

Boosting women’s knowledge in post-harvest handling of fish and fattening of mud crabs before sale

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Background

Women are increasingly being recognised for the important roles they play throughout fisheries value chains. In the past, women were largely involved at subsistence fisheries level (Vunisea 2015). While household food security is still a primary motivation for women to fish, many women are increasingly involved in the commercial side of fisheries to provide supplementary income for their families (Thomas et al. 2021). In some households, women are considered primary income earners, and they are investing in a wide diversity of activities such as gleaning, fishing, post-harvest processing, selling and marketing of value-added products (Thomas et al. 2020). Women are the dominant sellers of crustaceans, molluscs, seaweed and mud crabs, one of the most sought-after species sold at local markets (Vitukawalu et al. 2020a). For example, mud crabs are mostly sold live to middlemen and to consumers at local markets (Mangubhai et al. 2017) and fish are often smoked, refrigerated and dried before sale (Waqairatu-Waqainabete et al. 2019). While there has been a slight increase in sales price for fish products over the years, women seafood vendors still identified gaps in these local markets, one of them being the lack of access to training on the proper post-harvest handling of fish (Vitukawalu et al. 2020a) and invertebrates that would help boost their daily income.

To address this need, the Wildlife Conservation Society Fiji Country Program (WCS Fiji) organised training specifically targeting women seafood vendors (including those that were also fishers) in the Northern and Central Divisions of Fiji (with funding from Blue Action Fund and Kerrest Johnson Family Charitable Fund). Sixty-four women seafood vendors participated in two separate trainings organised by WCS Fiji in Labasa (Vitukawalu et al. 2020b) and in Suva on the proper post-harvest handling of fish. The trainings were led by Dr Jimaima Lako, a food and nutrition scientist from the Fiji National University. WCS Fiji also worked in

collaboration with The Crab Company Fiji, based in Raviravi in Ba town, to train women mud crab fishers from Tavulomo in Dama District, Bua Lomanikoro and Tiliva in Bua District and Tavea in Lekutu District of Bua Province on mud crab fattening and post-harvest handling best practices.

Production of the manuals

These trainings were carried out to help women better market their catch and ensure high quality fresh products that meet the required health and safety standards. The positive feedback received during and after-training, followed by requests from the women participants, prompted the production of two manuals in English and iTaukei languages.² As women continue to play important roles in the fisheries sector, having access to training and resources will help them improve the quality of their products and services. As catalysts of change, the women will have confidence in their decision-making processes boosted across all levels of the fisheries sector by the right exposure and availability of resources.

Guide for proper post-harvest handling of fish

This guide was developed for fishers and market vendors to ensure fish is handled in a proper manner from the time of harvest until it is sold to customers. The guide includes information on parts of a fish, good hygiene practices and determining the freshness of fish. It also includes step-by-step instructions on brining, icing, gutting and filleting of fish in sanitary ways that will reduce the deterioration of fish, eliminating the chances of contracting diseases through poor fish handling.

Mud crab fattening and post-harvest handling manual

The mud crab fattening manual was produced to help mud crab fishers sustainably catch and fatten their crabs, thus enabling them to receive a better selling price while ensuring the long-term future of the fishery. With the increasing

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² <https://fiji.wcs.org/Resources/Management-Tools-and-Guides.aspx>

Post-harvest handling of mud crabs included a lesson on the proper way of tying mud crabs. © Ana Ciriya/WCS



Constructing mud crab cages using locally sourced bamboo in Bua Lomanikoro. © Ana Ciriya/WCS



demand for properly fattened live crabs, this manual provides an opportunity for mud crab fishers to consistently supply this market in a responsible manner in terms of human health and a sustainable fishery. The manual includes step-by-step instructions on how to select fattening sites, the materials required and the construction and installation of mud crab fattening pens. It also includes guidance on checking fat content, feeding, handling and the proper way of tying mud crabs before sale. Setting up mud crab fattening farms will encourage the development of mud crab management plans (e.g. Giffin et al. 2019) and apply sustainable harvesting practices to guarantee the continuous supply of wild mud crabs for many years to come.

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Dr Jimaima Lako explaining the brining process to fishers and market vendors in Labasa. © Vutaieli Vitukawalu/WCS



Women seafood vendors assessing the freshness of fish at the post-harvest handling training in Suva. © Vutaieli Vitukawalu/WCS

