



Gender and fisheries in Tonga

Summary of key issues

June 2018



FAME

Fisheries,
Aquaculture
and Marine
Ecosystems
Division

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Introduction and purpose

This report is intended to support gender-responsive approaches to fisheries and aquaculture work undertaken by the Pacific Community (SPC) in Tonga. It is an internal SPC product that is expected to stimulate discussion in the Social Development Programme and the Fisheries, Aquaculture and Marine Ecosystems Division of SPC.

The report provides a snapshot of available information and analyses about gender issues in fisheries. More research and analysis are, however, required to develop a comprehensive understanding of the multiple ways in which men and women participate in the sector across Tonga. Recommendations relevant to SPC, the Government of Tonga and development partners are provided at the end of the document.

Analysis of gender issues in fisheries and aquaculture requires an understanding of commitments, laws and policy frameworks that support gender-equitable management of fisheries and marine resources.¹ It also requires clarification of how men and women:

- are involved in fisheries;
- influence decisions about the use of fisheries resources;
- access those resources; and
- share the work, benefits and risks of using fisheries resources for different purposes.

Identification of gaps in knowledge about these issues can guide future work and provide the rationale for research by government, development partners and communities.

Methodology

The material in this report is gathered from a desk review of relevant available literature. The review draws heavily on the 2018 research for the *Country Gender Assessment of the Agriculture and Rural Sector in Tonga* (CGA-ARS) and other recent work done by SPC, development partners, and the Government of Tonga.

The report provides summaries and gender analysis of government commitments and policy frameworks that can support or constrain gender-responsive fisheries and aquaculture development. Based on CGA-ARS and analysis of other sources, existing findings on the status, strengths and weaknesses of enabling environments for gender mainstreaming are highlighted. Findings are intended to be relevant to the work of the Government of Tonga, development partners and the private sector.

To inform further data collection, analysis and improved programming, the report also identifies:

- gaps in knowledge and evidence and areas for further data collection and analysis;
- preliminary observations, lessons learned and good practice in gender mainstreaming; and
- recommendations for progressing gender mainstreaming in fisheries and aquaculture within SPC and with governments.

Overview of gender issues in fisheries

Gender roles vary across time, place and region according to changing values, practices and technologies. Gender roles and responsibilities are largely socially constructed and are the basis for the structure and organisation of women and men's differential relationships with their environments, the economy, their resource utilization patterns and strategies.²

Few households in Tonga are involved in income generation or business through fisheries. The 2015/2016 household income and expenditure survey showed less than 1% of households' income is derived from fisheries, while 12% of household expenditure is on fish and seafood.³ There has been relatively little research published on the roles that women in Tonga play in fisheries and coastal management, although there is work that documents women's engagement in reef gleaning and fishing for finfish.⁴ Women are also engaged in some types of aquaculture activities, including pearl farms and fish ponds.

According to the Tonga Statistics Department, in 2017, 13% of households in Tonga were engaged in fishing. Table 1 provides information on where those households were and how they used their catch. The table shows that most fishing was for home consumption or to fulfil traditional obligations, activities that are generally the responsibility of women, who do most or all of the post-harvest processing.

¹ Management of fisheries and aquaculture includes conservation and development and the use of fresh water and marine fisheries.

² Williams, S.B., Hochet-Kinbongui, M. and Nauen, C.E. 2005. Gender, fisheries and aquaculture: Social capital and knowledge for the transition towards sustainable use of aquatic ecosystems. EU: Brussels, 32 p.

³ Kingdom of Tonga. 2015/2016. Tonga Household Income and Expenditure Survey. <https://sdd.spc.int/en/news/latest-news/148-tonga-household-income-and-expenditure-survey-2015-2016-report>

⁴ Kronen, M. 2002. SPC. Women in Fisheries Information Bulletin #11. Women's fishing in Tonga: Case studies from Ha'apai and Vava'u Islands. www.spc.int/Digital-Library/Doc/FAME/InfoBull/WIF/11/WIF11_17_Kronen.pdf. See also. FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization). 2010. Fisheries and aquaculture country profiles: The Kingdom of Tonga. Rome: FAO.



Table 1. Household purposes of fishing

Region	Total no. of households	No. fishing	Yes, for home consumption and social obligations	Yes, for sale	Yes, mainly for home consumption but some for sale	Yes, mainly for sale but some for home consumption
Tongatapu	12,953	11,865	647	73	189	179
Vava'u	2,715	2,177	388	16	93	41
Ha'apai	1,179	712	309	39	65	54
'Eua	885	776	60	1	22	26
Ongo Niua	273	174	82	0	13	4
TOTAL	18,005	15,704	1,486	129	382	304
%		87.2%	8.25%	0.7%	2.1%	1.7%

Source: Tonga Statistics Department, 2017:227-231

Within government, the CGA-ARS found that staff of the Ministry of Fisheries were open to the idea of gender analysis and gender mainstreaming but they had little technical knowledge or experience in gender analysis. The Tonga Fisheries Sector Plan 2016–2024 identifies areas where women could be more engaged in fisheries activities but it does consistently incorporate gender analysis, monitoring or evaluation approaches that allow outcomes to be tracked.

Women's fisheries activities appear to be primarily related to subsistence, food security and small-scale marketing for periodic income generation. Transportation costs and infrastructure barriers, such as unreliable sources of ice, constrain women from consistent engagement in small-scale informal business activities linked to shipping fish to larger markets. Of 34 fishing licences, women hold two.⁵ Overfishing and declining stocks have affected food security and increased prices of local fish. Imported tinned fish is regularly consumed as an alternative.

Tongan women's time commitment to reproductive tasks, community work and church obligations constrain them from becoming more engaged in underdeveloped sectors such as fisheries. This is a recurrent issue that must be considered in all gender analyses, i.e. how the difference in the amount of time women and men spend on reproductive and caregiving work in the home and community affects the amount of time they have available to engage in development activities, community decision-making forums, and productive work. This information is basic but fundamental to gender analysis of fisheries issues.

Guiding frameworks that support gender equality in the fisheries sector

The Government of Tonga has made a number of commitments linked to gender equality in the fisheries sector.

At an international level, endorsement of the Sustainable Development Goals and United Nations conventions means that Tonga recognises the importance of gender equality in decision-making, the economy and the environment. Tonga has ratified the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biodiversity. Guiding bodies for these conventions have recognised that analysis of men's and women's roles in resource management, including management of rivers, reefs and oceans, is critical to making progress on the conventions.⁶

At the regional level, Tonga has signed the Pacific Platform for Action on the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality, as well as the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration. Both of these commitments recognise the need to support women to engage more in decision-making about the management and use of economic resources such as fisheries.

Within Tonga, the Revised National Policy on Gender and Development clarifies the importance of gender mainstreaming to advance development in all areas of life. In fisheries, the Tonga Fisheries Sector Plan makes little specific mention of gender mainstreaming but it does include: (i) the intention that women be involved in governance groups overseeing the implementation of the plan; (ii) scope to empower women in fisheries through the development of special management areas; and (iii) the need to improve the role of women in fisheries businesses. Currently, the Ministry of Fisheries has no specific guidance on collection of sex-disaggregated data and information is inconsistent, as each fisheries division collects its own data, which are then amalgamated into annual reports.

The Special Management Areas programme and process for recovering and improving coastal fisheries resources incorporates gender-responsive approaches. It facilitates the collection of sex-disaggregated data on women's and men's needs and monitors issues linked to livelihoods and male/female engagement. Men and women participate in training about coastal resource management and carry out resource surveys. To date, the special management area process has not included gender training, nor has there been any gender analysis of its effects. This is an area for further research and documentation of lessons learned.

⁵ Note that these data were provided by Ministry of Fisheries staff during consultations for the SPC/FAO Country gender assessment – agriculture and the rural sector in Tonga.

⁶ CBD 2015 – 2020 Gender Plan of Action Pocket Guide: Summary and Examples. <https://www.cbd.int/gender/doc/CBD-GenderPlanofAction-EN-WEB.pdf>; See also the UNFCCC Introduction to Gender and Climate Change and associated documents <https://unfccc.int/topics/gender/the-big-picture/introduction-to-gender-and-climate-change>.

Decision-making about management and use of fisheries and marine resources

The Government of Tonga is responsible for management of fisheries. The Tonga Fisheries Sector Plan notes that the minister responsible for fisheries is charged with ensuring the long-term conservation and sustainable use of fisheries resources. The minister is also responsible for control, management and development of aquaculture.

Gender balance in the Ministry of Fisheries is 44% women and 56% men but overall gender balance numbers do not reflect the concentration of women at clerical level, nor the concentration of men at the two levels of fisheries assistants. In early 2018, there was one woman among five men at the CEO levels and more women than men at the third and fourth levels of staffing. It should be noted that, while women play a prominent role in the Tonga public service, being a woman does not automatically indicate an understanding or ability to do gender analysis or develop gender-responsive programming. Gender mainstreaming, planning, programming and implementation are all technical skills that can be done by either women or men but they require specific training and analytical skills.

Tonga has an open system of marine tenure. This means that: (i) anyone can fish or gather resources anywhere in coastal areas; and (ii) local communities cannot control access and overfishing. Consequently, all types of fishing and gleaning have been done in coastal and inter-tidal areas. In some areas, stocks have declined significantly, threatening ecosystem stability and food security. To address threats of stock collapse, and to restore and improve management of coastal areas, the government introduced special management areas (SMAs). Community councils govern the management areas and are made up of both men (60%) and women (40%).

The Tonga Fisheries Sector Plan identifies conservation and management challenges regarding the SMAs, which require establishment and enforcement of limits by species, clear regulation and legislation, as well as more devolution of authority to special management area committees. The fact that there are men and women represented on the SMA committees is positive. Assessment of how gender sensitive these committees are requires analysis of the extent to which women and men actually attend and participate in the substantive work of each committee, and the extent to which women's views are heard and reflected in committee decisions and actions.

Women and men's roles in fisheries and aquaculture

In Tonga, as in other Pacific countries, off-shore fishing is almost exclusively dominated by men, although women may work in the shore-based components of commercial operations. Women are engaged in subsistence fishing and gleaning and the Tonga Fisheries Sector Plan notes that, in some areas, women's subsistence gleaning activities account for over 75% of invertebrate harvests. Women also do small-scale marketing of fish and shellfish in the main markets and engage in some aquaculture activities, such as pearl farming. There is scope to involve women in all of these areas; proactive engagement, use of gender indicators in monitoring and evaluation, and documentation of lessons could highlight good practice and facilitate replication in multiple areas.

Research done in 2002 found that about half the village women surveyed in Ha'apai were engaged in fishing for finfish. In Vava'u, information from the same study showed that between 6% and 21% of women fished. Women's fishing techniques varied in the areas surveyed and included net casting, spear fishing and using handlines. Numbers for gleaning were higher, ranging from 72% to 92%.⁷

Men also engaged in these activities but at different times of the day and for different durations. Women preferred fishing in the day, while men did night fishing. Women also spent slightly less time gleaning than did men. Men used different gear – handlines as well as all types of nets. Men also trolled and did deep-bottom fishing to harvest finfish, whereas women were not reported to use those techniques.

Aquaculture plans and/or trials for seaweed, pearls, clams, beche-de-mer and milkfish are in the development stage. Some trials have faced challenges due to natural disasters such as tropical cyclones.

No recent comparable research could be found for this report; this indicates that comparison against the baseline documented in 2002 would be useful to assess how women and men have adapted to changes in species availability, climate impacts, and changes resulting from social and economic development.

Services and support for women and men engaged in fisheries and aquaculture

Implementing gender-responsive programmes in rural areas is complex and constrained by social norms about women's rights to engage in decision-making. The hierarchical nature of Tongan society may also be a barrier and marginalise specific groups. To work within the existing socio-cultural context, avoid increasing women's workloads, and ensure there is no backlash requires careful programme design to ensure engagement with, and buy-in from, communities. Programmes that aim to increase incomes

⁷ Kronen, M. 2002. SPC Women in Fisheries Information Bulletin #11. Women's fishing in Tonga: Case studies from Ha'apai and Vava'u Islands. www.spc.int/Digital-Library/Doc/FAME/InfoBull/WIF/11/WIF11_17_Kronen.pdf;

should also empower women and widen their opportunities.

The Tonga Fisheries Sector Plan and fisheries policies do not explicitly identify women as a target group, nor do they provide any gender analyses of different programmes. Undertaking gender analysis training with the ministry and providing data collection and analytical support could identify how to advance gender mainstreaming and accelerate Ministry of Fisheries' objectives for conservation, management and sustainable private sector development.

Government extension services

The Tonga Fisheries Sector Plan identifies potential for engagement of women in fisheries but it is not clear to what extent fisheries extension officers engage women and men differently. In other Pacific Island countries, men have been considered the main target audience for fisheries extension, and information in the CGA-ARS indicates that this may also be the case in Tonga.

The Ministry of Fisheries provides training and extension services in the two areas where women are known to be involved, that is, in-shore fishing and aquaculture. The lack of available sex-disaggregated data on extension training participants and recipients of extension services makes it difficult to analyse how well women are being served as ministry constituents.

The Women's Affairs Division lacks capacity and technical knowledge to support women interested in fisheries. There are also constraints linked to the lack of inter-ministry coordination and collaboration, limited staff availability, and inadequacy of financial resources.

Fisheries-based employment, small-scale business and income generation

Lack of conservation strategies, no enforcement of limits, and overfishing has led to the collapse, near collapse or near extinction of several fisheries in Tonga. These include beche-de-mer, mullet, coconut crabs and devil clams. The extent to which Tongan women relied on these species for income generation is not clear but they could collect and sell beche-de-mer and coconut crabs to intermediaries or brokers.

The Tonga Fisheries Sector Plan, citing 2011 census data, notes that approximately 10% of the population engaged in fishing activities and of those people, 66% sold some or all of their catch. Just over half of the fishing population was located in Tongatapu, Ha'apai and Vava'u. Sex disaggregated data were not available, but Ministry of Fisheries staff reported that there were a few aquaculture businesses run by women in Vava'u. Staff also noted that women hold two of the 34 fishing licences issued.⁸ In addition, the Ministry of Fisheries is supporting mabe-pearl farming in Vava'u and women and men are engaged in that initiative, although in a number of cases businesses are family owned and registered to the husband.

Currently, the fisheries sector plan includes a small section on support to the private sector, specifically mentioning that an area for further work is improving the role of women in business. This is stated in the context of constraints facing both male and female small entrepreneurs: lack of business skills, limited access to credit, and low awareness of fisheries operations within the Tonga Development Bank. The plan notes that staff in the Ministry of Fisheries do not have the technical capacity to support business development and that there is a need to collaborate with the Tonga Business Enterprise Centre.

Provision of government services, including infrastructure, to support small fisheries-focused entrepreneurs in outer islands is limited. The CGA-ARS noted that women in Ha'apai were constrained by the inconsistent availability of ice for shipping fish to market, as there is no ice supply at the wharf/landing facility.

A number of development partners, including DFAT, the UN agencies and international non-governmental organisations, support women's economic empowerment but no literature was found to indicate that initiatives involving women in fisheries were in place in Tonga.

⁸ Information provided during consultations for the SPC/FAO Country gender assessment of agriculture and rural sector in Tonga research.

Gender-responsive approaches to fisheries and aquaculture

Gender-responsive approaches to fisheries and aquaculture are those that reflect and respond to men's and women's gender roles, their needs and interests, and the constraints they experience. Development of gender-responsive fisheries interventions requires information and evidence about what men and women do and what resources they control and have access to. Building an evidence-base and sharing that evidence among stakeholders is a critical step.

Gender-responsive approaches also seek to ensure that women and men share and control decision-making and benefits in an equitable manner. Such approaches must also recognise and analyse contextual issues, such as socio-cultural norms and workloads to ensure that interventions do not cause harm to anyone. Understanding that women carry a higher burden of reproductive and caregiving work than do men is important when designing effective and inclusive projects.

In Tonga, the Ministry of Fisheries has programmes with the potential to support consistent inclusion of women in fisheries management, use and conservation. The Special Management Areas programme includes some existing gender-responsive processes, such as documentation of women's and men's needs, and engagement of women in the management committees that govern the special areas. There are, however, significant gaps in the ministry's technical capacity to mainstream gender. Gaps include lack of awareness about the purpose and benefits of gender mainstreaming and limited capacity to do gender analysis and gender-responsive programme design. Additionally, the ministry lacks clear evidence about women's and men's roles and potential to develop the fisheries sector. Collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data from across the various divisions of the ministry is an outstanding area for more work.

Table 2 highlights a few key steps in the process⁹ of establishing an SMA and how gendered perspectives could be integrated.

Table 2: Gendered perspectives in the SMA process

SMA process	Gendered perspective to consider
Meeting consultation with community to confirm their interest in establishing an SMA	Encourage the Government of Tonga to ensure that women and women's groups are part of the consultation to confirm interest in the SMA. Ensure a sex disaggregated list of participants, including their age breakdown if possible, is important
Consensus and fully understand SMA	During the community consultation, ensure that facilitators find out the productive roles of men and women in that community – who currently uses the resources from the sea for home consumption and/or for home consumption and for cash income. Do community members also undertake agricultural farming? If so, who and to what extent? If the SMA is in place, who is affected? Do community members (both men and women – not forgetting the elderly and the youth) have alternative sources of livelihood and food for home consumption? Who monitors and enforces the SMA – will women be involved? How?
Establishment of an SMA committee	<i>Currently, a committee is made up of a chairperson, town officer/district officer, two reps from among fishers, two reps from among women, two reps from among youth, one rep from the Ministry of Fisheries.</i> It is important to clarify the role of the women and youth reps. Do these reps need to be from fishing families as well? Encourage reps from these groups to liaise with women/youth groups and networks within the community. Also recognise that, whilst there are two women reps, this does not mean that the two fisher reps need to be men. If women play a big role in fisheries/marine resources in that community, they, too, should be encouraged to put their names forward as the fisher reps or chairperson.
Socio-economic survey	Tongan communities are relatively small. This is a good opportunity to collect sex disaggregated data at the household level. It is also a good opportunity to conduct gender analysis of income and expenditure, decision-making processes in the household and community, people's access to and control of resources, and the training and education needs of community members.
Consultation and development of a coastal community management plan	Women and women's groups should be strongly encouraged to participate in the development of the coastal community management plan. Previous discussion on productive roles of men and women in the community need to be considered in this stage.

⁹ The information on the steps in the SMA process is taken from a newsletter article: Scaling up Tonga special management areas through community-to-community exchange. See: http://www.spc.int/DigitalLibrary/Doc/FAME/InfoBull/FishNews/158/FishNews158_02_Muron.pdf

Table 3 highlights strengths and weaknesses in the enabling environment for gender mainstreaming in the Ministry of Fisheries. These findings are a result of consultations with selected staff during the development of the CGA-ARS in March/April 2018. They are not necessarily representative of the views of all the ministry staff.

Table 3: Enabling environment assessment for the Tonga Ministry of Fisheries

Enabling environment criteria	Indicative findings
Commitment at leadership level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tonga Fisheries Sector Plan (TFSP) 2016–2024 acknowledges women as being integral to the success of the plan. Special management areas (SMAs) roll-out acknowledges the importance of including women at every level, including in decision-making. Pearl farming project includes women.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Other policies and strategies are not consistent with TFSP. A National Fisheries Policy completed in 2018 acknowledges fishermen but ignores women.
Organisational culture and internal willingness to address gender issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goodwill towards being more gender inclusive at the operations level. Gender training for staff would be welcomed, including gender and statistics. There is no apparent discrimination in employment practices.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a belief by some in senior management that there are no gender issues in Tonga. Gender is generally not considered relevant in policies or strategies by senior management, despite gender commitments in TFSP. There are no gender champions and gender effects are not discussed at staff meetings.
Accountability mechanisms and systems to enforce commitments to gender mainstreaming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SMA surveys collect sex-disaggregated data and use survey results to measure impacts on livelihoods. Pearl farming project collects sex-disaggregated data.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No other sections collect sex-disaggregated data. Monitoring and evaluation frameworks do not include gender indicators.
Technical capacity to identify and address gender issues	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff lack skills for gender analysis or programming of issues across sectors. Staff lack skills for collecting sex-disaggregated data.
Adequate financial and human resources to implement gender mainstreaming	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Coastal Fisheries Section is understaffed and under-funded to achieve planned SMA expansion. There is no budget for gender activities.

Potential for strengthening gender mainstreaming

Gender equality and equity have not to date been high on the agenda of the Tonga Ministry of Fisheries, although there is interest and scope to advance this work. Developing a clear gender analysis of the Tonga Fisheries Sector Plan and identification of policy issues will clarify practical next steps. Identification of data and analysis gaps, as well as policy issues, will enable creation of a gender-responsive sector policy, an action plan to integrate gender across the ministry's work, and gender indicators and targets.

Strengthening gender mainstreaming will require increased collaboration and coordination across government, including engagement of the Ministry of Fisheries with the Women's Affairs Division. The Women's Affairs Division is currently focused on developing the enabling environment for gender mainstreaming across the whole of government and is working primarily at the policy level. The division has a small staff and budget and does not have the resources to provide training and technical assistance to line ministries.

Support provided jointly to the Ministry of Fisheries and the Women's Affairs Division could assist government to build technical capacity for gender analysis and gender-responsive planning in the Ministry of Fisheries. It could also identify specific policy issues that the Women's Affairs Division could respond to and take forward at the national level. The Women's Affairs Division, with support from Ministry of Fisheries staff, is well placed to provide advice on what aspects of the Revised National Policy on Gender and Development are relevant and adaptable to the mandate of the Ministry of Fisheries.

Once gender objectives are specified in Ministry of Fisheries' programmes, assessment and monitoring can track implementation to show the extent to which gender-responsive approaches are working and benefiting women and men. Further, improving the enabling environment and increasing collaboration across sectors will support alignment of the ministry's objectives with national gender commitments and create synergies with the Revised National Policy on Gender and Development.

The Women's Affairs Division supports and coordinates activities with civil society organisations. It has the potential to assist the Ministry of Fisheries to connect with community, business and environmental organisations interested in the advancement of rural women. Exploring overlapping interests and possible partnerships would allow the ministry to move forward its agenda of engaging women more in aquaculture and business activities. Additionally, the Women's Affairs Division works closely with organisations that provide services to victims of violence against women. Where Ministry of Fisheries programming has the potential to change social norms and gender roles, good practice protocols on avoiding violence against women can be incorporated to reduce the risk of women experiencing backlash in the home and community.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are linked closely to findings from the SPC/FAO *Country and gender assessment of the rural sector in Tonga*. They are relevant to a range of development actors, including the Government of Tonga, multilateral and regional agencies, civil society organisations, donors and international conservation non-governmental organisations.

- Using a participatory approach involving senior management of both the Ministry of Fisheries and the Women's Affairs Division, undertake gender analysis of the Tonga Fisheries Sector Plan and clearly identify gender-related policy issues.
- Identify a senior executive in the Ministry of Fisheries as the gender focal point and champion, and clarify specific roles and responsibilities to advance gender-responsive implementation of the work of the ministry.
- Deliver training to all Ministry of Fisheries staff on gender analysis, collection of sex-disaggregated data and generation of evidence about women's and men's roles and their knowledge of fisheries, species management, food security, habitat restoration and conservation.
- Facilitate collaboration between the Women's Affairs Division and the Ministry of Fisheries. In the context of training on gender issues in fisheries, engage agencies in joint efforts to assess women's strategic interests in fisheries.
- Provide support to the Ministry of Fisheries to integrate gender considerations into the draft fisheries policy. Alternatively, work with the ministry to develop a specific gender and fisheries policy, focused on women's economic empowerment, food security and disaster risk reduction.
- Provide support to review the Special Management Areas programme and identify how it can more effectively integrate women at the community level into decision-making, planning and monitoring.
- Undertake a follow-up survey to the case study of Hapa'ai and Vava'u, reported in the 2002 SPC Women in Fisheries Information Bulletin #11, to assess how men's and women's fishing activities have changed in response to stock levels, climate variations and the introduction of special management areas.
- Undertake mapping of coastal management and fisheries-related development projects with analysis of good practice for involving women and men in equitable ways.



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