

Outcomes of the first regional Gender and Social Inclusion in Fisheries Symposium

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Introduction

Pacific fisheries play a critical role in the economic and social development of the region, contributing to food security, livelihoods, and national revenues. Despite its significance, challenges around gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) persist. Around 56% of annual small-scale fisheries catches are by women (Harper et al. 2013) who dominate the onshore processing sector (Ruia et al. 2023), are often underrepresented in decision-making processes, and face multiple barriers to accessing resources and opportunities.

The first regional Gender and Social Inclusion in Fisheries Symposium, which was co-hosted by the Pacific Island Forum Fisheries Agency and the Pacific Community, brought together 55 (42 women, 13 men) coastal and offshore

fisheries practitioners, representatives from civil society organisations, academia, regional organisations, fisheries entrepreneurs and political leaders.

The discussions explored challenges and pathways to the quantification of women's roles and their socioeconomic contributions to fisheries, how to empower small-scale fish entrepreneurs and enhance inclusive participation in fisheries management and development, including decision-making.

The outcomes of the deliberations are shared below under three of the symposium's thematic areas, which were identified as priorities for both coastal and offshore fisheries.

Participants to the first regional Gender and Social Inclusion in Fisheries Symposium, held at the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency in Honiara, Solomon Islands. Image: © Josaia Nanuqa



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Theme 1: Data and information on women's contributions and socioeconomic benefits

- 1 Improved coordination and partnerships between agencies of the Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific (CROP) and increased partnerships between national fisheries agencies and women's machineries.
- 2 Advocacy and awareness for Pacific Island fisheries leaders and gender equality leaders to create high-level political support for GESI in fisheries. This can be done through improved CROP initiatives that are in line with high-level GESI commitments in regional frameworks.
- 3 Harmonising and standardising data collection across and within sectors (e.g. fisheries, gender, agriculture, statistics, climate change) and organisations (e.g. academia and civil society groups at the regional and national level) to integrate GESI indicators into existing research tools and systems to guide GESI and fisheries policy commitments.
- 4 Increasing capacity for fisheries socioeconomic data collection and analysis with GESI lenses, including on welfare and well-being for small-scale and commercial fishers and fish workers. This should combine formal and informal forms of capacity building aiming at skills development for GESI analysis.
- 5 Increasing documentation of traditional knowledge of Pacific Island women and men to inform fisheries management practices with indigenous peoples in the centre of fisheries management as stewards of their maritime spaces and marine resources.
- 6 Strengthening inclusive and community-driven solutions for sustainability.

Theme 2: Empowering small-scale fisheries enterprises

- 1 Long-term strategy, investment and partnership, including with the private sector is required to increase the success of formal and informal small-scale seafood businesses.
- 2 Comprehensive capacity building and training that is accessible to local groups and small-scale fisheries enterprises. This includes post-harvesting, marketing support for accessing local and international markets, and business literacy, all of which must be integrated.
- 3 Provision of and support to access financial services and products that are suitable for small-scale businesses and community groups. Financial support must be tailored to ensure it does not disadvantage community groups such as women, youth and others.
- 4 Collaboration with educational institutions to deliver micro-qualification courses or similar training units to build individual and group business skills to facilitate access to finance and to enable inclusive training opportunities for rural women, men, youth and marginalised groups.
- 5 Interventions aimed at value-adding must be tailored to the local and rural context using climate smart, economically viable and culturally appropriate approaches. Interventions should utilise readily available and low-cost materials and techniques with an emphasis on food safety and hygiene, coupled with awareness and advocacy on nutrition and healthy foods.
- 6 Improved transport and infrastructure, including cold storage, to enhance access to domestic and international markets. Capacity support to understand and meet export requirements and development of marketing strategies to better connect small-scale entrepreneurs while managing expectations.
- 7 Regulations, policies and laws to enable and protect locals when engaging in regional or international trade. Enable locals and groups to understand policies and laws so that they can be used to facilitate and protect them when dealing with overseas business partners.

Theme 3: Inclusive voices for a meaningful participation in fisheries management, conservation and development

- 1 Mentorship programmes and leadership training tailored to address gender biases can empower women and young fisheries career starters to break through cultural barriers as evidenced by imbalances in mid to senior management positions to support their professional growth with equal opportunities to become leaders of tomorrow.
- 2 Adoption of a people-centred approach, fair recruitment practices, and addressing access barriers improve diverse participation in building leadership capacity. Emphasis on supporting conflict management and nurturing emerging leaders. This involves fostering a culture of collaboration and shared leadership, where diverse voices are valued and empowered.
- 3 GESI-sensitive community engagement at all phases of programmes and interventions is a prerequisite to achieving sustainability and ownership.
- 4 Long-term engagement and involvement of a wide range of stakeholders, including women, in decision-making processes through various methods and avenues. This includes creating inclusive spaces for women to voice their perspectives, and ensuring their representation in leadership positions across sectors.
- 5 Communication and information strategies aim to empower communities to achieve meaningful participation in sustainable resource management. This involves utilising culturally appropriate and GESI-transformative communication channels, messages and languages to disseminate information effectively and inclusively.
- 6 Advocacy for union involvement and the importance of traditional engagement mechanisms in addressing worker issues. This entails recognising the historical significance of unions in advocating for workers' rights and amplifying the voices of marginalised workers, including women and minority groups.
- 7 Decolonising GESI by integrating traditional values with modern principles and addressing deep-rooted issues. This requires challenging colonial legacies and power structures that perpetuate gender and social inequalities, particularly when addressing social identities that still remain sensitive and tabu to talk about.
- 8 Ongoing dialogue, research, and collaboration are necessary for inclusive, equitable GESI approaches. This includes fostering partnerships between government, civil society, academia, and communities to co-create and implement GESI-responsive actions.

Conclusion

The symposium was a pivotal step toward creating a regional platform for advocacy and awareness, including debating, sharing and learning from experts. The symposium ultimately fostered a vision of a more inclusive and equitable fisheries sector with stronger buy-in from leaders, regional organisations and fisheries and gender experts. By addressing the data gaps, empowering small-scale entrepreneurs, and promoting inclusive governance, the region can improve the lives of communities that rely on fishing for their livelihood and income. Ongoing collaboration and commitment will be essential to achieving these goals, and both the Pacific Island Forum Fisheries Agency and the Pacific Community are committed to working with member countries to progress the recommendations from this symposium.

References

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