

Inclusive research to build capacity and ownership: Kiribati's gender and fisheries analysis

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Background

Between October and December 2023, the Kiribati Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resource Development (MFMRD) – in partnership with the Pacific Community (SPC) through the Pacific European Union Marine Partnership (PEUMP) programme⁴ and with support from the University of Wollongong ANCORS Pathways Project – conducted a gender analysis of the fisheries and aquaculture sector, covering 10 communities on the atolls of Tarawa, Maiana, Nonouti and Kiritimati (Mangubhai et al. 2024). The analysis is a tool to better understand the gender dimensions and dynamics in fisheries and aquaculture in local communities. An institutional analysis of MFMRD was also conducted to assess the environment for gender mainstreaming in fisheries. The approach was a mix of field research and data collection coupled with training for MFMRD staff in collecting field data. This work was part of MFMRD's commitment to ensuring that gender equity and social inclusion are better integrated and mainstreamed into all aspects of its work.

Change process

Survey questionnaires were developed to collect data, including a focus group discussion tool that was tested in the field and adapted to suit the local context (Mangubhai et al. 2024). An institutional analysis of MFMRD assessed five key areas of gender mainstreaming: 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 carry out gender mainstreaming; and 5) availability of adequate resources to finance gender mainstreaming.

Training

A three-day gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) training was conducted for 22 MFMRD staff from the agency's technical and policy units (14 women, 8 men). Prior to the training, 20 participants completed a gender



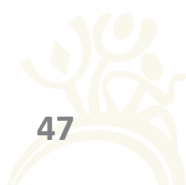
MFMRD participating in gender training and socioeconomic survey design. © SPC

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⁴ For more information on the PEUMP programme visit website: Home | PEUMP





Field team on Kiritimati Atoll. © SPC

attitude survey, which revealed key insights. This type of survey helps to assess the immediate impact of the training. The pre-survey findings underscore a strong collective belief in gender equality in decision-making, but also highlight areas where attitudes toward women's full participation in fishing can be improved. When asked if fishing should be solely a man's responsibility, 70% disagreed, 25% agreed, and 5% were neutral. However, when asked whether women should own boats, fishing nets and other means to fish, only 15% agreed and 85% disagreed. Crucially, 100% disagreed with the notion that women should remain silent in community-based resource management meetings, and

all participants unanimously agreed that men and women should make community fisheries decisions together.

A post-training evaluation revealed that all participants agreed (92% strongly agreed, 8% agreed), that they gained new knowledge from the training. Additionally, 93% now have a clearer understanding of how to integrate GESI into their work. The training also encouraged critical thinking, with all participants agreeing (75% strongly agreed, 25% agreed) that the sessions challenged their perspectives. Participants particularly appreciated the group discussions on integrating GESI, as well as



Fishers from Banana Village on Kiritimati Island. © SPC

interactive sessions using games, quizzes, and GESI tools and analysis. Notably, no session was rated unfavourably.

Field research

Over 60 focus group discussions took place with 488 fishers and aquaculture farmers from 11 villages (246 women and 242 men). These included young, middle-aged and elderly women and men. There were also key informant interviews with 12 MFMRD staff (7 women, 5 men) across senior management and technical staff. Also consulted were 2 women staff from the Ministry of Women, Youth, Sport and Social Affairs. The key highlights and findings included a set of recommendations to progress gender in fisheries, which were presented in-country in March 2024 along with separate validation sessions for senior managers and technical officers.

Results and impact

The approach taken prioritised the building of in-country capacity within MFMRD, focusing on socioeconomic research with a GESI lens. Rather than simply delivering the gender analysis of the fisheries and aquaculture sector in Kiribati, the support aimed to equip local MFMRD staff with the skills to conduct comprehensive gender analyses independently, interpret findings, and communicate their significance at the to community and national level.

MFMRD staff were engaged at each stage of the analysis, and participated actively in survey and tool development, which included focus group discussions and key informant interviews. This engagement allowed staff to shape the tools and ensured the surveys were culturally relevant and grounded in the local context. The training sessions, paired with mentorship, offered MFMRD personnel hands-on experience in analysing gender data. This practical exposure enhanced their understanding of gender roles within Kiribati's fisheries and aquaculture sector, encouraging them to see beyond traditional perceptions and recognise the socioeconomic contributions of women in fisheries.

The inclusion of MFMRD staff in data review, analysis, and interpretation also proved instrumental for team cohesion and skill building. After the training, participants showed confidence in applying GESI principles, with many expressing plans to incorporate these perspectives into their work. This included initiatives such as establishing women's fisheries organisations and using GESI tools in community engagement, highlighting a meaningful shift toward inclusive practices. Additionally, MFMRD staff contributed to an article in the Women in Fisheries Information Bulletin, capturing key insights from undertaking the analysis.

Through her leadership, MFMRD's Director for Coastal Fisheries, Tooreka Teemari, was part of the process from the initial planning stages to the review of the final report, and she presented the key findings at the 16th session of the Heads of Fisheries meeting in April 2024 in Noumea, New Caledonia. This public acknowledgment of the importance of GESI underscores Kiribati's political will to embed gender equality principles and approaches in fisheries and aquaculture. This opportunity to share their findings publicly was a meaningful

step toward communicating their achievements at a high-level regional meeting, thus demonstrating ownership and leadership to progress gender equality in the fisheries sector.

The analysis recommended integrating GESI perspectives into the draft MFMRD strategic plan, and this suggestion was taken on board by MFMRD leadership, and SPC provided technical advice to support this.

Lessons learned

The lessons learned are shared here.

- Building capacity goes beyond training sessions; it involves hands-on guidance and opportunities to directly apply GESI knowledge and tools. Tailored support strengthens local stakeholders' ability to implement and adapt learnings and tools effectively.
- Engaging stakeholders in tool development and piloting ensures tools are practical, contextually relevant, and effective. Stakeholder feedback provides insight into any necessary adjustments to better suit the local context.
- Training sessions and hands-on GESI exercises are powerful tools for fostering lasting change within organisations. They not only equip staff with essential skills but also serve as catalysts for broader organisational shifts. The commitment shown by MFMRD staff to implement GESI-focused actions in their daily work, alongside the integration of GESI recommendations into the strategic plan, underscores how capacity-building efforts can drive sustained progress in gender equality and social inclusion.

References

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