

Gender equality and social inclusion training for Tonga's Ministry of Fisheries

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Background

Tonga's Ministry of Fisheries (hereafter the Ministry) is spearheading community-based fisheries management through its Special Management Area (SMA) programme – a successful homegrown model to enhance community-driven management systems. The application of gender equity and social inclusion (GESI) lenses is an area the Ministry expressed interest in to enhance its capacity, with a strong focus on the SMA programme. In the past three years, the Ministry received diverse forms of assistance from the Pacific Community (SPC) through the Pacific-European Union Marine Partnership Programme (PEUMP) and with support from SPC's Human Rights and Social Development Division to enhance learning, research and awareness on GESI, and to some extent on human rights. These activities included awareness raising, learning sessions and research-related tasks:

- 1 A people-centred approach⁹ session planned and conducted during the Ministry of Fisheries Stakeholder Workshop (2020).
- 2 The inclusion of GESI and human-rights based approaches in the virtual training on how to conduct socioeconomic assessments using a step-by-step process (2021).
- 3 The inclusion of GESI and human rights aspects in research as part of the COVID-19 socioeconomic impact assessment on SMA households and small-scale fishers (2021).¹⁰

The above support was provided opportunistically or through an integrated approach to enhance GESI as part of the socioeconomic assessment work. To provide a more foundational basis for strategic learning and to strengthen capacity, a GESI training for fisheries officers was proposed

by SPC staff in consultation with the Ministry's acting CEO, who welcomed the training initiative as a way forward to progressing GESI mainstreaming across the Ministry's various divisions, with a focus on the inshore and operational teams.

Training details and structure, purpose and objectives

A two-and-a-half-day training was planned, designed and conducted by SPC in Nukualofa, Tonga from 22–24 August 2023. The facilitation team included Natalie Makhoul, PEUMPs' gender and human rights specialist; Margaret Fox, GESI adviser for fisheries; and Siueli Eleni Mone, in-country focal point for human rights. Siueli Eleni Mone was crucial in building relationships with the Ministry, identifying GESI training needs in consultation with the Ministry and contributing to sessions and input to the training in order to align with and explain national level GESI issues, objectives and priorities representing the Ministry of Internal Affairs' Women's Affairs Division. The key purpose was to provide a tailored training on GESI concepts and how these can be applied to support the progress of GESI mainstreaming in the fisheries sector. The training was intended to build the confidence and technical capacity of ministry staff. The application of GESI from a fisheries officer's lens was facilitated by providing practical tools on how to bring social and human dimensions into the focus of coastal fisheries, particularly with regards to small-scale fisheries management and community engagement in the context of the SMA programme.

Training structure

The first two days were open for both male and female staff to help build their technical GESI mainstreaming knowledge and skills. The third day was a half-day of training for female officers only, with a focus on women's empowerment in the professional world of fisheries. The purpose of this session was to identify barriers and challenges to women working in a male-dominated sector, and to provide tools and support for leadership through empowerment.

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⁹ A People Centred Approach or PCA is SPC's own tool in applying human rights-based principles, including GESI.

¹⁰ <https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/8gqjg>

Day 1: Concepts and definitions were discussed, GESI misconceptions and biases were identified, and linkages between state obligations and commitments with regards to GESI and fisheries-related contexts were also discussed. GESI's relevance to the fisheries sector was demonstrated, and discussions included the following: 1) key GESI issues in the fisheries sector at both the regional and national levels; 2) the reasons why progress is slow and pointing out gaps and needs for greater GESI investment; 3) understanding national GESI priorities from a “big picture” perspective and highlighting how these relate to, and matter, in the context of Tonga's fisheries sector.

Day 2: The focus was on delivering technical capacity for GESI analysis. In a first step, the term “GESI mainstreaming” was discussed. GESI analysis was then highlighted as a key enabler for technical staff to better understand GESI issues within their specific work areas. The sessions that followed focused on GESI analysis by presenting various analysis tools and examples using the SPC Pacific Handbook on Gender Equity and Social Inclusion in Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture.¹¹ Group work activities allowed participants to apply GESI analysis tools using a scenario. In the final session, key findings and recommendations for GESI from the 2021 socioeconomic COVID-19 impact assessment for small-scale fishers in SMA communities were presented and discussed. None of the participants were aware of the report and its findings. A discussion followed about how research, data collection and analysis can be better used to support GESI-relevant evidence to inform policy and programming.

Learning objectives

The learning objectives for Days 1 and 2 were to ensure that participants are: a) more gender aware and sensitive towards inclusive approaches, and are better positioned to identify entry points for integrating GESI into coastal fisheries; and b) better equipped with knowledge, tools and processes to apply GESI concepts into coastal fisheries.

Day 3 (half day only): This half day was dedicated to women's empowerment, with the intent to better understand constraints and barriers of female fisheries officers in progressing their professional careers and in undertaking their roles and responsibilities within the Ministry's work environment. This day allowed female fisheries officers to express their struggles and aspirations with navigating through cultural and traditional gender norms, while also working in a male-dominated field and juggling responsibilities at home and in their communities. This targeted session created awareness of gender barriers by aiming at building the confidence of female fisheries officers to overcome these barriers through empowerment.

The learning objectives for Day 3 were to ensure that female fisheries officers: a) are more aware about gender barriers and how these may affect their work within the Ministry and externally when working at the community level; and b) feel more empowered to progress their careers and to make a case for a more equitable work environment and a stronger engagement of women in fisheries.

Participation and why female officers are mostly selected to attend GESI training

In total, 13 Ministry staff attended the workshop (11 women, 2 men) and included staff from the science, compliance, policy, administration and human resources divisions. Four of the women were extension officers from the outer islands (two from Vava'u and two from Ha'apai). The low number of male participants was noted, and could be a result of the misconception that GESI topics are for women only. It is also possible that competing training sessions scheduled for the same week made it difficult for men to attend. A female participant remarked that she found it disappointing her male colleagues did not attend, and instead were sent off to attend technical training. On the other hand, the low

¹¹ <https://coastfish.spc.int/en/component/content/article/494-gender-equity-and-social-inclusion-handbook>

Female participants giving presentations at the training workshop. ©Josaia Nanuqa



representation of men was a blessing in disguise. It allowed a very honest and open dialogue by creating a safe and trusting setting for female staff to speak their minds and share their emotional stories related to the challenges they face in the fisheries sector. The women also reflected on their journeys growing up experiences with strongly designated gender roles in their personal and professional lives. A positive outcome of participant composition was the high number of young fisheries officers, with eight of the staff being between 20 and 30 years old. This prompted discussions on the challenges of younger officers, and the difficulty of speaking out in team meetings about, for example, their career progression because this age hierarchy is mirrored in the Ministry's power structure, comprises a hierarchy of senior officials. Two senior female fisheries staff were also part of the discussions. Their leading role as supervisors and the knowledge and experience they held helped to encourage younger staff to share and speak up during the workshop, and was a sign of leadership and commitment towards GESI, showing the importance of role models and intergenerational mentoring within the work place.

Session outcomes with key issues raised

1. Gendered journeys from girls and boys to women and men in the Tongan context

The first day allowed time for self-reflection on one's personal gender identity, from growing up as a girl or boy, to becoming a woman or man in the Tongan societal context and how gender roles, expectations and norms shaped participants' individual journeys. Key messages that were shared were:

- Growing up, girls face more restrictions because parents have stricter rules for girls than boys and limitations are imposed on girls with regards to exploring the outdoors, including the sea.

- Girls face greater restrictions in going out to the ocean for a swim, which they see as a barrier considering careers related to the ocean, where swimming, diving and a keen interest in marine spaces and resources usually begins.
- Other obstacles that girls feel are the expectations of doing well in school while also having to support parents in meeting family needs from an early age. This is particularly so for girls from families that struggle financially and so girls are pressured to support and look after their siblings. The pressure on girls is even higher if they come from families that have many children (e.g. 7 or more) because girls are expected to help with their siblings' upbringing, particularly in families that have lost a parent.
- There are high expectations for girls when it comes to good behaviour, finding a husband, and having children. Participants, however, mentioned that this can vary, depending on one's parents and their level of conservatism and general attitudes.
- One positive aspect of being a girl in Tonga is if she is the eldest girl in the family, in which case she receives special status as a fahu, with certain privileges that her siblings do not receive. In households with only one girl, the parents are also more likely to pamper her, particularly the fathers.
- Some participants mentioned that growing-up experiences depend highly on social factors such as the family's socioeconomic background, social status, and family mindset.
- Some married women mentioned that they feel lucky because they have married supportive husbands who give them more freedom, both at work and at home than other women who do not have enabling spousal support.

Participants of the two-and-a-half-day workshop. ©Josaia Nanuqa





Some of the participants during a break with SPC's in-country Human Rights and Social Development focal point, Ms Eleni Mone (far right).

It was evident that hardship within a family is felt more by girls than boys. Girls felt more pressure to step in to take up additional responsibilities for their siblings and for household-related matters, with additional pressure to look for paid work. Intersecting social categories such as poverty levels created greater vulnerabilities for girls. Early restrictions on girls with regards to exploring the sea signalled the greater barriers women and girls face when choosing careers in oceans and marine science.

2. Identifying GESI issues in the Ministry of Fisheries across all divisions

Participants discussed GESI issues within the Ministry and identified these through group work exercises:

- The Ministry's Compliance Division used to be a male-dominated space. Recently, however, the division has seen more women employed in jobs. Attitudes and the nature of the work can be challenging for women who mentioned personal safety concerns, harmful behaviour during inspections, and dealing with dangerous situations. Mixed teams of women and men, and support from the police, were mentioned as ways to improve women's working conditions. Compliance work allows women and men to gain a wide skillset and progress their careers, hence women emphasised the importance of improving access to, and conditions within, the Compliance Division for women.
- A high concentration of women in supportive and administrative roles despite the fact that some of the women hold academic degrees and have a keen interest in technical working areas.
- Capacity building opportunities do not always trickle down fairly to women and young female and male officers, indicating that age hierarchies are a barrier to them accessing skills and development opportunities.
- Poor data collection, the lack of data analysis and sharing of data, and limited knowledge regarding the extent

to which datasets support GESI-related evidence were mentioned as an issue that hinders GESI mainstreaming.

- Emerging aquaculture activities are an exciting avenue to promote women and youth involvement in Tonga. Limited information, however, was available to better understand GESI constraints and mainstreaming opportunities in the aquaculture sector.
- The deployment of fish aggregative devices (FADs) has not been discussed from a GESI perspective and there is a need to better understand who benefits from FADs, the roles of women and men (e.g. who is fishing around FADs, who is processing the fish catches from FADs, the impacts of FADs on women's and men's livelihoods or food security) and the negative and positive impacts of FADs from a socioeconomic and GESI lens.
- Stereotypes within the Ministry still exist, such as women are not good at diving. Such stereotypes hinder women's access to jobs and training opportunities.
- The SMA programme supports women and youth as part of the committee structure. Their representation, however, in terms of numbers is still very small and concerns have been raised about their meaningful participation in a male-dominated community context, where women and youth may not always be taken seriously. There may also be harmful discriminatory behaviour such as ridiculing women's contribution. Active empowerment is needed to support self-esteem and confidence for marginalised groups to express their voices and change harmful social norms to create inclusive, safe and respectful structures for the SMA programme. Utilising female extension officers (where available) in empowerment initiatives and using their relationships within the community was discussed as a way forward to supporting more effective GESI integration within the SMA programme at the outcome level.
- Other social exclusion issues in the SMA programme were also mentioned in the context of landlocked communities that may be denied access to marine spaces

and resources even though this may be for basic survival needs. A risk assessment and an improved consultation process under the SMA programme was mentioned as way forward to addressing these exclusion risks.

3. Identifying GESI analysis needs for the Ministry

Participants discussed the need for GESI analysis to improve the Ministry's mainstreaming work for better outcomes across all divisions:

- The aquaculture sector offers a wide range of activities that can benefit women and men, youth and other groups that have fewer employment opportunities. Little has been done to better analyse GESI roles, barriers and opportunities. Few projects work with women supporting livelihoods such as the mabe pearl project funded by the World Bank. A better understanding of success factors and additional barriers and lessons will be required to determine how services and specific projects can integrate GESI. Less is known about projects that support youth or other marginalised groups. Participants identified the significant added value of a GESI analysis for the aquarium trade and seaweed farming. The lack of knowledge regarding GESI issues and needs in these sectors have led to GESI "blind" programmes despite the potential of women, youth and other marginalised groups in undertaking and further developing value-adding, trading and marketing. There is great potential for the Ministry in supporting economic empowerment of women, youth and other potentially marginalised groups through the integration of GESI, for example through targeted training.
- Future socioeconomic surveys should include GESI analysis.
- Women tend to express the need for training more than men, and include different types of training, from post-harvest-related needs to financial literacy, budgeting and business skills. The different training needs have not been mapped or analysed from a GESI perspective, hence a GESI analysis on training demand could help the Ministry to better understand needs and gaps for improved investment and services for training related activities that benefit a wider audience, in particular women.
- GESI analysis related to management is another area that can add value and improve fisheries management plans, especially for women-dominated fisheries activities, to better understand the status of species targeted by women as well as other ecosystem services and marine spaces differently used by women and men with different impacts on their food security and/or their livelihoods. GESI information from this analysis can also better inform community outreach, and information and awareness activities regarding SMA communities.
- Internal policies and recruitment processes are often GESI neutral and lack sex-disaggregated data relating to the work force, performance, career progression, or training access and other capacity building opportunities

and working conditions that impact women and men differently.

4. Day 3 allowed a safe avenue for women to reflect, discuss and express their feelings and thoughts on the five women's empowerment principles:

- Women's sense of self-worth.
- Right to have and determine choices.
- Right to have access to opportunities and resources.
- Right to have power to control our own lives, both within and outside the home.
- Ability to influence the direction of social change and create more just social and economic order.

This space was designed as a women only safe space, therefore, a summary of key issues will remain confidential because participants shared their personal journeys, stories, challenges, motivation and aspirations for the future. The more general outcome of this session highlighted the importance of role models, mentoring, leadership skills, the Tongan family unit, and having the support of fathers and husbands to follow a career pathway in marine science.

Evaluation and conclusion

The GESI training received excellent feedback through a post-evaluation survey, which indicated that 100% of participants agreed that they better understood how to include GESI in their work because of the training. None of the participants had participated in a similar training before and 90% found that the training was relevant to their jobs.

A training report was finalised – and shared with the Ministry – with special focus on highlighting potential areas for GESI mainstreaming and possible follow-up activities, such as identifying areas that can benefit from a GESI analysis, leadership training for women and young officers (e.g. Pacific Fisheries Leadership programme), and exploring targeted empowerment initiatives for marginalised voices in the SMA programme. As a direct result of the training, the Ministry appointed a gender focal point and has since established better relationships with the Ministry of Internal Affairs with the mandate of promoting and progressing gender equality.