



New research: Barriers to and benefits of women's participation in fisheries management in Fiji

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In Fiji, *iTaukei* women and men⁵ both play critical roles in harvesting, processing and marketing seafood in rural villages (Thomas et al. 2020); yet women's participation in fisheries management is often marginal (Rohe et al. 2018; Mangubhai and Lawless 2021). Given their significant contributions to and reliance on fisheries, the inclusion of women in fisheries management is critical for ensuring the sustainability of marine resources and the equitable distribution of their benefits. To understand and address the barriers to, and benefits of, women's participation in fisheries management, we will conduct in-depth interviews with *iTaukei* women and men in four rural Fijian villages.

We will consider how individuals' gender, age, marital status, and migrant status affect their participation. This is known as an "intersectional" approach (Crenshaw 1990), recognizing that "women" and "men" are not homogeneous groups. There are important social differences among women and among men that are shaped by other identities, such as age and ethnicity. For example, a young, unmarried woman might have different rights, privileges, and responsibilities than an older, married woman in the village.

This research will integrate and expand on survey work in 2019 and 2020 in 146 villages by research partners at the Locally Managed Marine Area Network (LMMA), Fiji LMMA Network, Wildlife Conservation Society, Imperial College London and Middlesex University. A sensitivity analysis of the survey data indicated that women's participation in fisheries management was associated with a range of positive outcomes, including household assets, fish catch, subjective well-being, and perceived benefits of village-level fisheries management through increased cooperation and knowledge. Our in-depth interviews will investigate how and why women and men participate in fisheries management, the barriers women and men face to participation, and how participation shapes their support for fisheries management efforts.

Fisheries management in Fiji

Fisheries management in Fiji lies at the interface between customary and administrative law. Customary law is based on a centuries-old marine tenure system rooted in community-level decision-making and enforcement, whereas administrative law is rooted in the national Constitution.

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⁵ *iTaukei* refers to ethnic Fijians.





Women play diverse but often under-represented roles in both customary and administrative fisheries management systems, according to their intersecting identities. For example, according to customary law, women have varying ownership and user rights to fishing grounds according to the clan they belong to and whether they married into the village; those belonging to, or who married into, chiefly clans have more rights than women who married into other clans; and those from the village usually enjoy more privileges than those who married into a village (Vunisea 2016).

Despite their importance in Fiji's fisheries, women have rarely been included in fisheries development, management, and national and international conservation efforts, which have historically focused more on activities dominated by men – such as high-value commercial harvesting – and less on activities dominated by women – such as subsistence harvesting, gleaning and non-harvest activities (Weeratunge et al. 2010; Mangubhai and Lawless 2021). Furthermore, women's contributions to fisheries are often unpaid, part-time, opportunistic, and “viewed as an extension of household duties” (Mangubhai and Lawless 2021). These factors combine to result in women being underrepresented in fisheries decision-making and, in some cases, having inequitable access to natural, social and material resources (Rohe et al. 2018).

Gender inequalities can worsen environmental challenges and can, in turn, be exacerbated by environmental change. For example, gender inequality can lead to greater food insecurity (Agarwal 2018) and the reduced effectiveness of marine protected areas (Kleiber et al. 2018; Lawless et al. 2021). Meanwhile, environmental problems such as resource scarcity, climate instability, and natural disasters can amplify gendered vulnerabilities to environmental changes and shocks, increase women's labour burden, and increase the incidence of gender-based violence (Castañeda Carney et al. 2020; Ferguson 2021; Resurrección and Elmhirst 2009; Lawless et al. 2022). In order to achieve gender equality in fisheries management and the associated benefits to the environment and society, research is needed to understand and support both women's and men's roles in fisheries management, in Fiji and beyond.

This research will address the following research questions:

- How do *iTaukei* women and men engage in Fiji's customary and national fisheries management systems?
- How does engagement in fisheries management vary among women and men across intersections of identity (i.e. based on their age, marital status, and migrant status)?
- How does women's and men's engagement in fisheries management decision-making shape their perceptions of benefits and support for fisheries management?

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