

Commitments to gender equality have surged, but how deep do they run? A look at Pacific small-scale fisheries

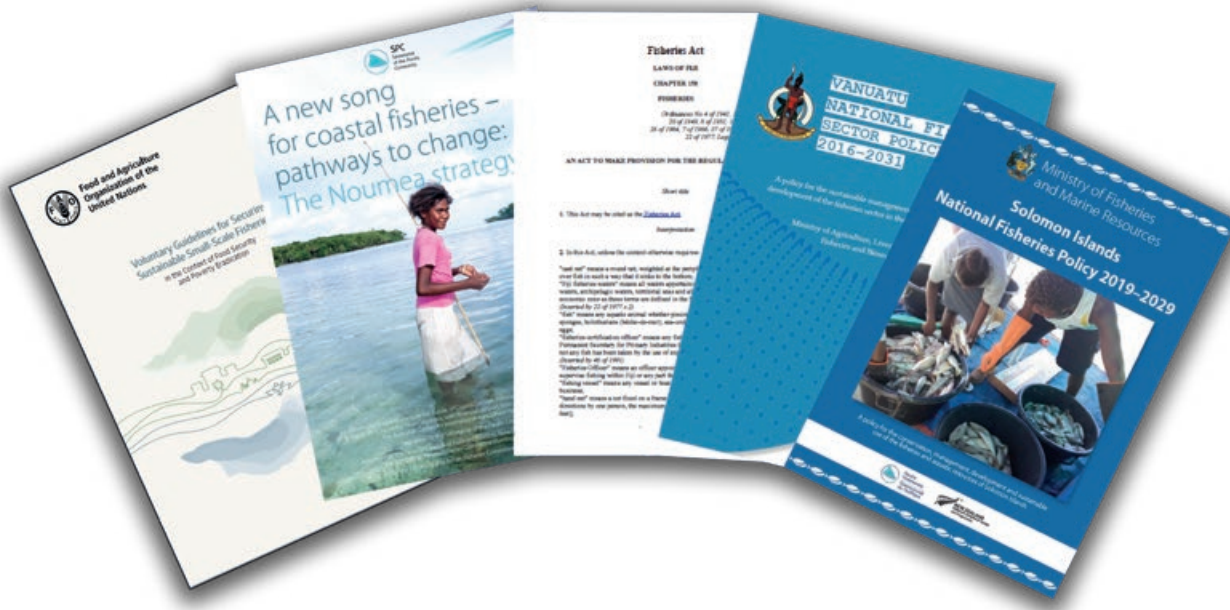
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Within the 22 Pacific Island countries and territories, coastal ecosystems support remarkably high levels of biodiversity (CTI 2009) and hold immense social and cultural value for the largely coastal populations (Veitayaki and Novaczek 2005; Kronen 2007; Andrew et al. 2019). Pacific Island small-scale fisheries, a largely coastal and community-based productive sector, are critical for food and nutrition security, economic opportunity, and the well-being of communities (Kronen and Vunisea 2009; Sulu et al. 2015). Consequently, efforts to mediate the interplay between ecological and social dynamics and values of small-scale fisheries have been the focus of many development, management and conservation initiatives throughout the region.

While women and men play crucial roles in small-scale fisheries activities (Vunisea 1997; Bliege Bird 2007), women's contributions to the economy (Harper et al. 2013) and food security (Kronen and Vunisea 2009) associated with small-scale fisheries tends to be overlooked (Vunisea 2008). These contributions are particularly deficient within formal fisheries statistics and policy. Fortunately, researchers have begun to collect sex-disaggregated fisheries data, and more deeply interrogate fisheries roles (e.g. Thomas et al. 2021). Community level research has documented the role that gender norms (Vunisea 2008; Lawless et al. 2019), power relations (Locke et al. 2017) and social structures (Foale and Macintyre, 2000) play in perpetuating women's invisibility and associated low levels of agency in the sector. These insights and formal guidance (e.g. Barclay et al. 2021) have coincided with a surge in commitments to address gender equality in the sector, including within policies, strategies, reporting and monitoring requirements (SPC 2015, 2016, 2018). Accompanying these commitments, fisheries organisations (i.e. donors, regional agencies, governmental agencies, international development organisations, and the private sector) have begun to prioritise and invest in gender equality outcomes within the sector (e.g. DFAT 2019; PEUMP 2015).

The increased attention and visibility given to gender in the sector signals progress towards gender equality. However, recent institutional research finds the capacities of fisheries managers and practitioners to adequately consider and respond to these gender commitments are limited (SPC 2016; Song et al. 2019; Mangubhai and Lawless 2021). Adding to this challenge, gender equality as a concept has been found to be open to interpretation and difficult to translate into practice (Song et al. 2019; Lawless et al. 2020). Consequently, how and why gender equality is pursued, and what gender strategies entail is not well understood. To overcome these challenges our recently published study in *World Development* (see Lawless et al. 2021) asked three questions.

1. How are the concept of gender and the principle of gender equality represented in policy instruments that govern small-scale fisheries?
2. What implicit and explicit rationales are used to pursue the principle of gender equality?
3. What strategies are proposed to address gender inequalities?



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We reviewed 76 small-scale fisheries policy instruments (i.e. global guidelines, regional policies, national policies and legislation, organisational programme guides, annual reports, research reports, organisational policies or strategies, gender audits, codes of conduct and promotional material). These policy instruments were identified by Pacific fisheries and/or gender experts (n = 26) as those being used and having influence throughout the Pacific Islands region. We detail our key findings in the following section, then discuss their implications, and conclude by providing four opportunities for fisheries organisations to rise to current best practice and make progress towards gender equality in the small-scale fisheries sector.

How are the concept of gender and the principle of gender equality represented in policy instruments that govern small-scale fisheries?

To understand how gender was represented, we first examined definitions of gender. We identified 3929 statements where the term “gender” was used and analysed its use. We found gender was mainly represented as a focus on women (79%). Rarely was language used to demonstrate gender was understood as a social construct (i.e. that roles, norms and relations are socially prescribed). Masculinity and the influence of gender norms on men was only referenced in one of the 76 policy instruments.

We then identified the types of gender issues (or entry points for change) prioritised in the policy instruments. Our results indicated high attention to gender issues at organisational (38%) and individual levels (37%), compared to household (4%), communal (8%) and societal (13%) levels. At the individual level, the issues identified predominately focused on women’s invisibility in the sector. Gender differences in

divisions of labour were acknowledged at the household level, but issues surrounding family or intra-household relations were not recognised. At the organisational level the focus was on enabling gender sensitive organisational environments (i.e. inclusive recruitment processes); standardising gender practice and research priorities; gender capacity building of staff; and facilitating inter-organisational partnerships to work on gender. At the societal level, gender issues related to food and nutrition security and to marine tenure were identified.

What implicit and explicit rationales are used to pursue the principle of gender equality?

We examined the gender objectives expressed in policy instruments and found gender was predominately presented as important for *instrumental* gains (75%), that is, to drive environmental outcomes rather than for *intrinsic* reasons (25%), that is, to achieve fair and just outcomes (Fig. 1).

We then examined these gender objectives according to the authors of the policy instruments (Fig. 2). We found a clear relationship between objectives that sought “improved conservation or environmental outcomes”, “sustainable small-scale fisheries management” and “economic development”. We also found substantial variation in the objectives of the same organisations. An extreme example was an international organisation that referred to 13 of the 16 differing gender objectives, which spanned both *instrumental* and *intrinsic* reasons.

Our analysis revealed six distinct rationales specifying why gender was pursued in small-scale fisheries policy instruments (Table 1).

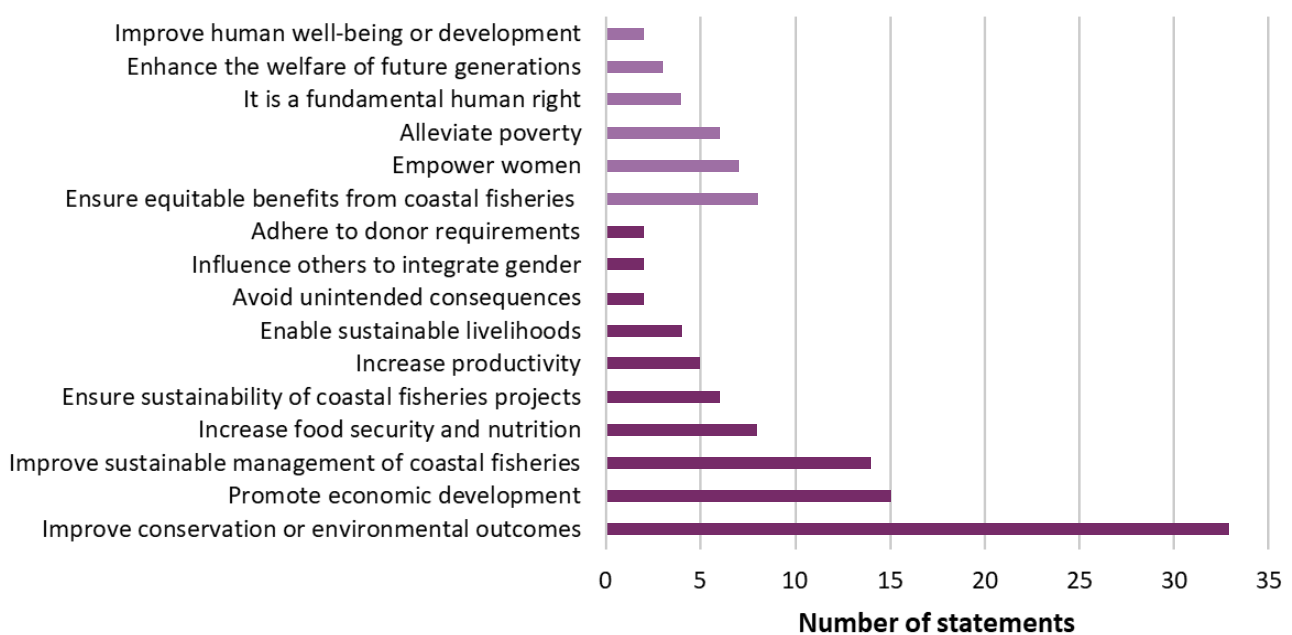


Figure 1. Statements (n = 121) indicating the dominant objectives for why gender equality is pursued in small-scale fisheries; organisation is based on whether they are intrinsic (light purple bars, n = 30) or instrumental (dark purple bars, n = 91).

Table 1. Six gender rationales found within small-scale fisheries policy instruments.

		Rationale	Objective(s)	Narrative	Approach	Policy Instrument	Organisation type						
Gender blind	Blind						Governments	LNGOs	Regional agencies	INGOs	Donors	Experts	Private organisations
	Blind	① Gender considerations are not relevant, or inherently addressed	Nil	Objectives and outcomes are not connected to gender, or assume that gender considerations are automatically incorporated.	None to minimal social analysis. Follows a “business as usual” approach.	- National fisheries policies, strategies and plans - Organisational codes of conduct, research reports	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Gender aware	Instrumental	② Gender considerations enhance small-scale fisheries projects	1–4	Project outcomes are prioritised and gender considerations are a means to reach targets or achieve project success.	Minimal gender and social analysis. Follows a “do no harm” approach	- Organisational gender audits, policies, programme guides			✓	✓	✓		
		③ Gender considerations facilitate conservation and environmental outcomes	5, 6	Gender is considered instrumental to achieving conservation and environmental outcomes. Conservation and environmental goals are the principle priority.	Accounts for gender norms and relations, particularly emphasises gendered access and control over natural resources and the goods and services they provide. In some cases, this can take the form of essentialising women’s connection with nature.	- Organisational policies, programme guides - Regional policies - Global gender and fisheries guidelines			✓	✓	✓		✓
		④ Gender considerations increase productivity	7, 8	Equitable access and support in harvest and post-harvest activities is prioritised to increase efficiency and benefits.	Avoids considerable changes to environmental function but promotes productive livelihood models. This often involves providing direct support and services to women.	- Organisational policies, programme guides - Global gender and fisheries guidelines				✓	✓		
		⑤ Gender considerations maximise economic opportunity and growth	10	Ambivalence about the relationship between gender and the environment. Financial benefits prioritised over environmental outcomes.	Environmental management geared towards maximising economic benefits, including market oriented and value-added approaches to generate income. Economic objectives can lead to gender exploitative methods.	- Organisational gender audit, policies, programme guides - Global gender and fisheries guidelines			✓	✓	✓		✓
	Intrinsic	⑥ Gender considerations are integral to human opportunity	11–16	Gender equality is viewed as a fundamental human right or of its own intrinsic value.	The environment is viewed as an entry point or means to promote gender equitable outcomes. Gender relations, power and intersectionality are prioritised.	- Organisational gender audit, policies, programme guides - Regional policies - Global gender and fisheries guidelines			✓	✓	✓		

Note: The rationales (underlying narrative and approach) are organised according to whether they are gender blind or aware, instrumental or intrinsic, and the policy instrument and organisation type promoting each. The gender objectives associated with each rationale are in the Objective(s) column, and range from 1 to 16: (1) Adhere to donor requirements, (2) Influence others to integrate gender, (3) Avoid unintended consequences, (4) Ensure sustainability of coastal fisheries projects, (5) Improve conservation or environmental outcomes, (6) Improve sustainable management of coastal fisheries, (7) Increase productivity, (8) Enable sustainable livelihoods, (9) Increase food security and nutrition, (10) Promote economic development, (11) Ensure equitable benefits from coastal fisheries, (12) Empower women, (13) Alleviate poverty, (14) It is a fundamental human right, (15) Enhance the welfare of future generations, (16) Improve human well-being or development.

What are the strategies proposed to address gender inequalities? We found 261 statements detailing different gender strategies (i.e. proposed actions to address a specified gender issue) in the small-scale fisheries policy instruments. Two thirds of these strategies (67%) were process-oriented (i.e. focused on evidence generation and internal organisational processes). In contrast, only one third of strategies (33%) sought to address gender inequality at the community level, and/or within broader social systems. Of the process strategies, 96% were directed at organisational level change (i.e. improving organisational monitoring, research or evidence generation). The remaining 4% of strategies were directed at the societal level, for instance, looking at gender-inclusive national and regional fisheries policies. Of the project strategies, more than three quarters (79%) were targeted at individual level change. Only 28% of these strategies were directed at or sought to engage both women and men. The remaining 72% focused exclusively on women (i.e. enhancing their agency or delivering projects directly to women). There was no evidence of strategies that sought household level change, and only 7% were targeted at the communal level.

What this means for small scale fisheries in the Pacific

Our analysis of policy instruments that govern Pacific Island small-scale fisheries found that the sector is preoccupied with a narrow focus on women and women’s issues. Attention to men, masculinity, gender identities or the power laden dynamics of gender relations rarely feature as part of fisheries analysis and project design. These findings are aligned with a trend known as “gender shrinking”, where the concept of gender is diluted (i.e. meanings and problems are narrowed)

(Lombardo et al. 2010). Questioning and challenging unequal power relations between women and men, and explicitly acknowledging men as critical actors in gender problems and solutions, can be uncomfortable for many and may disengage people from dealing with gender issues within policies, projects and workplaces (Nazneen and Hickey, 2019). In these cases, conflating gender with women may be deliberate, for instance, to make the concept of “gender work” easier to engage with and build slow acceptance (Nazneen and Hickey 2019). The tendency to focus only on women has also been found to be linked to the limited gender capacity and capability of individuals who are under the directive of their organisations or donors to “do gender” (Mangubhai and Lawless, 2021).

We found fisheries organisations were mostly inward looking – meaning they prioritised internal strategies for reform, and minimal attention was given to gender issues at the household, communal and societal levels. Gender norms and power relations within households, communities and societies profoundly shape the experiences of individuals, specifically their ability to make decisions, access benefits and experience costs (Rao 2017; Lawless et al. 2019). Overlooking such dynamics may compound women’s experiences of poverty (Cole et al. 2015), reduce capacities to innovate (Cohen et al. 2016; Locke et al. 2017) and hinder the ability of women to access, control and benefit from fisheries resources and interventions (Lawless et al. 2019). Conversely, when gender is understood as a social construct that shapes different barriers and opportunities (i.e. related to tenure rights, education, and access to material resources) it is possible to work in ways that may challenge (or at a minimum not reinforce or exacerbate) gender inequalities (Rao 2017); for example, to destabilise inequitable divisions in labour

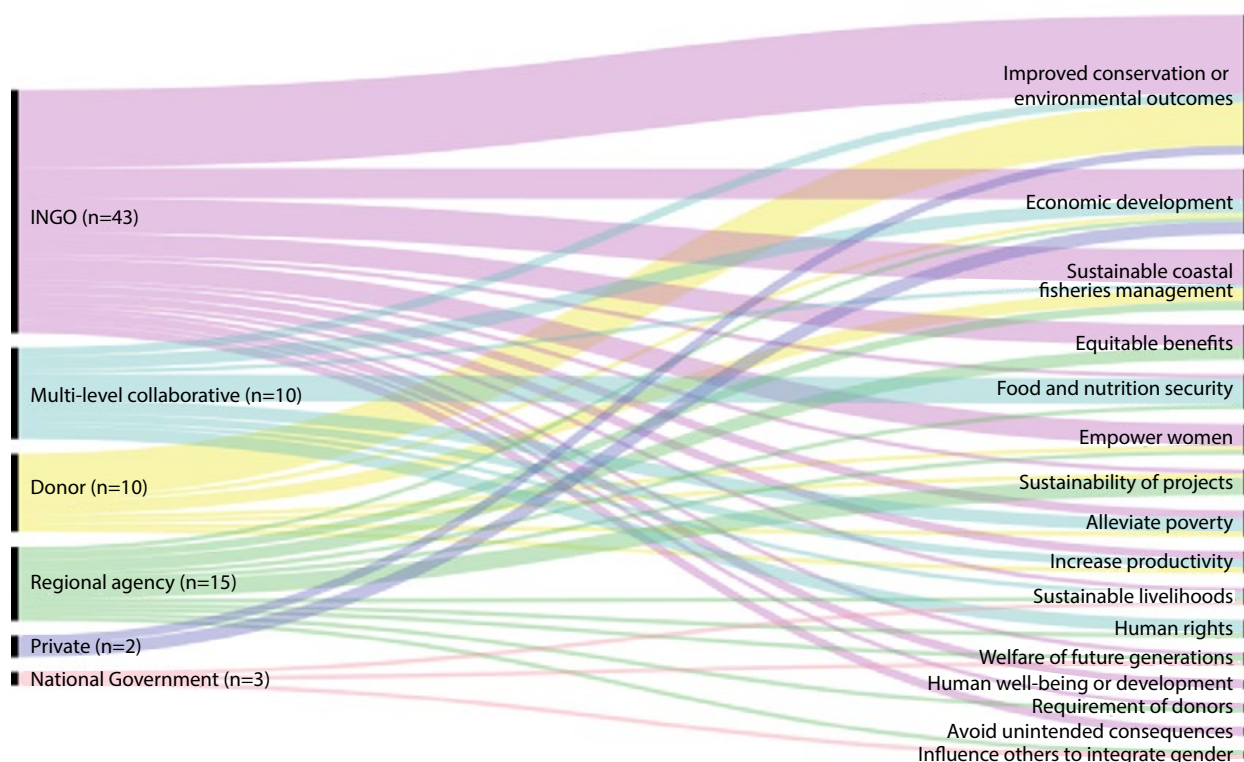


Figure 2. Relationship between the type of organisation (left) and the gender objectives (right) presented in small-scale fisheries policy instruments. The n refers to the number of times an organisation type stated an objective.

(Locke et al. 2017; Lawless et al. 2019), enable equitable access to productive assets (Cole et al. 2015) and examine and renegotiate power relations (Morrison et al. 2019).

We found gender was prioritised as an accelerant for *instrumental* goals (i.e. to drive environmental or conservation outcomes), more so than for *intrinsic* goals (i.e. to lead to fair and just outcomes). The rationalisation of gender equality for *instrumental* gains can, for example, enable the concept to be more easily integrated into policy agendas. This process is referred to as “norm bending”, where individuals or organisations mould a global principle to achieve other goals (i.e. economic growth) (Lombardo et al. 2010). However, norm bending can inhibit progress towards gender equality, particularly in cases where equality is not ultimately the end goal. For instance, gender equality may only be prioritised for the achievement of non-gender goals, such as enhanced conservation outcomes or increased productivity of marine resources (Rao 2017; Nazneen and Hickey 2019). In these cases, the social justice goal becomes diluted or lost, and the complex and inherent moral nature of gender equality can be overlooked.

Although gender equality was predominately pursued instrumentally, six rationales were applied by fisheries organisations to justify the importance of gender equality, signalling that gender is recognised as integral to many different goals; however, this diversity also signifies the wickedness of governability problems (Jentoft and Chuenpagdee 2009; Song et al. 2017), where the values and priorities for gender equality among fisheries organisations are potentially incongruent with each other. Such diversity raises concerns about how fisheries organisations can advocate for gender equality effectively when there is limited consensus on the motives for pursuing the principle.

The gender strategies proposed in policy instruments suggested most emphasis was on improving internal organisational processes (e.g. equal opportunity recruitment), more so than those applied within fisheries projects (e.g. strategies to facilitate women’s greater agency). While organisational level strategies are important in instituting standards for equitable and gender-sensitive workplaces, the heavy focus on internal processes may distract and limit the resources and attention given to projects (i.e. individual small-scale fishers, households and communities). Of the project strategies, women tended to feature as the primary project beneficiaries (e.g. through enhancing women’s connections with fisheries value-chains, markets, business networks and training opportunities). Strategies solely focused on targeting and addressing “women’s issues” are common across different sectors and contexts (e.g. Stacey et al. 2019; Lau et al. 2021; Mangubhai and Lawless 2021). These women-only approaches can be alluring as they tend to be more quantifiable and lead to tangible results, for example, counting and reporting on the number of women participating in projects and attending meetings, or the delivery of projects, innovations or physical assets to women. However, these approaches often lack practical strategies to address the gender dimensions of access, use, and adoption, and consequently often fail to accomplish their anticipated goals (see Vunisea 2008; Cohen et al. 2016; Rao 2017).

Recommendations

First, to overcome the tendency to conflate “gender” with “women”, organisational narratives and strategies need to view gender as socially constructed, and acknowledge how gender norms and relations determine the rights, freedoms, and opportunities of different women and different men. As part of this effort, men need to be recognised as influential actors in the identification of gender problems and solutions.

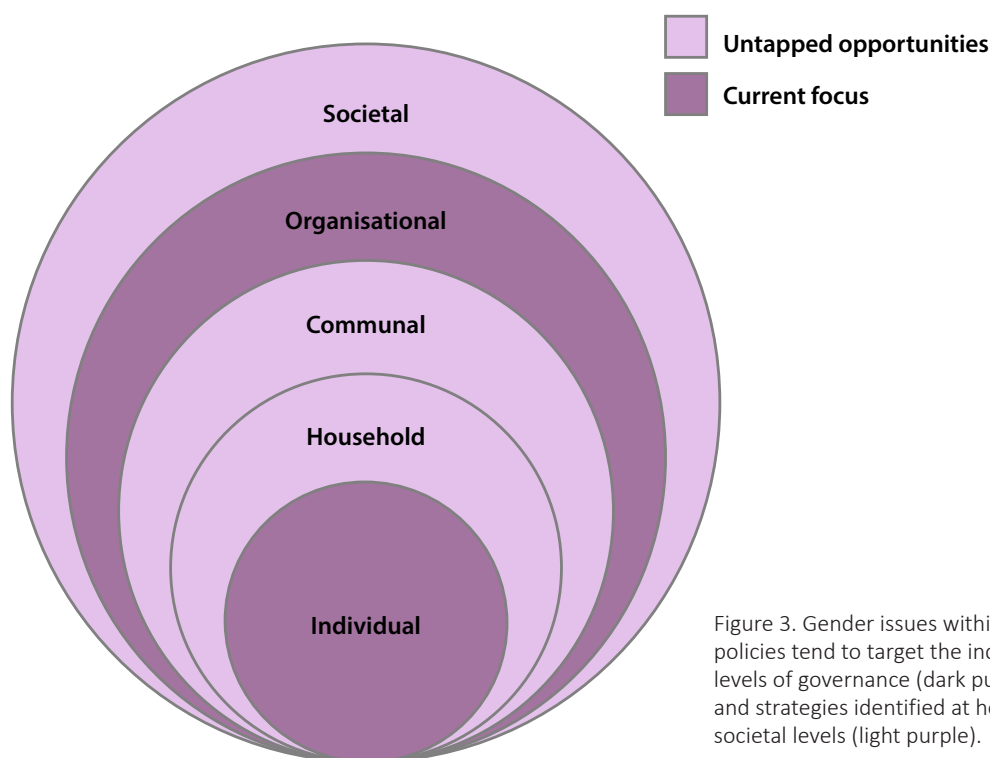


Figure 3. Gender issues within small-scale fisheries policies tend to target the individual and organisational levels of governance (dark purple), with few issues and strategies identified at household, communal and societal levels (light purple).

At a minimum, efforts should involve standards for the collection and reporting of sex-disaggregated data (e.g. Doss and Kieran 2014), facilitation techniques that are gender-inclusive (e.g. Kleiber et al. 2019), and the application and integration of gender analyses during project formation (e.g. Van Eerdewijk and Brouwers 2014).

Second, there needs to be a greater balance between *instrumental* and *intrinsic* prioritisation of gender equality. This may be articulated through commitments to both Sustainable Development Goal 14 (Life Below Water) and Goal 5 (Gender Equality). This shift requires organisations to question dominant objectives and rationales about why gender equality is prioritised (Lawless et al. 2020). The methodology we apply in this study may be useful in elucidating both the explicit and implicit governance objectives as a first step in promoting more equitable pathways for change.

Third, more attention needs to be given to addressing relational and structural inequalities across all spheres of governance. Our analysis has illuminated the areas of (in)attention to gender within the small-scale fisheries sector. Specifically, we have identified the societal, communal and household spheres as entry points and areas to improve gender integration in the future (Fig. 3).

Finally, in building strategies that are gender-nuanced, fisheries organisations need to develop novel partnerships that better engage with gender and development experts, for example, *feminist fisheries think-tanks* proposed by Williams (2019). Such a process may be useful in the gradual transfer of gender expertise and capacity to the fisheries sector.

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