

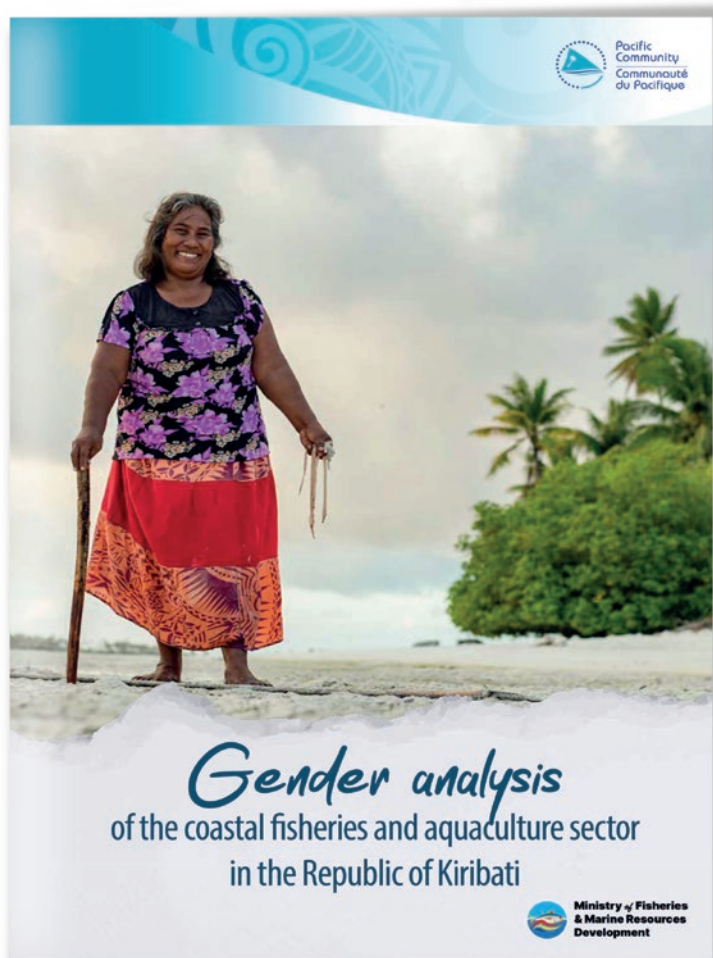
Gender analysis of Kiribati's coastal fisheries and aquaculture sector

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Coastal fisheries are deeply rooted in Kiribati's cultural traditions, serving as a means of social cohesion and the preservation of ancestral practices. In many communities, fishing is a way of life that fosters a strong sense of identity and connection to the ocean.

Fishing has long been a central activity for the people of Kiribati, not only for sustenance but also as a means of cultural expression and identity. With the commercialisation of fisheries in the 1960s and subsequent aquaculture investments in the 1980s, fishing practices have evolved, influencing traditional methods and livelihoods. However, the scarcity of gender or sex-disaggregated information on fisheries and aquaculture, including value-chains, impedes a comprehensive understanding of the roles, knowledge and contributions of both women and men in this vital sector, thereby hindering efforts towards inclusive and equitable resource management and development. The Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources Development (MFMRD) recognises that, by mainstreaming gender into the planning, implementation and development of fisheries and aquaculture, and fostering broader inclusive policies, Kiribati is not only advancing gender equality but also enhancing the resilience and productivity of the sector.

A gender analysis of Kiribati's coastal fisheries and aquaculture sector was conducted by MFMRD in partnership with the Pacific Community (SPC) between 24 October 2023 and 29 January 2024 (Mangubhai et al. 2024). A desk review was first completed to synthesise all available gender-related information on fisheries and aquaculture. An institutional analysis and capacity assessment of MFMRD as the main fisheries agency responsible for the sustainable management and development of the fisheries and aquaculture sector was then conducted, adapting SPC's Stocktake of Gender Mainstreaming Capacity survey instrument. The institutional analysis covered five main areas: 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 mainstream gender; and 5) availability of adequate resources to finance gender mainstreaming. Led by MFMRD staff who were trained in social research methodologies (Samani et al. 2024), focus group discussions were conducted with selected fishers (women and men) from 11 communities from three atolls in the Gilbert Islands (Tarawa, Maiana, Nonouti) and one in the Line Islands (Kiritimati). Fishers were divided up by gender and age (i.e. youth, middle-aged adults, elders). The surveys covered seven thematic areas:



- 1 Amount of time women and men spent on productive work;
- 2 Gender roles, responsibilities and traditions;
- 3 Selling and marketing;
- 4 Decision-making and access to, and control over, resources;
- 5 Access to capital and financial institutions;
- 6 External impacts; and
- 7 Access to support and external opportunities and aspirations.

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³ <https://www.spc.int/digitalibrary/get/a6cxi>

The report was published in August 2024 and is now available on SPC's website.³ Fifteen recommendations were made under five broad areas, which are summarised below.

Ensure institutional policies and plans support gender mainstreaming

- 1 Political commitment. The current high commitment for gender mainstreaming in MFMRD needs to be maintained through the highest levels of political leadership.
- 2 Policy improvement. Gender equity and social inclusion (GESI) should be integrated into policies being developed by MFMRD and the Ministry of Women, Youth, Sports and Social Affairs (MWYSSA).

Improve GESI in community-based fisheries and aquaculture projects

- 1 **Gender analysis.** Where data are lacking, MFMRD staff should undertake gender analyses of the communities with which they work to gain insights and better understanding of the roles, contributions, and constraints of women and men in fisheries and aquaculture.
- 2 **Disaggregated data.** The collection of relevant disaggregated data (e.g. by sex, gender, age, (dis)ability, other factors of diversity) across MFMRD divisions and units is essential. The data not only support targeted interventions to address gender disparities but also enable the formulation of evidence-based policies and programmes that promote gender equality, enhance women's empowerment.
- 3 **Traditional knowledge and practices.** MFMRD should further invest in the documentation of traditional knowledge and practices in fisheries held by women and men. Doing so would help preserve valuable cultural heritage and ensure its transmission to future generations, and may be valuable for the sustainable management of marine resources.
- 4 **Inclusive extension services.** It is essential to establish GESI-responsive extension services that can be provided by trained MFMRD staff, cater to the specific needs and circumstances of both women and men in coastal communities, and address gender-specific barriers.

- 5 **Supporting women and youth.** Supporting women and youth is required to foster an inclusive fisheries and aquaculture sector in Kiribati. Acknowledging the crucial contributions of marginalised groups, particularly women and youth, initiatives must be strategically crafted to amplify their participation and leadership roles in culturally sensitive ways.

- 6 **Gender-sensitive value chains.** Encourage the development of gender-responsive value chains and market systems that recognise and reward the contributions of women along the entire production and distribution process. This includes gender-equitable access to productive assets, such as land, water, fishing gear, and technology, addressing traditional barriers and inequalities that limit women's participation and productivity.

- 7 **Inclusion in community-based fisheries management and decision-making.** The inclusion of women, youth and persons with disabilities in community-based fisheries management and decision-making processes in culturally sensitive ways, is paramount to achieving sustainable and equitable fisheries governance in Kiribati.

- 8 **Aquaculture.** Given the lack of public or internal information on the gendered aspects of aquaculture, MFMRD could benefit significantly from investing in better documentation of gendered aspects of its aquaculture investments and support to local communities. This information can inform the design of more inclusive policies, programmes and livelihoods that address gender disparities, empower women, youth and other marginalised groups in aquaculture.

Improve MFMRD's technical capacity for GESI mainstreaming

- 9 **Training.** Investing in building the knowledge and capacity of MFMRD staff is essential to advance GESI within the fisheries and aquaculture sector. MFMRD staff need to understand GESI principles and develop practical skills to integrate these principles into their daily work.
- 10 **Designing gender and socially inclusive fisheries and aquaculture projects.** All new projects should have specific objectives, activities and deliverables that contribute towards gender equality and broader social inclusion in fisheries and aquaculture in Kiribati.



Strengthen institutional conditions for gender mainstreaming

- 11 Resources for gender mainstreaming. Allocating financial and human resources for gender mainstreaming is crucial to establishing an enabling environment for inclusive policies and programmes tailored to address the specific needs and challenges encountered by women in the fisheries and aquaculture sector.
- 12 Monitoring and evaluation. Monitoring and evaluation are indispensable components of effective gender mainstreaming efforts within MFMRD. Robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms need to be established to systematically track progress towards gender mainstreaming goals.

Invest in partnerships and collaborations

- 13 Strengthening MFMRD's relationship with MWYSSA. MFMRD should further invest, strengthen and expand its current relationship with MWYSSA to support mainstreaming efforts in the fisheries and aquaculture sector. The partnership could prioritise helping develop policies, improve the design of future projects, and address training and capacity needs.

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