



## Recognising the contribution of women in small-scale fisheries to improve food security and resilience in Fiji

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Small-scale fisheries (SSF) are irrefutably vital for food security and livelihoods of coastal communities around the world. However, there are challenges and stressors that these communities face such as climate change impacts, demographic shifts, and the increase in demand for fish and fish products that threaten their food security and livelihoods. Climatic conditions such as the increase in sea surface temperatures, ocean acidification, changes in precipitation, increased intensity and frequency of cyclones, and nutrient cycling have significantly affected fish production and distribution (Garcia and Rosenberg 2010; Ram-Bidesi 2015). Fisheries in tropical countries are seeing changes in fish distribution, and authors have projected fish

stocks movement out of the tropics into higher latitudes and this will likely affect food security and livelihoods (Cheung et al. 2013). Studies also show that there will be an increase of 3°C or more in the Pacific by 2100, which will result in decreased pH, deoxygenation, and a decline in marine production (Hanich et al. 2018). These impacts will cause the disappearance of almost 80% of aquatic species in certain areas, with a predictable decline of more than 50% in the catch potential of nine out of 17 Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs) (Hanich et al. 2018). The Pacific Community has devised plans to ensure that at least 35 kg of fish per person is accessible per year; however, it is almost certain that 75% of PICTs will fail to meet this food security requirement by 2030 (Hanich et al. 2018).



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Even though the SSF is evolving and focusing on sustainable practices in reducing hunger and poverty, little consideration is devoted to gender role, particularly in PICTs where women are the backbone of the fisheries communities (Kronen and Vunisea 2009). The contribution of women is immense in SSF; however, the fisheries data are more centred on direct, formal, and paid fishing activities, which are usually carried out by men, whereas those activities that are indirect, informal or unpaid are mostly carried out by women (Harper et al. 2013; Béné et al. 2013). Poor recognition and inadequate representation of women paint an incomplete picture of their role in SSF and in promoting food security and building resilience. Women are an essential part of SSF globally, yet they remain in the shadows (Harper et al. 2013). Their contributions to the fisheries' food security are constantly ignored, frequently undervalued, and poorly documented (Thomas et al. 2021). The discounted contributions of women challenge their importance in fishing and fisheries-related activities to food security and resilience worldwide. While there has been an evolution in women's empowerment and gender equality in recent times, studies reveal that gender inequalities persist in the fisheries sector (Harper et al. 2013; Kleiber et al. 2014). The overriding issue is that SSF's food security and livelihood cannot be effectively managed,

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improved, and transformed if women are not precisely represented in statistics, research, and decision-making (Alonso-Población and Siar 2018). Addressing barriers and constraints to gender equity by recognising the contribution of women in SSF will therefore build food security and resilience in PICTs.

My research aims to give recognition to the undervalued contribution of women in improving food security and resilience in SSF in Fiji. My study will be carried out in the coastal provinces of Tailevu and Serua on the island of Viti Levu. The objective of my research is to examine the impacts of climate change on the SSF, especially on food insecurity. Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. During analysis, data will be sex-disaggregated to investigate the gendered response and resilient adaptation strategies in relation to the impacts of climate change on food security and livelihoods. Analysis will specifically focus on:

- gender, age categories, and the productive and reproductive work of men and women;
- the difference in men's and women's access and control of resources, benefits, and opportunities; and
- influencing factors that will describe social, economic, and political forces that have an impact on gender roles and relations.

I will be providing recommendations on the processes and pathways to enhance the contribution of women in SSF. This will guide researchers and enable policymakers to further understand gender equity in SSF in Fiji, and how it can be incorporated into sustainable management and policy planning to increase food security and resilience in Fiji.

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