

## Integrating gender in Pacific coastal fisheries research: The Pathways project

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### Introduction

Coastal fisheries<sup>3</sup> provide food for Pacific Island communities and support their livelihoods and cultures. In the Pacific Islands region, women and men engage in all aspects of coastal fisheries – often in distinct ways, with distinct opportunities, benefits and challenges (Chapman 1987; Weeratunge *et al.* 2010). Substantial evidence from research and development demonstrates that understanding coastal fisheries accurately (Weeratunge *et al.* 2010; Kleiber *et al.* 2014, 2015), managing coastal fisheries effectively (Seniloli *et al.* 2002; Hilly *et al.* 2012; Amos 2014; Schwarz *et al.* 2014), and improving livelihoods and development outcomes through, and within, coastal fisheries requires that research and development activities recognise, accommodate and engage with gender-related expectations, barriers and dynamics (Lawless *et al.* 2017).

A range of global and Pacific Island national and regional policies make commitments to equity, gender equality, and women's empowerment (see Box 1), and include the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (FAO 2015; henceforth the SSF Guidelines), the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, United Nations 1979), and the Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs). Specific to Pacific coastal fisheries is 'A new song for coastal fisheries – pathways to change: The Noumea strategy' (Secretariat of the Pacific Community 2015a), which seeks to support 'more equitable access to benefits and decision-making within communities, including women, youth and marginalised groups', and recognises that:

...gender relations have a significant effect on the course of development and so the voice of women and youth must be heard and acted upon effectively in all future [community-based resource management] strategies. In addition to playing a greater role in decision-making, women and youth must have more equitable access to the benefits flowing from coastal fisheries. (Secretariat of the Pacific Community 2015a:6)

Increasingly, funders and implementers of fisheries research and development seek transparent, decisive and measurable commitment to these gender commitments. The process of integrating gender into coastal fisheries research, management and development requires a strong mandate, and buy-in and capabilities from managers and communities, and a clear plan and dedicated resources. The objective of this paper is to illustrate the applied and diverse ways in which gender has been integrated in one project that is focused on coastal fisheries in the Pacific, and stimulate discussion and make refinements to strategies in order to integrate gender among those committed to improving coastal fisheries, food security and Pacific community wellbeing.

### The Pathways project

This paper outlines the gender integration approach used in the project 'Strengthening and scaling community-based approaches to Pacific coastal fisheries in management support of the New Song' – or the 'Pathways project'<sup>4</sup>. The Pathways project aims at improving the wellbeing of Pacific coastal communities through more productive and resilient fisheries, and better food and nutrition security, and is working with partners in Solomon Islands, Kiribati and Vanuatu, as well as with teams working at the Pacific regional scale. While the three focal countries share similarities in terms of gender in coastal fisheries, they also hold distinct opportunities and challenges when it comes to integrating gender into research and development.

Gender considerations are integrated through all five of the Pathways project's objectives and are outlined most fully under Objective 4 of the Pathways project: Increase social and gender equity in coastal fisheries governance, utilisation and benefit distribution.

The Pathways project integrated gender early on in proposal development by building on strategies, research findings and lessons from a previous project 'Improving Community-based Fisheries Management in Pacific countries'. The approach to gender integration we describe in this paper has also been guided by the Consortium of International Agricultural Research Centers (CGIAR) programme on Fish Agri-Food Systems (FISH): Gender Strategy (WorldFish 2018).

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<sup>3</sup> In this document "coastal fisheries" refers to all activities in the fisheries value chain including pre-harvest, harvest, and post-harvest activities such as gear prep, fishing and gleaning, marketing, processing, and cooking.

<sup>4</sup> Project partners: WorldFish; ARC Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies at James Cook University (Queensland, Australia); the Pacific Community (SPC); and the University of Wollongong Australian National Centre for Ocean Resources and Security (ANCORS)

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The Pathways project is funded by the Australian Government through the Australian Center for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT); as such it will be implemented in accordance with DFAT principles and policies to ‘promote opportunities for all’ (AusAID 2011; Commonwealth of Australia DFAT 2015). In addition, the Pathways project has been designed to be responsive to global and regional commitments within the SDGs, the New Song, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the Small-scale Fisheries Guidelines of the Food and Agriculture Organization.<sup>5</sup>

To integrate gender in the Pathways project three main goals were identified: 1) increase research quality, 2) empower women, and 3) facilitate equitable outcomes. To achieve these goals four objectives, specifically related to gender integration, are pursued:

1. increase the recognition of women’s contribution to coastal fisheries;
2. enable women’s engagement across scales of governance;
3. fairly support livelihood opportunities and benefits for women and men; and
4. enable women and men to improve nutrition within the first 1,000 days of the project.<sup>6</sup>

## Gender in the Pacific

Gender equality and women’s empowerment are goals built upon the intrinsic values of human rights such as equity and equality, but are also ‘critical levers for achieving agriculture [and fisheries] and rural development outcomes’, where improvement to equality have been linked to increased food production, improved nutrition, greater household

health and wellbeing, reduced loss and waste of fish, and enhanced environmental outcomes (WorldFish 2018:5).

There are many barriers to reaching gender equality, and these barriers persist, are reflected and reinforced in societies and systems, including coastal fisheries systems. These barriers perpetuate poor representation of women in the formal economy, and result in a lack of women’s voices at multiple scales of governance (Pacific Community 2016). At the community scale, women are less likely to be present or vocal at meetings, meaning that, in general, women’s views and concerns are less likely to be shared and heard unless the meeting style, time and facilitation are directed towards them (Vunisea 2008; Schwarz et al. 2014; Dyer 2018). However, community-based management consultations and decisions that do not include women’s input, can still have an impact on them. For example, in Vanuatu, male chiefs created a no-take marine reserve in a gleaning area, which meant that women were no longer able to fish there (Tarisei and Novaczek 2006). It is these findings that have brought a strong focus within the Pathways project on facilitation strategies that engage women and men in decision-making.

There have been recent commitments and attention to gender in regional and national policies, although these have not yet translated into widespread change in research and development practices and outcomes. The challenge is to overcome capacity, knowledge or commitment shortfalls in order to integrate gender into all aspects of Pacific Islands research, governance and development (Piau-Lynch 2007; Secretariat of the Pacific Community 2015b; Government of Solomon Islands 2016; Leduc 2016). This has begun to be addressed by partners such as the Pacific Community through stocktakes of gender in fisheries of each Pacific Island country (e.g. Pacific Community 2018), and will benefit further from ongoing support and a focus on gender throughout the coastal fisheries sector.

### Box 1. Empowerment, equality and equity

Development and gender goals often include concepts of empowerment, equality and equity. These concepts are closely related, but achieving each will require different approaches.

**Women’s empowerment** means women are able to make meaningful choices about their own life (e.g. marriage, livelihood, children, living conditions) A meaningful choice means having things to choose between, as well as having the power to make that choice (Kabeer 2000).

**Equality** means *equal* opportunities or outcomes that can be achieved when formal barriers are removed (Reeves and Baden 2000). In other words, everyone gets the same thing and there are no legal or social barriers that prevent women and men from having the same opportunities. Equality is achieved when women and men are free and able to pursue the same livelihoods and experience the same conditions and benefits.

**Gender equity** means women and men are treated fairly and with consideration to their sometimes-different needs (Pavlic et al. 2000). This is an important step towards achieving equality, and can include capacity development, or gender transformation.

<sup>5</sup> Our gender approach lies within a larger framework of social inclusion. Social exclusion – which relates to norms, beliefs and practices that value certain people more than others, and exclude certain people from decision-making as well as fair access to resources – is not limited to gender. However, gender is a key social category in all human societies and often can be an important place to start when examining social exclusion. Gender can also be left out if it is not made central to the social analysis. The Pathways project focuses on gender but also recognises the multiple and interacting categories of social exclusion should be considered.

<sup>6</sup> The first 1,000 days refers to the period of time between conception and a child’s second birthday. This represents a critical period of time where nutrition has profound and lasting impacts on a child’s development.

## Concepts for gender in research and development

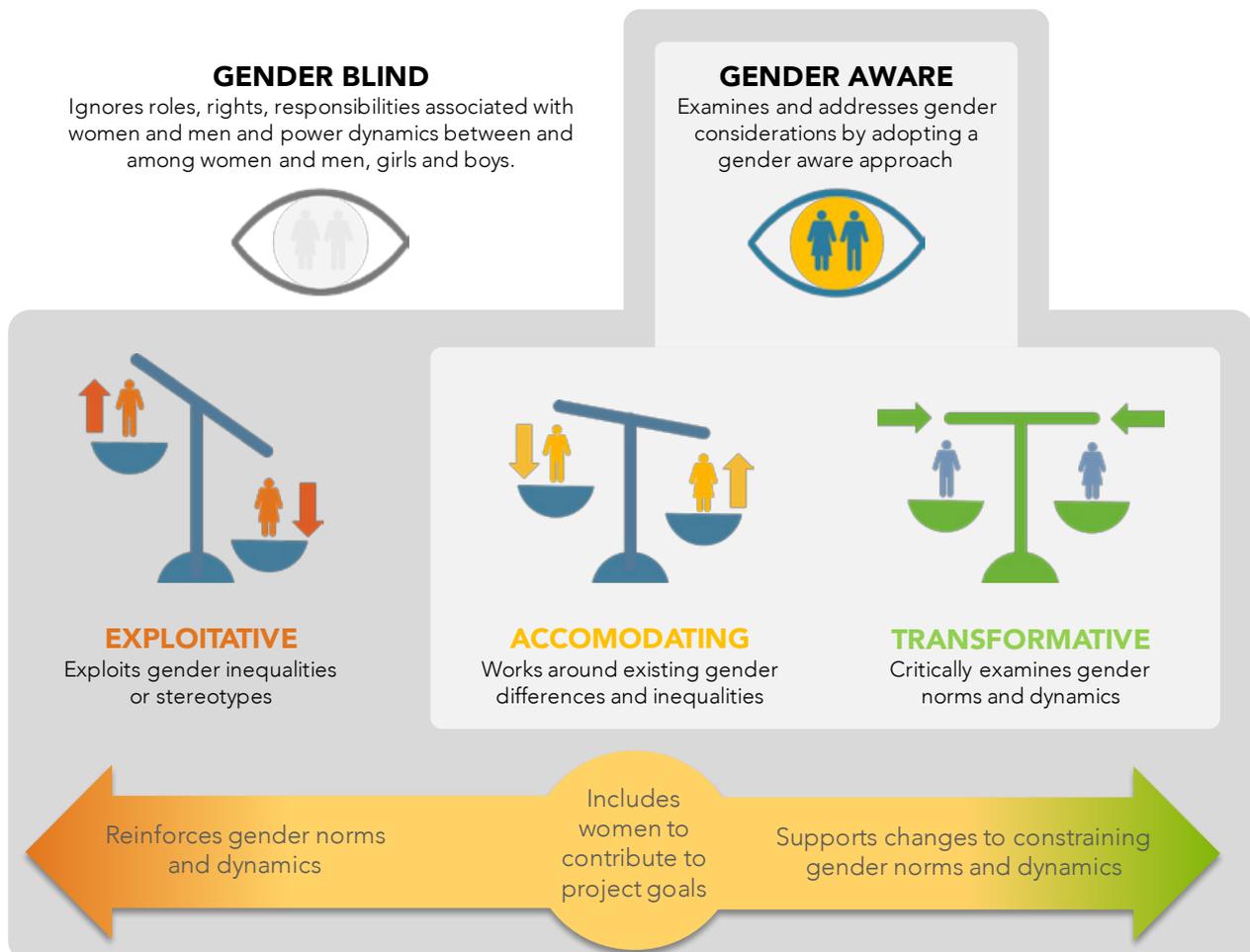
### Gender aware approaches

Research and development approaches that are 'gender aware' consider women and men's often differing needs and capabilities to participate. These differing power dynamics, needs and capabilities are determined not by biological differences between women and men, but rather through social expectations, roles and other norms. Gender-blind approaches are, of course, not 'best practice', and refer to initiatives or research projects that do not pay attention to gender norms or power dynamics. In alignment with the FISH gender strategy, the Pathways project aims at ensuring that any project activities that involve humans will be gender aware, and at least accommodative, while aiming for transformative (Fig. 1). An accommodating approach works around barriers to women's (or men's) participation. For example, an accommodative approach will make meeting times, meeting structures and locations that work for women as well as men. A transformative approach is more likely to be supported when women's empowerment and gender equality are a stated goal of a project. A transformative approach encourages people to

question whether there are gender norms and beliefs that impede their life goals, but also mean inequality will persist (Cole et al. 2014).

### Gender strategies – measures and methods

Within a gender aware approach, it is important to specify the changes that are desired, and the methods that will be used to enact those changes. Strategies in gender and development have been grouped into three main categories: 1) reaching women and men with information; 2) benefiting women and men through the delivery of, or access to, resources; and 3) empowering women and men to make strategic life decisions (Theis and Meinzen-Dick 2016). To achieve this, WorldFish has added another category: 4) transforming constraining gender norms and dynamics (Fig. 2). Gender-integrated research commonly monitors and examines reach and benefit, while gender-focused research is better suited to examine outcomes of empowerment and transformation. The Pathways project will use these categories to guide monitoring and evaluation activities, as well as other targeted research, to ensure that the method, monitoring and measurement match the desired change. This continuum also illustrates how we test assumptions; for example, asking and answering 'If



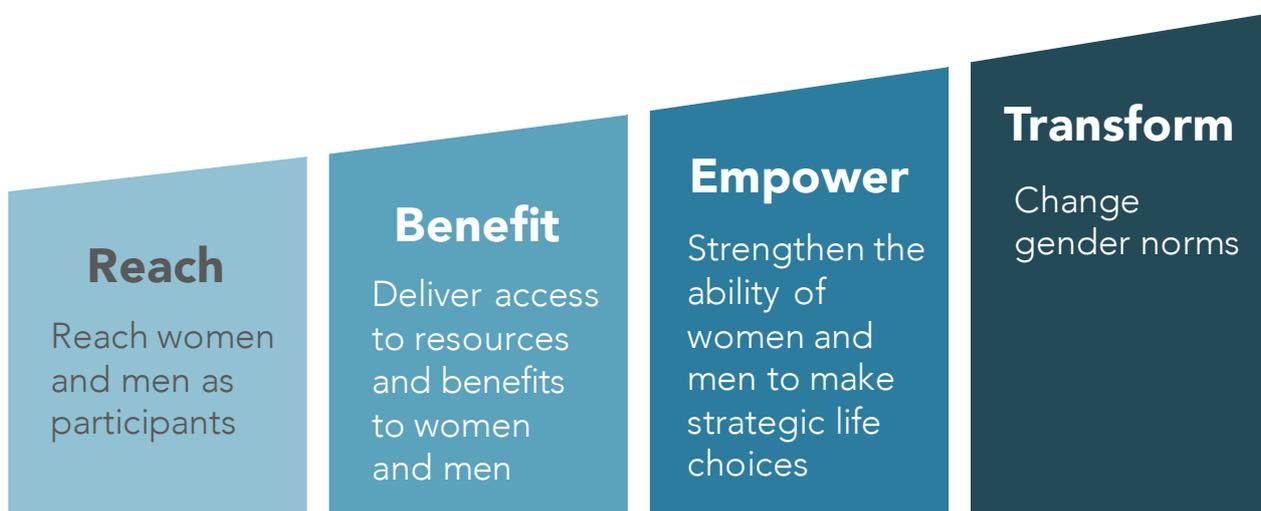
**Figure 1.** Research and development with a mandate to 'do no harm' must be gender aware, but also avoid gender exploitative approaches. An exploitative approach uses gender inequality to achieve project goals and reinforces gender stereotypes. By contrast, accommodating or transformative approaches work around or critically examine gender norms and dynamics to achieve project goals and equity goals. Figure adapted from WorldFish (2018).

men and women have participated in, do men and women benefit from (in terms of income, improved nutrition, voice in decision-making)?

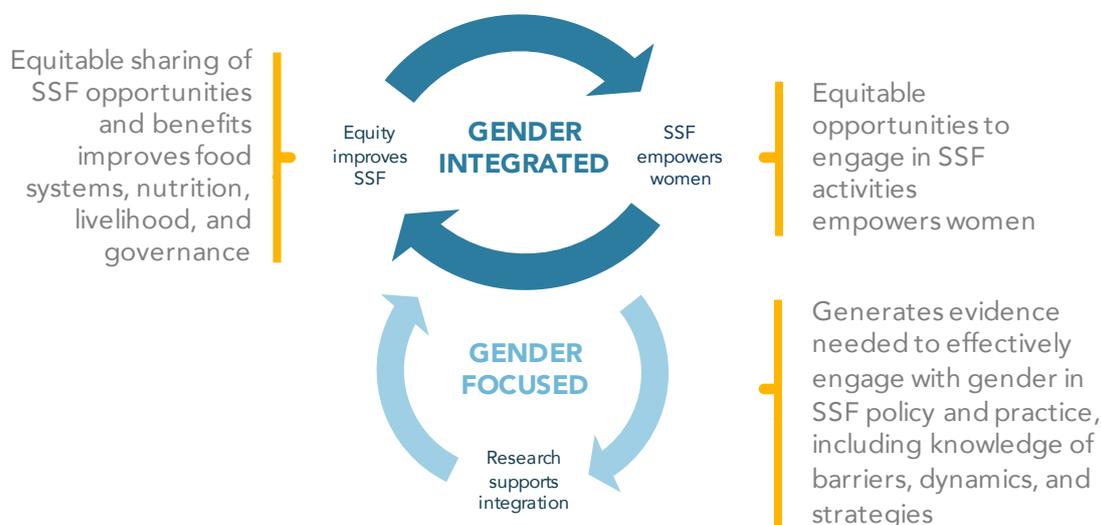
### Gender integration in fisheries systems research and development

Successful gender integration in all coastal fisheries research and development activities that include people means that gender is always taken into consideration. There are two interacting reasons for integrating gender into research and development. The first is that it improves science and our understanding of when differences within communities of people are considered. The second reason is that it can improve social and ecological outcomes when issues of power and inequality are considered, and more people are actively included (Fig. 3).

Gender integration aligns with the FISH Gender Strategy and employs gender-aware approaches that are either gender accommodating or gender transformative (Fig. 1). As one aspect of this, the Pathways project will collect, analyse and report sex-disaggregated data on all aspects of the project. The project will also include women and men in decision-making and activities by designing processes and creating opportunities that are responsive to their needs and viewpoints. Gender integration will be tracked and improved by continuous monitoring, linked to ongoing reflection and adjustment of practice. The outcomes of gender integration will be better understood with evaluation. Monitoring and evaluations will not assume that ‘reach’ equates to ‘benefit’ (Fig. 2); this will be monitored through suitable indicators and evaluations (indicators described below).



**Figure 2.** Gender-integrated initiatives, and associated monitoring and evaluation and research, fall along a spectrum from ‘reach’ to ‘transform’. Figure adapted from Theis and Meinzen-Dick (2016).



**Figure 3.** ‘Gender-integrated’ and ‘gender-focused’ research work together for continual improvements towards gender integration and coastal fisheries research quality. Figure adapted from WorldFish (2018).

**Gender-focused research in fisheries systems**

The Pathways project will also conduct gender-focused<sup>7</sup> research in various coastal fisheries contexts (Table 1; Fig. 3). This will involve, in a small subset of community engagements, identifying and addressing gender barriers deeply embedded in societies, economies, cultures and governance structures, and then testing strategies – such as gender transformative approaches (Cole et al. 2014)

– to produce a shift in gender barriers and optimise opportunities towards gender equality, equity and women’s empowerment (Box 1). This will be undertaken in order to inform and refine the quality of gender integration in the Pathways project (Fig. 3). Gender-focused research questions will address issues of women’s empowerment and gender transformation (Fig. 2).

**Table 1.** A brief description of gender-integrated and gender-focused approaches to research.

	 <b>Gender integration</b>	 <b>Gender focus</b>
What is it?	Fisheries research that integrates gender	Gender research done in a fisheries context
Who does it?	Everyone	Gender researchers*
Why do it?	Improves outcomes	Improves gender integration

\* Includes in-country and collaborating gender researchers

**Gender research in the Pathways project**

Integrating gender into the Pathways project serves the project’s goals and objectives. This section details why gender integration is necessary, identifies the specific challenges, and how the Pathways project plans to address these. The monitoring and evaluation, as well as the gender-focused questions developed to address each objective are summarised in Figure 4.

**1. Increase recognition of women’s contribution to coastal fisheries**

In the Pacific, women’s contribution to coastal fisheries are often not included in official statistics and governing processes (Kronen et al. 2007; Kronen and Vunisea 2009). This creates a barrier to gaining a full understanding and effective governance and management of coastal fisheries in Pacific coastal communities. There are two interacting barriers to the recognition of women’s contribution to coastal fisheries.

**Challenge – Biased sampling in coastal fisheries data collection.** Coastal fisheries research is often gender blind, and tends to focus on men’s fishing activities such as those using a boat and offshore

fishing (Weeratunge et al. 2010), while overlooking other critical fishing and value-chain activities such as gleaning and processing that tend to be carried out by women. Findings from this overly narrow perspective perpetuate the idea that fishing is about what men do and reinforces the assumption that there is no need to include women in fisheries decisions. This ultimately leads to ineffective management decisions that are detrimental to women, fishing communities, and the efficacy of fisheries management.

**Challenge – Lack of public recognition of women’s contribution to coastal fisheries.** In Pacific coastal fisheries, women’s labour is often valued less than men’s labour, leading women’s contributions to be given less social value than men’s (Chapman 1987). A biased perception of women’s contributions can lead to women’s voices, concerns and solutions being left out of fisheries management and decision-making. This feeds directly back to justifications for biased sampling.

To address these challenges, the Pathways project will work at two scales. First, the project will collect sex-disaggregated data to assess community-based management performance. Second, the project will work with national and regional fisheries agencies and partners to examine

<sup>7</sup> In this case ‘gender-focused’ is synonymous with ‘gender-strategic’ research identified in the WorldFish gender strategy.



Objective	<b>Increase recognition of women's contribution to coastal fisheries</b>	<b>Enable women's engagement across scales of governance</b>	<b>Fairly support livelihood opportunities and benefits to women and men</b>	<b>Enable women and men to improve dietary diversity in the first 1000 days</b>
Gender-focused research	Examine how sex-disaggregated fisheries data are collected, analysed, and reported  Examine changes to public and media discourse of women in fisheries	Examine gender integration into coastal fisheries policies  Examine how governing processes, structures and norms at multiple scales can enable fair involvement in decision-making  Identify strategies that can effectively address barriers to gender integration in governing institutions	Examine how livelihood-related activities affect women and men, and their relationships	Examine the gender roles and norms around coastal fisheries collection, preparation and consumption  Test if gender-transformative approaches improve and sustain nutrition outcomes
Gender-integrated monitoring and evaluation	100% of coastal fisheries assessments use a gender-integrated research design  Count the number gender-related media outputs by the project	40 % attendees or partner agency staff at project events are women  Women speak 50% of the time in meetings  60% of project events use gender-sensitive facilitation techniques  75% of CBFM committees have women representatives	Coastal livelihood-improvement activities are targeted at both women and men  Change in income among women and men participating in livelihood-interventions facilitation techniques	Women and men receive nutrition information

**Figure 4.** The four gender objectives of the Pathways project with their corresponding gender-focused questions, and gender-integrated monitoring and evaluation questions.

and improve these agencies' data collection programmes. Project partners will be involved in stocktakes on gender and fisheries, and designing strategies that respond to their findings. This stocktake will be used to refine integration of gender into all Pathway project countries' coastal fisheries assessments. For example, one priority of this project (and of other partners) is to improve the quality, availability, interpretation and reporting of sex-disaggregated fisheries data. This will be a foundation for understanding coastal fishing at a community, national and regional scale, and will be used to raise the profile of women's contribution to fisheries through strategic communication targeted at the general public, donor agencies and national fisheries agencies.

**2. Enable women's engagement across scales of governance**

Women's voices, opinions, and priorities are at risk of being left out of coastal fisheries governance because of prevailing gender dynamics in the Pacific, and persistent assumptions that fisheries is a topic for and about men (Lambeth 1999).

There are three challenges at the community, provincial and national scale that will be examined and addressed to minimise this risk and to empower women as prominent coastal fisheries governors.

**Challenge – Lack of gender equality, equity and women's empowerment in community-based fisheries management.** Existing local governance structures may inadvertently reinforce, sustain, or take advantage of inequitable gender norms and power imbalances unless explicit and reflexive strategies both for engagement and for distributional equity are used.

**Challenge – Missing gender commitments in national fisheries policy.** When gender is not an explicit consideration in policy it is less likely to be addressed by those in formal governing position. Many fisheries policies remain gender blind and without clear strategies or goals to address gender.

**Challenge – Lack of capacity for national and provincial fisheries agencies to meaningfully consider gender (including meeting existing or**

**emerging policy commitments**). In cases where gender is included in the national fisheries policy, there is often a lack of institutional, fiscal and technical capacity to meaningfully implement it, assess progress and adjust actions for greater impact.

To address these barriers, the Pathways project will test, refine and share strategies towards gender-inclusive community-based management. The Pathways project will also examine national policy for gender commitments and work alongside government partners to strengthen gender considerations where there are existing policy change processes. In gender stocktakes, conducted with project partners SPC and national governments, the Pathways project will examine the capacity of all fisheries institutions to implement gender and design and refine capacity building activities and outputs that respond to these needs.

### 3. Fairly support livelihood opportunities and benefits for women and men

Improving coastal fisheries management alone may not be sufficient to meet the livelihood aspirations and needs of women and men in coastal communities. The Pathways project aims at improving fish-based livelihoods through activities and initiatives that complement community-based management. Gender is a key consideration to ensure the equitable distribution of opportunities, benefits and risks related to shifts in livelihoods.

**Challenge – Livelihood initiatives tend to focus only on men's work or only on women's work.** Without additional attention to equity, gender relations, or unintended consequences this can lead to an unfair distribution of benefits or increased labour burdens, and in some cases have led to resistance backlash in household or community contexts.

To address this challenge the Pathways project has been working with partners to integrate gender into an existing 'livelihood diagnosis' tool.<sup>8</sup> This will ensure that livelihood assessments and activities include the needs and priorities of women and men. The Pathways project has a particular focus on working with and further supporting established women's groups, and being mindful, deliberate and continually reflective in the way in which men are engaged in and view these initiatives. After the initial livelihood diagnosis, gender-transformative approaches may be used, if appropriate. The Pathways project will also assess the outcomes for women and for men, and be sensitive to unintended consequences, as well as adjust activities and share lessons, as needed.

### 4. Enable women and men to improve dietary diversity within the first 1,000 days

Poor diet has been identified as a key concern in the Pacific and is a contributing factor to malnutrition and the societal and individual costs that this contributes to. Improving coastal fisheries or livelihood outcomes alone will not

address the nutritional needs of women and children in the first 1,000 days (from conception to the second birthday). There are three areas for gender integration with regard to improved nutrition.

**Challenge – Women and children's diets are often insufficient in micronutrients.** This can have consequences on the health and development of women and children, as well as public health and societal wellbeing.

**Challenge – Nutrition initiatives often focus only on women, and women's role in caring for children.**

Embedded gender norms and roles can mean that daily household food and nutrition security tasks fall mainly to women. Women and men are both influential in the selection, provision and preparation of food for household consumption. Initiatives that don't acknowledge this may reinforce or increase the burden of women with additional responsibilities that could otherwise be shared.

To address these issues, a nutrition diagnosis and activities will include providing behavioural change and awareness materials to women and men. After the initial diagnosis, interventions may also engage in transformative approaches as appropriate; in this setting, this may examine and actively question the equitable distribution of productive roles (e.g. choice of food, preparation of food, feeding infants and children) within the household.

## Conclusions

A growing number of development and research initiatives recognise gender equality, equity and women's empowerment as critical levers towards social and ecological goals. Global, regional and national initiatives to improve small-scale fisheries increasingly bring gender into sharp focus, and integrate gender throughout all areas of governance, value chains, management and research. This paper provides an example of what gender integration can look like in a project that is focused on coastal fisheries, and aims to deliver on outcomes such as increased productivity, enhanced fisheries sustainability, improved nutrition and greater livelihood opportunities and incomes.

The Pathways project has committed to gender integration in research and development, and has outlined an ambitious plan to do so. One aspect of this commitment is training and ongoing support for all members of the project team. For example, in November 2018, 30 members of the project team participated in a three-day workshop that was co-delivered by research partners the Royal Tropical Institute. The workshop was designed to build foundational knowledge of key concepts and rationale; share culturally fit, gender-sensitive approaches of facilitation across Solomon Islands, Kiribati and Vanuatu; and develop operational plans and ongoing coaching for key pieces of gender-integrated action research.

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.sprep.org/att/IRC/eCOPIES/Pacific\\_Region/225.pdf](https://www.sprep.org/att/IRC/eCOPIES/Pacific_Region/225.pdf)



Building and enabling capacity to integrate gender within coastal fisheries is not only an objective of the Pathways project partners, but represents substantial and sustained efforts of many actors in the Pacific region and beyond. The aim of sharing this paper and articulating this approach to gender integration is to stimulate discussion, critical reflection, and collaborative refinements as to how goals around gender are addressed and realised in practice, particularly within and through the coastal fisheries that provide a foundation of social and ecological wellbeing of Pacific Islanders.

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