevant or important for both women and men?
- Will your research help you identify opportunities to address unequal power dynamics between women and men?
- Is there an adequate gender balance within the research team? Consider the fact that women may prefer to be interviewed by women, and men to be interviewed by men. Additionally, some cultures may not allow a woman and a man to be alone together in a private place.
- What gender biases do individual researchers have that might affect the way an interview is conducted or recorded? For example, if a researcher feels strongly that “a woman’s place is in the home”, this bias may affect how the researcher engages in a study of women and men’s roles in livelihoods.
- Have you gotten approval and consent from the community for the research? A consultation visit may be required before you start the research to ensure you have the community’s support and consent.

Research methods

It is important to ensure that gender differences and different gender values are reflected in the conceptual framework and methodology you select, and the people (e.g. key informants, leaders) or groups (e.g. households, committees) you interview. Because not all women or all men are the same, it is important to consider if there are other *social differences* such as age, ethnicity, caste, religion, history (including colonial history) or migrant status that intersect with gender to shape how individuals use natural resources, and whether you want to collect data on these *social identities*. When designing your research methods, consider the following:

- What unit of measurement will you use – individuals, families, households, specific social groups, communities? Collecting data at the individual level yields the greatest insights into questions of equity, but it is resource intensive. If collecting data at a higher level, how will you ensure that you are capturing gender differences?

- What criteria will you use for selecting respondents, and will your criteria create unequal opportunities for women and men to participate in the research? For example, doing a study on fisheries but only selecting fishers and not others who work along the fisheries value chain, where women tend to be more highly represented. Or, only including paid work, thereby excluding unpaid work such as catching bait or repairing nets, which might exclude women.
- Will the methodology you use create unequal opportunities for women and men? For example, if participants have to read text, then those with lower levels of literacy may not be able to participate, which may disproportionately exclude women.
- What other social differences might you want to consider in your study design that intersect with gender to shape how individuals participate in fisheries or aquaculture? For example, do older and younger women use resources differently? Do women and men of different ethnicities participate differently in fisheries or aquaculture?
- Is your survey and sampling strategy designed to take into account social and cultural factors that may introduce gender bias into the data? For example, if you only choose to interview heads of households, this will likely result in only men being interviewed in strongly patriarchal communities.
- Do your questions translate easily into the local language(s)? Using technical words, jargon or acronyms can create barriers. For example, some people may not understand certain terms, and may feel uncomfortable asking for them to be explained.
- Have you been careful to avoid using language that might suggest a bias to one gender (e.g. “fishermen” instead of “fishers”), conform to gender stereotypes in your sampling (e.g. “men do all the fishing”), or assume that the roles of one gender are more important than those of the other (e.g. “fishing is more important than gleaning”)?
- Will your research design create gender-specific risks, and have you designed measures to mitigate against these risks? For example, asking someone questions about their relationship with their intimate partner might be considered taboo.

Collecting data

When collecting data, consider the following:

- To avoid unintentional harm to women, it is important in some cultures to seek the permission of a male member of the household or relative before a woman can talk to outside researchers.
- Have you received free, prior and informed consent? This applies whether you are interviewing people one-on-one, or in a group. In other words, the individual has the right to decide not to participate, without any repercussions.
- Have you clearly explained how you will maintain the privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of those you interview? Consider too, that in some contexts, individuals may prefer not to be anonymous because they are

highly regarded knowledge holders in their communities. Consult with local experts and individual participants – prior to and at the point of data collection – to determine the most appropriate process. Photographs should only be taken with permission, and only if it does not compromise the person participating in the research.

- Have you selected an appropriate location and time for the interview to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of each participant? This may require being flexible about working in female- and male-dominated spaces. Do you need to schedule interviews at different times for women and men when they are not working on aquaculture farms, fishing or tending to household duties?
- In addition to separating women and men for focal group discussions, do you need to also consider different social differences so that people speak more openly? Understanding the governance structure in a community will help place participants into groups.
- Even within male- or female-only groups, are you paying attention to who is speaking and who is not? If need be, change or adapt your facilitation style so that everyone has an opportunity to speak. It may be worth splitting up groups of women and men based on age or another social characteristic. Be aware that in some contexts, less powerful or dissenting voices may simply agree to the opinions of the dominant group, or to the viewpoints of the majority.
- What languages or dialects will you need to use for the surveys? How will you ensure that everyone is translating

the questions in exactly the same way? This may be an important consideration if, for example, a woman or man has married into a community and may prefer to talk in their native tongue, or if younger people speak English or another foreign language.

- Be aware of how cultural norms, your own social identity, as well as your verbal and body language might affect the person you are interviewing and how comfortable they are speaking to you. For example, be sensitive to differences in experiences and opportunities between those living in urban vs rural areas. In some cultures, older women may not like being questioned by a young woman, while in others it might be preferred.
- Will you record the names of people, and if so, how will you maintain confidentiality while conducting the research in the field, or when you are back in your office?

Data analysis, interpretation and use

- How will you conduct and present sex-disaggregated descriptions, statistics, figures, tables and analyses?
- Will the “unit of analysis” adequately capture gender differences? For example, if the analysis only focuses on fishing gear, women who glean with little or no gear may be easily overlooked.
- How will you present the results to show the gender dimensions of the research? For example, will the analysis show women’s and men’s participation and contribution to social and economic aspects of the sector?

Chelcia Gomese from WorldFish facilitating gender-sensitive reporting.
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- Will the data analysis that you select (including the way data are aggregated) ensure there is adequate protection of individual or group identities?
- Because women and men are not all the same, do you need to disaggregate the data by other social categories (e.g. other gender identities, age, ethnicity, caste, religion, history (including colonial history) or migrant status, or by the intersections of gender with these categories?)
- Do you need to return to verify the key findings with different groups before completing and publishing the research?
- How will knowledge holders be acknowledged and, where appropriate, credited for their contributions to the research? How will undervalued knowledge holders be elevated?
- What will be the mechanism of sharing the findings of the research with all members of the community, especially those that participated in the study?
- Will gender-specific findings and recommendations be identified?
- Are any of the results too sensitive to publish? How will you present sensitive results to communities? How will you avoid unintended consequences, including harm to certain groups (e.g. women, youth)? For example, questions around trust, gender-based violence or leadership can be sensitive.
- Can the same communication tools and mechanisms be used for women and men, or do they need to be different?
- Will the results be linked to gender-sensitive management or policy decisions?

Conclusion

As you go forward as a researcher, it is important that the recommendations you make, or the solutions you identify from your research, help to address or lessen the impacts of gender inequalities, rather than maintain the status quo or widen inequalities. This is particularly important if there are gender norms that are harmful or continue to marginalise specific groups. Although there may be some that push back or some that might use culture as a reason to not address harmful practices, it is important to understand that no culture is static, and many have and will continue to change over time. In such circumstances, it is important to work in close partnership

with local people and/or experienced local gender groups and organisations. Furthermore, it is worth considering what Delisle et al. (2021) highlight: "Pacific Island cultures value fairness, working together as a community for the collective good, protection of the most vulnerable, helping and serving others, participation, dialogue and consensus building." Gender-sensitive fisheries and aquaculture research can make an important contribution to a more equitable future for all.

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