

# A gender analysis of the fisheries sector in the Federated States of Micronesia

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## Background

In March 2019, the Pacific Community (SPC) – through its Division of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Marine Ecosystems and its Social Development Programme – conducted a gender assessment of the fisheries sector in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). This assessment was funded by the Pacific European Union Marine Partnership (PEUMP) programme. PEUMP aims at improving the economic, social and environmental benefits for the 15 Asia, Caribbean and Pacific states in the Pacific Islands region by incorporating a gender- and human rights-based approach across all of its programme activities. The FSM gender and fisheries assessment was the first assessment under PEUMP and was conducted across all four FSM states. The FSM assessment's analytical findings on gender mainstreaming capacities at different government levels will support the institutional strengthening of various government agencies and other state-level institutions that are involved in fisheries and marine resource management to mainstream gender across their activities.

The FSM gender and fisheries assessment was informed by an extensive literature review and field visits in all four states. Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with identified stakeholders with support from the FSM Government, and the respective state fisheries departments. The survey methodology developed by SPC's Social Development Programme uses a gender and development approach and a gender mainstreaming capacity assessment. This follows a consistent structure that allows comparative studies of gender and fisheries assessments in other Pacific Island countries with a view to regional gender and fisheries development needs and gaps.

## Main findings

### Country context and its challenges

FSM's complex federalist state structure, with four levels of governance and the uniqueness of all four states with regards to social and cultural norms, further complicates the advancement of gender equality and gender mainstreaming efforts in the fisheries sector. Overlapping mandates of different key players at different government levels create institutional challenges for effective coastal fisheries management while the legislative framework is found to be fragmented. The assessment, however, found that the management of coastal fisheries at the community level provides an entry point for stronger engagement and visibility of organised women's groups within each of the four states.

### Understanding FSM's fisheries sector and gender roles

The assessment identified the vital roles women play in the collection of seafood from the nearshore reefs and mangroves, their advocacy roles in promoting sustainable fishing practices, and their broader contributions to the well-being of the fisheries sector. However, findings confirm the

short-comings in the validation of women's contributions. Coupled with a strict gender division of labour, there has been little attention to women's active roles and limited consideration to having women involved in planning and decision-making processes, or providing greater access to women participating in the fisheries sectors.

### Example of women's groups and their advocacy role for sustainable fishing practices

In Chuuk State, the Department of Fisheries has partnered with the Chuuk Women's Council to create awareness in communities about the dangers of dynamite fishing as a destructive fishing method, and have reported a decrease in the number of reported cases with increased awareness. The Department recognised the Chuuk Women's Council as a suitable partner for this activity due to its extensive network across Chuuk's outer islands.

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## Changing gender roles

Compared with findings from a baseline gender and fisheries study conducted by SPC in 1999–2000, this assessment confirms that in 2019 women in FSM are still active players in the fisheries sector. Better boats, safer equipment and improved telecommunication means fewer risks and augmentation of the wider acceptance of women joining fishing trips. There has also been an increase in the number of women managing the marketing and selling of fish. Despite these changes, the communal acceptance of women who fish is still low. The study also revealed that increased labour mobility of younger men and women to Guam and Hawaii meant the older generation of fishers had to continue to fish and fend for themselves while their children worked abroad to send money home. While for some this meant a new outboard boat, income for medication or other food, elderly men and women fishers often go out fishing together now, more so than 10 to 20 years ago. They do this for the company and for safety reasons.

## Formal and informal employment and subsistence economy

Formal employment in FSM's fisheries sector is very limited, with only about 250 people working for wages, and the majority of these being men. Overall, less than 2% of all wages earned come from formal fisheries-related employment.

However, research findings suggest that state investment plans for the development of tuna longlining plants in Pohnpei and Kosrae states will create more formal employment opportunities. As evident in the tuna processing sector across the Pacific, the majority of these jobs will most likely be taken by women. The assessment's scope of study was limited to the coastal and aquaculture sector; thus, this opportunity was not further investigated. Nevertheless, it is crucial that FSM takes into consideration lessons learned and recommendations made regarding gender issues in the tuna industry based on previous studies in the Pacific Islands region (Ram -Bidesi and Sullivan 2008).

Despite the insignificant formal employment rates, results from the FSM Household Income and Expenditure Survey (FSM Government 2014) showed that for all households in Kosrae, Chuuk and Yap states, fishing was the greatest income earner, while in Pohnpei State, it was ranked fourth. In Pohnpei, the number one income earner is the production and sale of kava (*sakau*).

## Gender mainstreaming

The institutional capacity of mainstreaming gender into the fisheries sector was found to be low across all levels of government in all four states. There is widespread recognition that the engagement of women and women's groups is beneficial to the successful outcome of various projects, such

Wahlung, Kosrae Island fishers Sepe (66 years of age, to the right) and Simeon (67 years of age) - ©SPC



as the establishment and enforcement of marine protected areas using women's groups and their advocating network structures. The involvement of women in decision-making and management would also ensure a stronger likelihood of sustainability. The endorsement of the FSM National Gender Policy in 2018 is seen as a main entry door to support mainstreaming in the fisheries sector while building bridges to a more collaborative workstyle with the national women's interest office and the various women's organisations on the ground. The National Gender Policy is also seen as key to improving gender responsive budgeting to support mainstreaming activities in light of minimal national budgets allocated to gender-related activities.

## Recommendations

The FSM gender and fisheries assessment included recommendations to be taken into account by PEUMP and other development partners to improve gender mainstreaming capacities of main state institutions and to progress with the integration of gender-related issues at the project level. Recommendations include the need for gender mainstreaming training using the 2018 National Gender Policy to connect all levels of government in a more systematic manner while engaging women's groups to support gender-related activities. The need for more sex-disaggregated data and further socioeconomic studies with gender-integrated research was stressed. The lack of market hygiene standards needs to be addressed as well as educational awareness of health impacts due to unhealthy imported foods. Plans for community-based and locally managed marine areas need to include clear roles for women, and promote a socially inclusive approach.

**Recommendation 1:** Using FSM's newly endorsed National Gender Policy as a guide, and SPC's Gender and Fisheries Handbook, conduct training in gender mainstreaming for appropriate government agencies involved in fisheries management, development and enforcement at national and state levels in collaboration with the Women's Interest Office and women's associations where they exist.

**Recommendation 2:** Incorporate into future gender-related training, a specific component on how to conduct participatory rural appraisals and how to collect both quantitative and qualitative data to ensure that any data collected are clearly disaggregated by sex and can be used for monitoring and evaluation purposes.

**Recommendation 3:** Undertake socioeconomic studies to better understand the dynamics of fishing communities, particularly the roles of men and women in all four states.

**Recommendation 4:** Agencies within respective states that have active data collection programmes on market sales should also begin collecting sex-disaggregated data on a regular basis in order to better understand the involvement of both men and women in catching, processing and marketing fish.

**Recommendation 5:** National and state government agencies involved in fisheries management, development and enforcement should build stronger relationships with the respective Women's Interests Offices and women's associations at both the national and state level to support community outreach activities that ensure the active participation, engagement and involvement of women especially in the areas of:

- advocacy for fisheries management activities within the household and community;
- post-harvest, including best seafood handling practices;
- value-adding to seafood to increase income;
- understanding financial literacy; and the
- need for healthy diets that involve seafood.

These activities could be supported by targeted educational campaigns through various forms of media, with input from various government agencies and civil society groups.

**Recommendation 6:** Improve the quality of marine resources sold by women in all four states. Existing rules on hygiene for licensed fish markets should be enforced by the appropriate authorities. As part of this, the introduction of a certification process for personal fish exports should be investigated, particularly in the states of Chuuk and Kosrae, which have substantial volumes of personal marine resources exported by air to Guam and Hawaii, respectively.

**Recommendation 7:** Promote community-based locally marine managed areas and encourage co-management arrangements of marine resources through community involvement, with clearly defined roles for women. This could involve training women to act as advocates for ensuring the sustainability of marine resources (see Recommendation 5). Such activities could include monitoring fisheries, enforcing size limits within their household and community, and supporting existing or developing committees to assist in management activities.

## References

- Federated States of Micronesia Government. 2014. Household Income and Expenditure Survey: 2013/14 Main analysis report. Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia Government. 108 p.
- Sullivan N. and Ram-Bidesi V. 2008. Gender issues in tuna fisheries: Case studies in Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Kiribati. Honiara, Solomon Islands: Forum Fisheries Agency. FFA Report 08/14. 61 p.