

# Bolstering women in fisheries value chains in Fiji

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## Introduction

Official statistics published by the Fiji Bureau of Statistics (FBOS) showed that fishing and aquaculture contributed FJD61.1 million to Fiji's real gross domestic product (Real GDP<sup>2</sup>) in 2020 (Ministry of Fisheries, 2021). Production from small-scale fisheries accounts for 40% of global catches and small-scale fishers and fish workers represent 90% of people involved in fisheries value chains around the world, 40% of whom are women. (FAO, Duke University & WorldFish, 2023). Women fishers, contribution to the formal economy has long been overlooked and there are calls to bolster these overlooked roles (Ibid.).

To support this call, WiFN-Fiji (Women in Fisheries Network-Fiji) has been actively advocating for the strengthening of women in fisheries value chains as women in Fijian coastal communities play an essential role in providing protein for the average household as the latest rapid gender analysis of the fisheries sector in the Ministry of Women-led Gender Transformative Institutional Capacity Development Initiative in 2022 (Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, 2022) provides the latest data confirming that women account for 51% of inshore fishers while 43% of Fijian women who fish do so for a source of income and 99% to provide food.

## Livelihood diversification for Namara women in fisheries value chain

Business activities in the Namara District in Tailevu are mainly related to small-scale coastal fisheries in which women fishers make up a good number of users and who face challenges due to overfishing. The lack of skills and opportunities to diversify sources of income-generating activities has therefore posed a big challenge for these women fishers.

With the primary objective of equipping the Namara women fishers with the necessary skills and knowledge to diversify their income streams the WiFN-Fiji organised a workshop in April 2024, to engage the women fishers of Namara in various skill-building sessions including tailoring, contemporary weaving, jewellery making, and fabric art, all with the aim of broadening their economic opportunities beyond traditional fishing activities – consequentially to allowing the local fisheries resource to recover. The four-day event was a training-of-trainers workshop engaging with representatives from the six villages of the District of Namara namely Naisausau, Matamaivere, Nakorolevu, Tubalevu, Nakalawaca and Naikawaga.

The village of Nakorolevu, has since then conducted their own training within the village empowering their with the

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<sup>2</sup> Real GDP: total value of all goods produced in a country in a year after inflation adjustments.



Representatives from the Namara District with the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection Ms Eseta Nadakuitavuki at the closing of the Building Resilience for the Namara women through alternative income generating activities training workshop in April 2024. © WiFN-Fiji



Women fishers from the Namara District participating in the Building Resilience for the Namara women through alternative income generating activities training workshop in April 2024. © WiFN-Fiji.

necessary skills and knowledge to diversify their income streams. The Namara district women are scheduled to undergo a financial literacy training with the aim of strengthening the organisational capacities of the women fishers, particularly in terms of simplified accounting, business creation, guidelines on governance, financial management, budget preparation, creating profit and loss statements, using financial data to make informed decisions, risk assessment and mitigation strategies, financial analysis and decision making.

### Creating market linkages for Muanaira oyster farm

When the United Nations agreed the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, they called, through SDG 14b, for market access to be provided to artisanal fisheries. (Gorez, 2022). Through its various training workshops with its members, WiFN-Fiji identified a recurring cry for help among women fishers for easier market access. Women fishers have repeatedly highlighted the difficulties faced when trying to access markets for their products.

Repeated researchers have mentioned the need to facilitate easier access for women fishers to markets. A summary report by Wildlife Conservation Society titled “*The critical contribution of women fishers to food security and livelihoods in Fiji*” (Wildlife Conservation Society, 2020) recommended that opportunities be explored to diversify the markets that women fishers have access to.

The Muanaira oyster farm is run by the Muanaira Women’s Group in Vutia, Rewa and face the great challenge of accessing markets. The Muanaira Women’s Group works as most women’s groups in Fiji—it is registered formally with the national women’s machinery and is still in the process of upskilling its members to be business savvy in order to manage

the oyster farm more effectively. The Muanaira is an initiative of Fiji’s Ministry of Fisheries and SPC that started in 2018 aimed at generating an alternative source of livelihood to relieve pressure from harvesting in the wild. The women are heavily involved in all levels of the oyster farm value chain, while some of their spouses and children assist the women in harvesting, sorting, cleaning and clearing the cages.

WiFN-Fiji has been working with the Muanaira Women’s Group to create market linkages for the oyster farm and high-end markets. Through this effort, women of Muanaira were able send the first shipment of oysters to Nawi Island Restaurant – a high-end marina that caters to super yachts. This shipment was just the first in readiness for the yachting



A Namara district representative participating in the Building Resilience for the Namara women through alternative income generating activities training workshop in April 2024. © WiFN-Fiji



Figure 4: A member of the Muanaira Women's Group deploying cages in the oyster nursery. © WiFN-Fiji.

season that begins May 2024. This is the first time the women of Muanaira have supplied to a high-end restaurant. In addition, through continuous mentorship on strategic bargaining and negotiating powers, the Muanaira women now regularly supply oysters to the Suva expat community with the selling price of FJD40 a dozen (a 100% increase from the previous FJD20 a dozen).

The most notable success of this project is that it has laid the foundation for the expansion of scope for WiFN-Fiji's work in creating market linkages for the women fishers which has led to the momentum being picked up by other partners who are now assisting WiFN-Fiji with developing a market linkage strategy for these women fishers tapping into the Fijian governments, interest in import substitution especially with the growing demand of the tourism industry. This strategy will map out a pathway for the 20 women fishers and their products to upscale their businesses. The strategy includes consumer surveys, supply chain surveys and supply chain strengthening consequentially to create a consistent supply chain for the different markets that will be identified.

Understanding women fishers, value chain intricate systems and strengthening the roles along these fisheries value chains needs more targeted focus and investments to unleash the full potential of women fishers in the economy as noted by Xiangjun Yao, FAO Subregional Coordinator for the Pacific Islands: "Empowering women in fisheries is not only a matter of gender equality but also a smart investment in sustainable development and food security for the whole community." (Kukharava, 2023).

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Figure 5: Lanieta Kaikadavu of Muanaira making the first delivery of oysters to members of the expat community in Suva. © WiFN-Fiji.