

Training in small fishing operations

Many fishers in the Pacific Islands region use powered boats to get them to their fishing grounds. A lot of them lack training to conduct safe and sustainable fishing operations, so safety awareness is being advocated to ensure they return safely to fish another day. In addition, coastal communities around the region are being encouraged by governmental and non-governmental organisations, as well as by many fisheries consultants, to establish marine protected areas for conservation purposes to protect cultural or natural resources, mainly in heavily fished or exploited areas. As a consequence, fishers often have to move their effort away from inshore reef species to oceanic pelagic species.

In some places, fishers are familiar with plying the open seas to catch the fish they need but in other areas, coastal communities only know how to fish within their inshore waters and lagoons. They have to develop boating skills and additional fishing skills to venture offshore for the much larger pelagic species. In many cases, rural fishers and boat operators do not have formal training in proper boat handling and are not aware of some of the boating necessities that are important for their safety.

The Small Fishing Operations (SFO) course was developed to give small-scale fishers the appropriate training to carry out safe and sustainable fishing activities. The course emphasises small boat safety, safe fishing practices, and sustainable hook-and-line fishing methods. It is designed to give fishers basic fishing skills and safety knowledge to confidently and safely, operate a small fishing boat. In 2017, SFO courses were carried out in Fiji, Marshall Islands, Niue, Palau, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu (as part of the Safety, Fishing and Financial Management Course for Fisheries Officers), with 110 people trained.



Participants of the Small Fishing Operations course in Fiji learn how to build a Samoan handreel to target deep-bottom snappers. Image: William Sokimi

Participants were made aware of the safe operation and maintenance of fishing gear and equipment; proper on-board fish handling, sanitation and hygiene practices; and basic financial and resource management of a fishing operation. The course prepared participants to implement safe operation plans to ensure their vessels were organised and ready for safe fishing trips. They were also trained to deal with emergencies at sea.

Fishing methods included midwater fishing techniques to target offshore pelagic species. Participants were also briefed on deep-water bottom fishing but with the proviso that these species have a slow recovery rate and are prone to overfishing. The fishing training involved understanding the theory behind trolling and several midwater fishing methods, followed by practical sessions on gear construction and fishing activities.

The main topics discussed during the course were:

- Various trolling methods: midwater vertical longline; short horizontal longline; cloth, bag, and canister paluahi (chum fishing for pelagic fish); drop stone (theory); deep-water bottom reel fishing and deep-water bottom vertical longlining (theory); ika-shibi (theory); night fishing methods for small pelagic fish using lights and nets (theory).
- Proper fish handling, storage on ice and processing techniques.
- Hazards in the workplace and the need to conform to safe working habits.
- Environmental issues and controlled fishing practises to protect marine life and coastline preservation as a basis for a sustainable fishery.
- Basic understanding of economics and small craft management methods, including maintaining a logbook and details of vessel costs and returns.

For more information:

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