

Mainstreaming gender and human rights-based approaches into coastal fisheries

Dr Sangeeta Mangubhai is currently the Director for the Wildlife Conservation Society's Fiji Country Program. In March 2018, she became the fourth Pacific Islander to receive the prestigious and globally competitive Pew Fellowship in Marine Conservation from the Pew Charitable Trusts. Her three-year project aims at developing practical, context-specific guidelines, tools and policy recommendations to assist Melanesian countries with mainstreaming gender and human rights-based approaches into coastal fisheries management and development, for improved food security and livelihoods of local communities.

Project background

The United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimated that there are 50 million small-scale fishers in developing countries (FAO 2015). This estimate includes Pacific Island countries, which have communities that are largely coastal and highly reliant on inshore fisheries for their subsistence and livelihoods. Although fish is the largest protein source for Pacific Islanders and subsistence and commercial fisheries contribute millions to many countries' GDP (Bell et al. 2009; Gillett 2016), most coastal fisheries are heavily exploited and stocks are in urgent need of rebuilding.

The FAO 'Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication' (SSF Guidelines) provide principles and guidance to countries on addressing small-scale fisheries (FAO 2015). The SSF Guidelines reflect a growing acceptance and movement away from narrowly focusing on fisheries governance or a 'rights-based approach' (which largely deals with access rights to fishing grounds), towards a broader more inclusive 'human rights-based' (HRB) approach that recognises that human rights are integral to development outcomes. An HRB approach is inclusive of rights-based approaches, but also addresses broader human rights issues that are less documented (e.g. displacement, marginalisation, forced evictions, inadequate work standards, unlawful detention, discrimination, exploitation, abuse) in the fisheries sector, and their links to broader development goals such as rights to food, health, gender equality, adequate standards of living, and poverty alleviation.

The SSF Guidelines draw on numerous human rights conventions, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), to promote social development and improve governance in developing country fisheries, particularly of vulnerable and marginalised fishing groups. The guidelines also highlight the need for more equitable representation and inclusion of women in decision-making and management in the

fisheries sector. Unfortunately, the guidelines lack sufficient details or a way forward for member states to implement them within their own unique social, cultural and political contexts.

Despite FAO hosting workshops to bring together experts from around the world, there is limited experience and examples on the ground of the practical application of the SSF Guidelines by state and non-state actors, including in the Pacific. The inclusion of gender and an HRB approach in fisheries management in the Pacific is also hindered by the fact that these issues are often addressed by separate ministries and are poorly integrated or mainstreamed into sectors such as fisheries. Without the knowledge, tools or enabling conditions for integration, fisheries managers and practitioners will continue to struggle to ensure that fisheries management and development approaches are holistic, inclusive of gender and other HRB approaches that are tailored to the Pacific.

Research objectives

The project aims at developing practical, context-specific guidelines, tools and policy recommendations to assist Melanesian countries to mainstream gender and HRB approaches into coastal fisheries management and development, for improved food security and livelihoods of local communities.

The project has three main components. The first is to develop an *understanding* of the degree to which traditional and current gender equity and an HRB approach can be fully optimised to enhance coastal fisheries management and development in Melanesia to improve its effectiveness. This will involve: 1) in partnership with PhD candidate Sarah Lawless at James Cook University, synthesising information from in-country gender assessments of regional organisations, ministries of fisheries (in Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu), international and national non-governmental organisations, academics and gender experts; 2) undertake a desktop study to look at what HRB approaches have been used in coastal fisheries projects across Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu; 3) working with the Pacific Community (SPC) to collect, analyse and

assess legislation in the three countries against gender and human rights requirements that are applicable to the coastal fisheries sector.

In the second component of the project I will facilitate the development of a locally relevant, context-specific framework for evaluating how well gender and HRB approaches have been applied to coastal fisheries management and development projects in Melanesia. This will be done in close partnership with SPC and multi-sectoral partners. The framework will be tested in Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, and lessons learned and case studies of successes and failures will be compiled and shared with fisheries managers and practitioners.

The third component involves working with government and national practitioners in each of the countries. I hope to collaborate and develop practical tools and policy recommendations to mainstream gender and HRB approaches into the fisheries sector to overcome barriers and obstacles in each of the three countries. The types of tools developed will depend on stakeholders needs in the three countries, but may include guidelines, checklists, toolkits or policy briefs.

If successful, this project will contribute to national and regional efforts to improve coastal fisheries management and development by ensuring more equitable representation of women in decision-making, and the inclusion of broader human-rights and development goals.

References

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For more information:

Sangeeta Mangubhai
Director
Wildlife Conservation Society – Fiji Country Program
Suva, Fiji
smangubhai@wcs.org

