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SPC Pacific handbook for human rights, gender equity and
social inclusion in tuna industries

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Background information

Handbook development phase

1. In 2019 and 2020 during the development of the 2nd edition of the SPC Pacific handbook for gender equity and social inclusion in coastal fisheries and aquaculture discussions began between SPC gender and fisheries experts, country representatives and stakeholders from academia and civil society to explore the need for a similar handbook for Pacific tuna industries. The significance and importance of the Pacific's tuna industry for the fulfilment of Pacific people's economic, social and environmental rights in light of the Blue Growth debate was emphasised and a need was expressed by fisheries and social scientists to develop a similar handbook that provides guidance and practical support for tuna industry stakeholders. The importance to cover human rights more broadly and complementary to gender equity and social inclusion (GESI) was highlighted by stakeholder groups in these discussions.
2. The Pacific literature on human rights and GESI related to tuna industries was found to be very limited, scattered, incomplete, outdated or investigated by international non-governmental organisations from outside the region. Documented cases of human rights violations related to tuna fisheries were found to rarely provide country driven solutions to discuss how to address human dimensions. The lack of advice guided by human rights-based approaches in a sector that has been associated by the nature of the work with risk, danger and lack of transparency was evident.
3. Therefore, a practical guide that provides simple and actionable advice on how fisheries practitioners can take an active role in integrating GESI lenses and human-rights based approaches in their work was found to be a valuable resource for the region.
4. The handbook for GESI in coastal fisheries and aquaculture served as a model with the introduction chapters being heavily drawn from. Valuable lessons learned from testing the coastal fisheries handbook were built into the handbook for tuna industries.
5. With a thin documented information base on GESI and human rights issues and a significant amount of anecdotal information in the room, a consultation process was deemed necessary and formed the basis for the authors to gather information, collect stories and document feedback from a range of stakeholders such as industry, civil society, academia, individual experts, regional organisations and country representatives. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions at the time of the consultations, the authors conducted the interviews mainly on the phone and online.
6. The first draft of the handbook for human rights and GESI in tuna industries was presented back to stakeholder groups during a two-day socialisation and validation workshop in Suva, Fiji in April 2022. The workshop provided the opportunity to validate findings, share feedback and comments on the draft handbook structure, content, style including examining the tools developed for each of the modules. In a very engaging workshop a vast amount of valuable feedback, suggestions and additional content were collected. More time was then allocated after the workshop to undergo a second review process to incorporate all feedback until the finalisation of the handbook early 2023.

Purpose of the handbook

7. The handbook is a learning guide (a) to improve knowledge and awareness and (b) to provide approaches towards the application of gender equity, social inclusion, and human rights in tuna industries.

Target audience

Primary and secondary target audiences

8. The handbook targets a mixed audience with the primary target audience being national fisheries agencies and other public or semi-public institutions that can, through their work, positively shape the Pacific's tuna industry towards a more equitable, inclusive, and human rights-based orientation. Practical guidance in this handbook is particularly addressed to support oceanic fisheries managers and officers, scientists, economists, and legal experts in the respective offshore divisions within the national fisheries agencies. The overlapping nature of tuna fisheries with small-scale coastal fisheries is also covered in this handbook, and thus coastal fisheries divisions may also benefit from this handbook.
9. This handbook also targets the private sector, namely the Pacific tuna industries. In doing so, the handbook uplifts the idea of a shared responsibility of private and public players to ensure that the Pacific's very own GESI and human rights commitments and internationally recognised standards are applied in legal and policy frameworks as well as in business practices referring to the UN human rights in business principles. This handbook provides angles, case studies, and information that is directly linked to how the private sector can apply GESI/HR lenses in business operations.
10. In addition to these primary target audiences, the handbook has also secondary audiences which are the Pacific training and education institutions (e.g. maritime colleges, universities – regional and national levels) and the broader civil society sector.

Content and structure

11. The handbook consists of 9 modules. Eight modules cover key thematic areas ranging from introductory content (basic concepts, definitions and ideas), site specific GESI/HR issues at sea, in port areas and in processing plants, broader GESI/HR issues related to science and management, informal small-scale tuna sector and the importance of multi-stakeholder engagement for GESI/HR. Module 9 is a Fiji case study to illustrate the GESI/HR issues at a national level.
12. Every module comes with tools, case studies, best practices, examples, tips and/or action points to prompt practical application of learned content. The handbook is designed to be a practical guide for practitioners with special efforts to ensure tailored content for the primary and secondary audiences.

I. Introduction – the basics



II. Site-specific HR and GESI issues – from the sea to the shore



III. Broader HR and GESI relevance



IV. The national scale



Way forward

13. The handbook has attracted international interest in the human rights in fisheries space. It was presented at the United Nations Responsible Business and Human Rights Forum Asia-Pacific in June 2023 and at the international expert meeting on human rights in fisheries organised by the Danish Human Rights Institute in November 2023. The international and regional level engagement on the importance of social responsibility and accountability in the seafood sector is growing, driving market access requirements and raising the importance of human rights due diligence process and GESI sensitive approaches along supply and value chains. The handbook is a key guide that can support the primary target audiences to take actions towards improving HR/GESI considerations.

14. Stakeholders for this handbook expressed interest in using handbook content to design training packages that can be delivered to target audiences to support the uptake of the handbook while creating learning and awareness opportunities.
15. Lastly, training and education institutions have flagged the idea to use the handbook to integrate GESI/HR into existing courses and/or develop new courses and course material.