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Inform and update on gender and fisheries research in coastal fisheries and aquaculture in Kiribati

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Background information

1. SPC through the Pacific-European Union Marine Partnership (PEUMP) programme in collaboration with national fisheries agencies, have been undertaking gender research in the fisheries sector across several Pacific Island countries to assess and establish a country baseline to better understand:
 - Women's and men's roles and forms of engagement within the fisheries sector;
 - Barriers, challenges, and opportunities for women and men;
 - The institutional gaps and needs of national fisheries agencies to mainstream gender in line with national gender equality commitments.
2. In 2019 a Pacific gender and fisheries literature review was conducted to understand research gaps and needs by country. Kiribati was identified as one of the countries with very little information on gender issues in fisheries despite a general awareness of women's contributions in fisheries, including in post-harvest, marketing and selling and value-adding.
3. Kiribati expressed their interest in conducting a gender analysis of their fisheries sector with a focus on coastal fisheries and aquaculture. The Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resource Development (MFMRD) saw the importance of an improved understanding of gendered roles, challenges and barriers, different needs and opportunities for women and men and different age groups to ensure equitable services and programmes.
4. SPC PEUMP with support from the University of Wollongong's Pathways project worked closely with MFMRD staff between October 2023 and January 2024 to conduct the first national gender and fisheries analysis for their coastal fisheries and aquaculture sector.

Purpose and objectives

5. A key purpose of the analysis was to support MFMRD in strengthening their institutional capacity to mainstream gender and achieve equitable benefits for fisheries-dependent communities, particularly, within the coastal fisheries and aquaculture sector.
6. Specifically, the gender analysis was designed to better understand the barriers, challenges, and areas for improvement as well as opportunities for a stronger integration of a gender lens that can inform national fisheries policy and programming.
7. This analysis investigated women's and men's roles in the fisheries sector (gendered division of labour) and how gender norms shape these roles comparing women's and men's access to and use of marine resources. Further, the study investigated gender-specific barriers and obstacles, gender-specific concerns and needs, engagement in pre-harvest to post-harvest activities, marketing and selling including value adding for marine resource commodities.
8. The goal of this paper is to highlight ongoing research on gender and social inclusion (GESI) in the fisheries sector by showcasing the recent gender and fisheries analysis in Kiribati as an example.

Methodology

9. The methodology had several components including:
 - Desktop review of existing literature in relation to gender and fisheries in Kiribati;
 - Design of field research questionnaire based on the areas of investigations outlined in the draft analytical framework provided by SPC, and in line with previous gender and fisheries country assessments. While also ensuring that the questionnaires are relevant to the context of Kiribati's gender and fisheries space;
 - Identifying and training of personnel from MFMRD's coastal fisheries division to conduct the field research;
 - Undertaking in-country field research on gender perspectives of the fisheries sector across representative sites through focus group discussions with community groups that were disaggregated by gender and age; and
 - Conducting an institutional analysis of MFMRD's capacity to mainstream gender including on relevant gender equality policies and commitments. Which encompassed interviewing key MFMRD personnel and their counterparts from Kiribati's national women's machinery – the Ministry of Women, Youth, Sport and Social Affairs (MWYSSA).

Key findings

Field survey

10. Gender roles, responsibilities, and traditions:
 - Women focus more on invertebrate harvesting and use simpler fishing gears compared to men. While men focusing more on catching finfish but they also harvesting some invertebrate species.
 - Men and women fish across a variety of diverse habitats. However, women's fishing activities is concentrated within the inshore/coastal areas while men fish in both coastal and oceanic habitats.
 - Women are largely responsible for post-harvest processing and selling.
 - Traditional beliefs and practices still exist that limit women's participation in fishing.
11. There have been some changes of roles over time, with women now more involved in fishing and men are now harvesting species that women traditionally harvested and vice-versa. Additionally, men are now more involved in post-harvest fisheries and housework compared to the past.
12. Women and men similarly face certain challenges including access to markets and salt, difficulty with maintaining seafood quality (access to ice) and obtaining licences. However, there were certain issues that are gender-specific, with personal safety a key concern for women while men's concerns were related to boat fuel, size limits and increasing numbers of commercial fishers.

Institutional Analysis

13. Interviews with senior management leads confirmed a strong political will and high-level support for gender mainstreaming. However, senior managers expressed a need to better understand what the gender mainstreaming process entails.
14. MFMRD has strong human resources management policies, rules and regulations on non-discrimination with increasing numbers of women in senior management positions. Further, training opportunities are inclusive with female staff participating.
15. To bolster women's economic empowerment in the fisheries sector, MFMRD has been engaging the Ministry for Women, Youth, Sports and Social Affairs (MWYSSA) to support their women's livelihoods activities.
16. The assessment provides a set of recommendations to support MFMRD in strengthening their institutional conditions to mainstream gender where gaps do exist.

Way forward

17. A set of recommendations will guide MFMRD in the future implementation of key findings to champion gender mainstreaming processes internally and externally. In a nutshell, recommendations include the following:
 - Opportunities for the integration of gender lenses in upcoming policies and institutional plans.
 - Gender and social inclusion (GESI) considerations at projects/programmes level.
 - GESI considerations related to research, community-based fisheries management, livelihoods development, including value adding.
 - Capacity building support for MFMRD technical staff on GESI.
 - Smart resourcing for gender mainstreaming.
 - Building strategic partnerships with the national women's machinery including strengthening existing collaborations with the MWYSSA.