

Undertaking a gender analysis for Tuvalu's coastal fisheries and aquaculture sector

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Tuvalu Fisheries Department collaborated with the Pacific Community and Tuvalu's Gender Affairs Department to conduct a national gender analysis of their fisheries and aquaculture sector.

Background

The fisheries sector is vital to the Pacific, supporting the food security needs and livelihoods of the people of the region, with aquaculture also contributing to the aquatic value chains of select Pacific Island countries and territories (Mori et al. 2023). Fisheries dependency is more accentuated for those living in atoll states such as Tuvalu due to its small land mass and limited economic activities. Further, there have been accounts of aquaculture activities occurring in Tuvalu and even considered in climate change adaptation studies and community fisheries management plans (Anonymous 2012; SPC 2011; Tuvalu Fisheries Department 2024). Despite this, there is a dearth of updated published information regarding the gender roles in Tuvalu's fisheries sector (Makhoul and Kinch 2020) with aquaculture being less visible and unaccounted for in national statistics. Understanding women's and men's engagement in the fisheries and aquaculture sector is imperative, as global studies have shown that their roles are deeply influenced by gender norms and relationships (FAO et al. 2023).

Gender is an important consideration particularly in the development of the Pacific's coastal fisheries and aquaculture as this involves working with local communities that are made up of diverse women and men (Fox et al. 2022; SPC et al. 2018). Thus, fisheries and aquaculture development interventions need to be gender responsive and socially inclusive, and a gender analysis can help managers and practitioners consider these gender norms, relations and dynamics when designing their projects or programmes (Mangubhai et al. 2024).

The Tuvalu Fisheries Department (TFD) collaborated with the Pacific Community (SPC) and Tuvalu's Gender Affairs Department (GAD) to conduct a gender analysis of their fisheries and aquaculture sector between August and December of 2024. The outcomes of this gender analysis will support TFD's understanding of the gender dimensions and dynamics in fisheries and aquaculture in local communities and within relevant government institutions. This will ultimately help TFD integrate and mainstream gender equity and social inclusion into their institution and the way they design and deliver fisheries and aquaculture projects and programmes.

Approach

For this analysis, a three-fold approach was undertaken. First, a desktop review of academic and grey literature related to gender and/or fisheries/aquaculture in Tuvalu was conducted in order to identify the availability of gender-related information on Tuvalu's fisheries and aquaculture sector and to also provide background information. An institutional analysis was then undertaken using a methodology that was previously administered in a similar assessment for Kiribati (see Mangubhai and Fox 2024) but tailored to Tuvalu's context. Key areas covered by the institutional analysis are: (1) political will and commitment to gender mainstreaming in government; (2) organisational culture that supports or does not support gender mainstreaming; (3) accountability and responsibility mechanisms to support gender mainstreaming; (4) technical capacity to do gender mainstreaming; and (5) availability of adequate resources to finance gender mainstreaming.

To further understand the gender dimensions of women's and men's engagement in coastal fisheries and aquaculture, focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted across four of Tuvalu's nine islands: Funafuti, Vaitupu, Nukufetau and Nanumea. These islands were selected as representative sites for the country and varied in population size, socio-economic background, geographic location, proximity to markets and access to services, presence or absence of aquaculture activity,



Tuvaluan woman selling shell craft jewellery outside Funafuti airport © Margaret Fox

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The survey team in Vaitupu © Margaret Fox

local marine management regimes and reliance on marine resources. The FGDs were held with five groups: young women (aged 18–29 years), young men (18–29 years), older women (>30 years), older men (>30 years), with a separate group comprising men elders that are involved in decision-making for each community. Where possible, the FGDs were led by staff from TFD or GAD, and in situations where more personnel were needed to administer this survey, trained staff from the local island councils and SPC were also involved. Most (95%) of the FGDs were conducted in the Tuvaluan language with the remaining done in English with participants who had a good command of English, when no other Tuvaluan-language speaker was available to administer the FGD.

The FGDs covered seven thematic areas: (1) time spent on women and men's productive work; (2) gender roles,

responsibilities and traditions including marine harvesting activities and aquaculture; (3) selling and marketing of marine resources; (4) access to capital and financial institutions; (5) decision-making and access to, and control over, marine resources; (6) external impacts affecting marine resources; and (7) access to support and external opportunities and aspirations. These questions were designed to capture women's and men's roles and engagement in coastal fisheries and aquaculture across different age categories and spheres of influence, including barriers and opportunities.

Further, key informant interviews (KIIs) were undertaken with traders in Funafuti who sold marine resources. These KIIs will provide a deeper perspective on how marine resources are locally traded, including associated challenges and opportunities pertaining to their businesses through a gender lens.

Relevance of a gender analysis

Team members from TFD and GAD appreciated their involvement in these surveys as it afforded them the opportunity to learn more about gender roles in fisheries and aquaculture such as certain marine harvesting practices of Tuvaluan men and women that are not usually well understood or documented. It also provided further insight into the challenges faced by fishers and fish traders across the different gender and age categories.

This gender analysis can also verify assumptions about women's and men's engagement in fisheries including traditional gender roles, which may or may not have changed. It also provides a baseline for relevant stakeholders to make evidence-based decisions and therefore enhance gender mainstreaming across Tuvalu's fisheries sector institutionally and across its programmes.



GDs underway with women and men's groups in Vaitupu © Margaret Fox



SPC personnel conducting gender and fisheries analysis training for TFD and GAD staff in Funafuti © Margaret Fox

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