

Growing and empowering women in fisheries work in the Pacific region

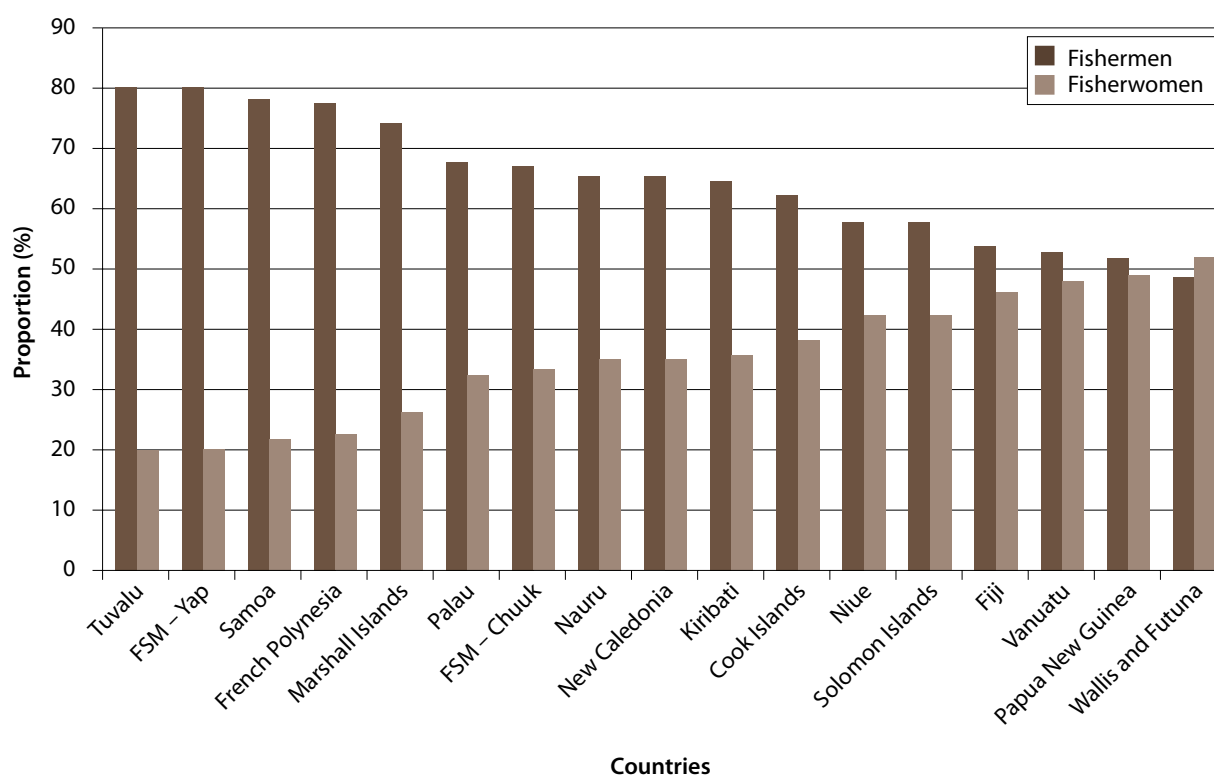
Moses Amos¹

In most Pacific Islands, decisions impacting on management and conservation of coastal fisheries are traditionally made by male community leaders, elders and chiefs with very little or no input from women. This is because women's contributions to fisheries are hardly recognised or appreciated, and are often forgotten in a sector commonly perceived by society to be primarily a male domain. This is despite women playing important roles and participating in most activities from catching, harvesting and processing to being heavily involved in selling and marketing.

Women can bring a wealth of knowledge about the fishery and useful information that can assist with the development of management undertakings.

They therefore have a major role in the implementation of management activities. Moreover, their roles and perspectives are important to the overall management and development of Pacific Island coastal and oceanic fisheries.

Although women have distinct roles in coastal and oceanic fisheries, no new study on the respective roles of women and men in capture fisheries has been done since the PROCFish Project² (2002–2009). In the informal fisheries sector, the general predominance of men in fishing continues. This is particularly apparent among fishers who exclusively target finfish, while women predominate among fishers who exclusively target invertebrates, as depicted in the graph below.



¹ Director, Division of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Marine Ecosystems, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Noumea, New Caledonia. (MosesA@spc.int).

² The Pacific Regional Oceanic and Coastal Fisheries Development project was designed to enhance management of fisheries in the Pacific Islands by providing Pacific Island governments and communities with accurate, unbiased scientific information about the status and prospects of fisheries.

However, in the formal fisheries sector, a 2010 study on the participation of women in fisheries science and management in three Pacific Island countries (Tuara and Passfield 2011) reported that women comprised only 18% of the total number of staff working in fisheries in government fisheries departments, environmental institutions and non-governmental organisations.

Over the past few years, SPC has been helping to increase participation of women in various ways. In the area of coastal fisheries, FAME has been working with many Pacific Island countries and territories, including American Samoa, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu, and with the Coral Triangle Initiative to expand conventional fisheries management to a community-based ecosystem approach to fisheries management (CEAFM). This approach involves the management of fisheries, within an ecosystem context, by local communities as resource owners and users, working with government and other partners across relevant sectors that impact on fisheries. The approach is based on consultation and decision-making that includes all stakeholder groups in the community and it has empowered women to bring their wealth of knowledge to assist with development of community fisheries management plans. Women are now well represented on Fisheries Management Committees and participate actively in the implementation of management activities where decision-making used to be male-dominated in the past.

SPC is also raising the profile of fisheries as a career option for women through publications (such as the *Women in Fisheries Bulletin*, or brochures on the work of fishing vessel observers³), providing positive role models, and removing barriers to women's participation in its wide range of training workshops and mentoring attachments for fisheries officers. This includes on-the-job training in coastal fisheries data collection and analysis (e.g. women make up 40% of participants in biological sampling, and 60% in market and creel surveys). In oceanic fisheries, national and regional level training is provided to staff in fisheries departments who collect, manage and summarise the data needed for assessment of tuna stocks. Two-thirds (63%) of the participants at the last four SPC annual Regional Tuna Data Workshops have been women. This is a reflection of increasing opportunities for women in this sector, with more young Pacific women graduating with degrees in marine science and joining fisheries departments in their countries.

However, there are still considerable gaps in our knowledge of how Pacific communities are likely to embrace women's role in climate change adaptation and the need for change. Learning to catch or produce fish in new ways, and to eat different types of fish are important adjustments to which women's contributions are essential. Therefore growing, building, and empowering women in fisheries work in the Pacific region will require intentional growth and provision of leadership experience. This will require changes in the way business is carried out. Building on SPC's past and present efforts to empower women in fisheries, there will be greater emphasis on multi-sector and cross-cutting approaches to programme and project design. FAME can draw on work and contributions from multiple sectors both in and outside SPC and apply cross-cutting processes to contribute to effective empowerment of women in fisheries in the Pacific including through project implemented activities. The role of women in fisheries science and management at the national level must be promoted, while at the community level, the Community-Based Ecosystems Approach to Fisheries Management programme and Community-based Aquaculture Development programme actively empower and enhance women's participation in the development of community fisheries management and aquaculture. Coastal communities will also be encouraged to increase participation of women in the implementation of community management activities.

The following FAME programmes and activities are particularly relevant to promoting women in fisheries work in the Pacific:

- (i) coastal fisheries science and management;
- (ii) collection and analysis of accurate and comprehensive oceanic fisheries data, targeting the region's resources of tuna, billfish and other oceanic species;
- (iii) Community-Based Ecosystems Approach to Fisheries Management programme;
- (iv) Community-Based Aquaculture Development programme;
- (v) Sustainable Nearshore Fisheries Development programme, focusing on improved seafood quality standards and value-adding; and
- (vi) training workshops and mentoring attachments for fisheries officers.

³ http://www.spc.int/DigitalLibrary/Doc/FAME/Brochures/Anon_13_Fisheries_Careers_brochure.pdf and http://www.spc.int/DigitalLibrary/Doc/FAME/Brochures/Anon_13_Observer_brochure.pdf

Reference

Tuara P. and Passfield K. 2011. Gender in oceanic and coastal fisheries science and management — Based on case studies in Solomon Islands, Marshall Islands and Tonga. Noumea, New Caledonia: Secretariat of the Pacific Community. 62 p.