

A Brave Start

Pacific Handbook for Gender Equity and Social Inclusion in Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture
 Barclay K., Leduc B., Mangubhai S. and Donato-Hunt C. (eds.). 2019. First edition Noumea, New Caledonia: Pacific Community. 80 pages

Published by the Secretariat for the Pacific Community (SPC), this handbook was jointly produced under the direction of the SPC Fisheries, Aquaculture and Marine Ecosystems Division and the Social Development Programme. The target readership is the staff of fisheries agencies in Pacific Island countries. The leaders of these agencies discussed the handbook on the occasion of its release in March at the biennial regional Heads of Fisheries meeting in Noumea, New Caledonia.

The Handbook's seed lay in a development research task involving Solomon Islands, Kiribati and Vanuatu; WorldFish commissioned it as part of a project of the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research. Subsequently, the SPC decided to produce the first edition of the handbook, modelled after the Pacific Gender and Climate Change Toolkit; it was developed through a workshop with broader participation from country gender experts and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

The handbook is a welcome sign that women are now receiving more attention in the SPC fisheries policy, after only intermittent efforts starting from about 1989. The 2015 New Song for Coastal Fisheries (SPC 2015) did include the need to address women's issues but tended to weaken the focus by referring repeatedly to women along with youth and marginalized groups. A recent study of new fisheries strategies in Solomon Islands, Kiribati and Vanuatu showed that minimal attention is yet to be given to gender and human rights in these strategies as in the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of

Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines), despite promising uptake of other measures like the ecosystem approaches to fisheries management.

The handbook is structured into five modules: (1) Introduction; (2) Gender and Social Inclusion Analysis; (3) Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning; (4) Government Processes; and (5) The Policy Cycle. Each module can be accessed separately, leading to a small amount of redundancy. The whole is lavishly illustrated with coloured graphics, tables and excellent photographs interspersed in the text.

Each module begins with key points and contains examples, authorities and tables. For example, Table 1.1 is an

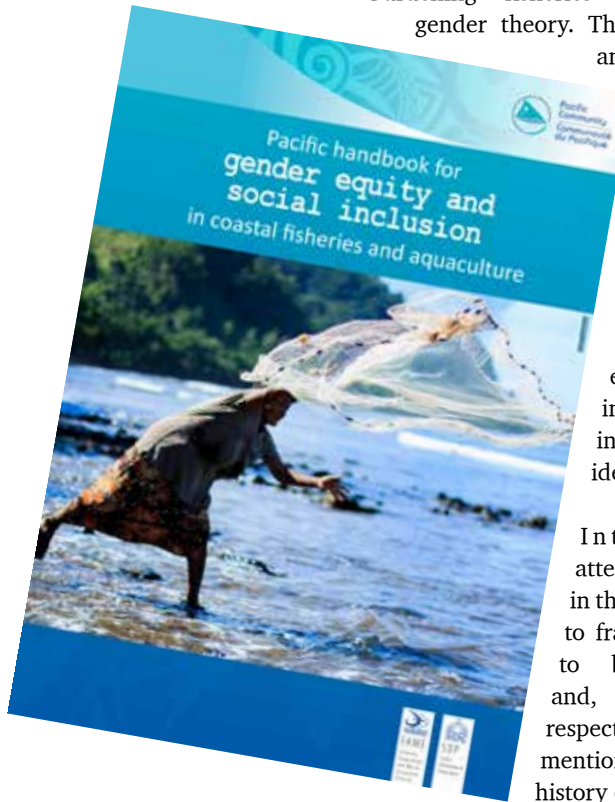
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extensive list of the policy instruments that Pacific Island governments have committed themselves to in order to promote gender equality and social inclusion, showing how each is relevant to coastal resource management and development. Fisheries officers might not be familiar with many of these instruments.

Gender equality

AM Song and colleagues had shown in 2019 that officers in the three countries they studied were unfamiliar with the concept of gender equality in fisheries, that they were ambivalent towards

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the need to include it in fisheries policy because to them it appeared as the remit of the social and welfare ministries.

Given the handbook’s target readership, the authors have avoided burdening fisheries officers with gender theory. They do provide and discuss,

however, the basic terms chosen to structure the handbook’s message. They focus on social exclusion as the inverse of social inclusion and the idea of norms.

Module 1, Introduction, attempts to bring in the salient points to frame the issues to be addressed and, in many respects, succeeds. As mentioned above, the history of SPC’s efforts to address women’s conditions in fisheries has been intermittent. But the brief historical reference does not match the evidence, as the more concerted efforts occurred in the 1990s, rather than in the 1980s.

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work and almost totally lost the focus on women. Women-only projects caused some negative reactions. In the early 2000s, ‘community fisheries’ became ‘coastal fisheries management’.

Although the PROCFish Project of 2002-2009 produced much detailed sex-disaggregated fisheries data, by the time its reports were published, the SPC had finished mentioning women or gender, and the WPC Women in Fisheries Information Bulletin was the only remaining vestige of gender work. The vision and endeavours of the New Song and the handbook are going right to the foundations of the need for gender equity and social inclusion in fisheries. Will this new cycle be more successful in engaging fisheries officers—women and men—in understanding the economic, social and community benefits or will resistance again wear down the efforts?

As Module 1 explains, the themes can be confronting, from the marginalization of social exclusion to the need to address gender-based violence in fisheries when, for example, attempts to help women through fisheries projects can lead to violence against them in the household (pg. 6). This module also situates this and other issues in the broader Pacific context with facts that may be new to fisheries officers.

This Module does lack a conceptual map outlining the handbook’s structure, clarifying its overall logic, positioning it relative to other related materials. This could have explained, for example, where implementation fits into the process of supporting greater gender equity and social inclusion.

Current realities

Module 2 deals with Gender and Social Inclusion Analysis. It makes the case for the importance of performing the analysis to establish the current realities, and to form a baseline to enable the performance of monitoring, evaluation and learning covered in Module 3. Without the conceptual map mentioned above, however, the level of detail in Module 2 seems variable. The tips were useful; for example, on pg. 8 the suggestion of engaging a gender specialist is excellent, as too often

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recognising and explicitly including women’s work, their access and benefits into the fisheries and the aquaculture sector. The first efforts were technically targeted to post-harvest processing, then became focused on women-in-development approaches that transformed into ‘community fisheries’



Fisher woman at Suva fish market, Fiji. The vision and endeavours of the New Song and the Handbook are going right to the foundations of the need for gender equity and social inclusion in fisheries

biologists will take on social analyses, even though most are untrained in social sciences and lack the depth of understanding for the task. On the other hand, the topic areas listed in pp. 9-11 seemed redundant and the handbook could have proceeded to the Gender Analysis Checklist (pp. 13-15). The two tools presented are useful—division of labour and activity matrix and time use survey—but they appeared to take the handbook to a new level of detail.

Module 3, titled Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning, addresses the themes of its title but may leave the reader wondering what sort of implementation is being monitored. In the second edition of the handbook, fisheries officers may appreciate having useful examples of designing and choosing interventions and programmes, leading into the monitoring, evaluation and learning phase.

Module 4 on Government Processes brings the handbook back to the target readership in fisheries agencies. The module is strong on how inclusion could proceed in government processes, right up to the scale of international

negotiations. This module particularly emphasises the importance of the capability of government agencies to undertake the gender mainstreaming work, going beyond training needs for staff to the importance of organisational culture, systems, commitment and leadership. The module concludes with a list of the gender-aware outcomes of the New Song and the SSF Guidelines to which agencies can contribute.

Climate of misunderstanding

Module 5 is called Policy Cycle and it draws attention to the policy initiatives proliferating since 2010. Being rather free of gender theory and methodological references, the handbook is a good, even a brave, start, given the climate of misunderstanding and past history. It is well worth looking forward to the second edition, which will hopefully be produced with the involvement of more fisheries officers. ↴

For more

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ocecoaman.2018.11.005>

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