

Women in artisanal and commercial fisheries in Fiji

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Introduction

Women in Fiji have changed from performing daily domestic responsibilities to being involved in a more integrated role, venturing into areas such as politics, religion, business and education. This changing role of women is becoming important within Fiji's fisheries sector.

Worldwide, women contribute in multiple ways to the production and marketing of fish. Most of these contributions are under-reported or are not reported at all. Some general research is being undertaken by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community on the role Pacific women play within fisheries. In the Pacific, women are great fishers and suppliers of fish on a small scale, yet the economic contribution of Pacific fisherwomen to their households, communities, and nations are rarely investigated.

In Fiji, some women are employed by fishing companies (e.g. Pacific Fishing Company Limited, Voko, and Fiji Fish), mostly performing tasks below management level. Women form the core of the industrial fisheries labour force through their involvement in post-harvest or processing activities (Vunisea 1996). Women's contribution is also significant within Fiji's artisanal fishery sector, which is evident by the number of women selling seafood at the Suva, Lautoka and Nausori municipal markets from Thursday to Saturday every week. The increasing participation of women selling marine products has also given rise to the sale of non-fish products, harvested both from the sea and from freshwater areas.

Despite women's contributions, their participation in the artisanal fishing sector is hardly acknowledged (Vunisea 1996), yet their increasing participation in fisheries cannot be disputed. Further research is required to highlight the economic contribution of women at all levels of fisheries in Fiji.

The focus of the research this article is based on is:

- Women in fishing companies (Voko and Fiji Fish)
The research examined the participation of women in the two fishing companies, including

their contribution to the labour market, wages, and their economic impacts on households, villages, and communities.

- Women in artisanal fisheries

The research was conducted on Viti Levu (see Fig. 1) and targeted women from the villages who sell their products at the Lautoka, Suva and Nausori municipal markets. An in-depth analysis was conducted on the economic impacts of artisanal fisheries on fisherwomen, households, villages and communities.

Methodology

Questionnaires were used to interview women involved in both artisanal and industrial fisheries. Women in artisanal fisheries were interviewed at the Lautoka, Nausori and Suva municipal markets, while artisanal fisherwomen from Namena were interviewed within the village. Women were randomly selected to be interviewed, but there was a fair representation of women selling marine and freshwater resources. Informal discussions were also conducted.

At Fiji Fish and Voko fish companies, only women who involved in fish processing were interviewed. All 10 women involved in fish processing at Fiji Fish were interviewed, whereas the fish company Voko determined which of their female workers would be interviewed.

In total, 25 artisanal fisherwomen were interviewed: five in Lautoka, eight in Nausori, and twelve in Suva.

Women in artisanal fisheries

Women in Fiji are becoming increasingly involved in artisanal fisheries. According to this study's research findings, artisanal fisherwomen in Fiji can be divided into three categories:

- Category 1: Full-time artisanal fisherwomen
- Category 2: Seasonal artisanal fisherwomen
- Category 3: Casual artisanal fisherwomen

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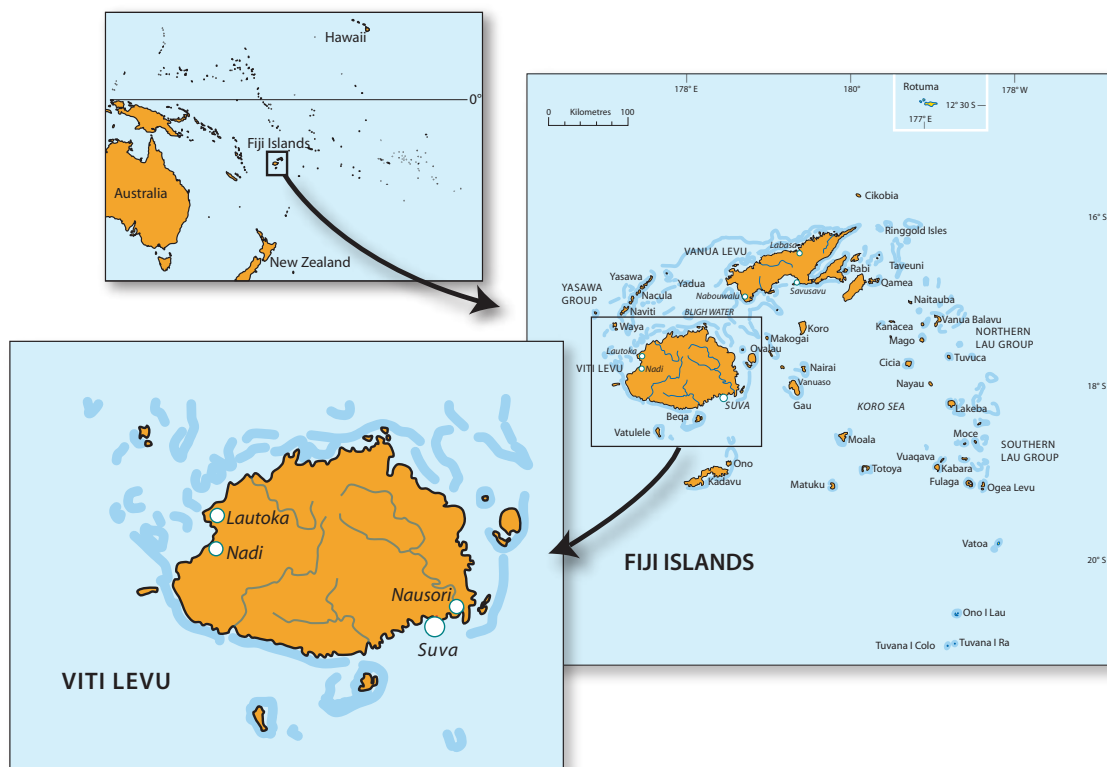


Figure 1. Viti Levu, Fiji Islands

In particular, fisherwomen in Category 1 can further be divided into sub-categories:

- Sub-category 1: Producer and seller
- Sub-category 2: Producer, buyer and seller
- Sub-category 3: Buyer and seller

Category 1: Full-time artisanal fisherwomen

Fisherwomen in this category are full-time sellers at any of the three municipal markets. Every week, selling starts on Thursdays or Fridays. This activity has been going on for more than 10 years. Selling does not occur the whole week due to market demand.

In this category, fisherwomen are either producers and sellers, or producers, buyers and sellers, or buyers and sellers. Those who belong to sub-category 1 only sell resources that they harvest from their villages. In sub-category 2, fisherwomen sell resources that they either catch themselves or buy from other women, such as seaweed. In sub-category 3, fisherwomen are only involved in buying and selling resources.

Category 2: Seasonal artisanal fisherwomen

Fisherwomen in this category only sell resources that are seasonal, such as land crabs, octopus and seaweed. As long as those resources are in season

women sell them at the market. Sometimes these women become suppliers to category 1 fisherwomen.

Category 3: Casual artisanal fisherwomen

Fisherwomen in this category only sell resources if they have a need to raise funds (e.g. for a village function, church activity, school activity, or family obligation). Selling is usually done for one day when the fisherwomen need money urgently for any of these activities that has just suddenly being organized within a very short time. Moreover, the quantity of resources the fisherwomen sell to meet such an obligation is usually determined by the return cost of transport to the market, amount of fund required and a little extra money for shopping.

Social status and activity of artisanal of the fisherwomen interviewed

Of the 25 fisherwomen who were interviewed, 21 (84%) were married, 3 (12%) were not married, and only 1 (4%) was a widow. With the exception of three single women, 22 had children. The oldest artisanal fisherwoman was 65 and the youngest was 25. The number of years that women have been engaged in this business ranges from 2–20 years. The education level attained by fisherwomen ranges from class eight to some university education (at the University of the South Pacific).

About 96% of fisherwomen spend three to four days a week fishing in the sea or in rivers, while only 4% spend this time buying and selling seafood. Resources harvested for the market include seaweed, fish, shellfish, octopus and freshwater mussels. The preparation of marine and freshwater products for the market is a family activity for all women. Family members assist in cleaning and packaging products.

Women selling at the Suva market usually begin their trade on Thursday or Friday, spending nights with their relatives in Suva. Women often give some of their marine products to relatives in appreciation of being provided with an accommodation.

Sometimes, women from the Lautoka market sell their products at the Suva market due to the higher demand there. Most fisherwomen travel to their market on trucks. Anyone whose produce has been sold before Saturday returns home on a bus or minibus.

Economic activity of artisanal fisherwomen

Selling marine and fresh water resources at the market is a weekly activity for 84% of women, and a fortnightly activity for 12% cent. Selling marine and fresh water resources is a year-round activity for about 90% of women. Of the 90%, 80% belong to sub-category 2 (producer, buyer and seller). Based on the amount of time devoted to collecting, preparing, packing and selling marine and fresh water resources, artisanal fisherwomen in this category are considered as selling marine and fresh water resources as a full-time economic activity. Only 2% belong to sub-category 3 (buyer and seller) and 8% belong to sub-category 1 (producer and seller).

Seasonal artisanal fisherwomen are producers only, selling marine resources (especially land crabs) only when they are in season. Casual artisanal fisherwomen only sell marine or fresh water resources to meet an urgent need of money for the family. Both groups of artisanal fisherwomen recognise the significance of their economic activity for their families and other obligations.

Women's choice of market at which to sell their products is mainly based on the market's competitiveness and transport costs. The selection of the particular spot to sell their products is associated with a range of factors, from attracting many buyers, favourite spot, available spot and competition with other marine product sellers. All full-time artisanal fisherwomen base the price of their products on what is decided by the market itself because they are all selling similar types of marine and freshwater products. Sellers determine the price of seasonal resources such as land crabs and octopus.

Artisanal fishing is the main source of income for 76% of women. In one week, 24% of women earned between FJD 40 and FJD 50, 36% earned between FJD 50 and FJD 100, 12% earned between FJD 100 and FJD 150, 4% earned between FJD 150 and FJD 200, and 24% earned more than FJD 200. Although artisanal fishing is the main income source for most women, only 28% have a weekly family budget and 44% have a savings account. However, the amount of money that each woman deposited into her savings account during the course of a week could not be determined. After deducting the costs for all household items listed in Table 3, the net income generated weekly by fisherwomen is as follows: between FJD 10 and FJD 20 (for 40% of women), between FJD 20 and FJD 50 (for 32% of women), and more than FJD 100 (for 28% of women). Table 3 illustrates the distribution of artisanal fisherwomen's weekly income.

Table 1. Artisanal fisherwomen's weekly income distribution

Costs	Income distribution	Percentage of artisanal fisherwomen
Transport to market	< FJD 5	36
	FJD 5 – FJD 10	48
	FJD 10 – FJD 20	4
	> FJD 20 – FJD 35	4
	> FJD 35 – FJD 50	8
Food (meals at market)	< FJD 5	52
	FJD 5 – FJD 10	48
Market cost	< FJD 5	84
	FJD 5 – FJD 10	16
Family groceries	No contribution	4
	FJD 5 – FJD 10	8
	FJD 10 – FJD 20	48
	FJD 20 – FJD 30	24
	FJD 30 – FJD 50	8
	FJD 50 – FJD 100	8

Contributions towards the church also constitute a major item of the weekly of fisherwomen's income distribution. In one week, 56% of fisherwomen contributed between FJD 10 to FJD 20 towards their church. School funds also comprise a major portion of the fisherwomen's income (76% of women contribute monthly to their children's school). Electricity is a monthly household item paid for by 92% of fisherwomen for their respective households.

General status of artisanal fisherwomen

Table 2 shows the types of assistance artisanal fisherwomen most demand to improve the standard of their business.

Table 2. Assistance to artisanal fisherwomen

Type of assistance required	Percentage of fisherwomen seeking assistance
Finance	40
Business management	36
Basic accounting	12
Budgeting	8
Product preservation and packaging	8
Market condition	8
No assistance	44

About 56% of fisherwomen require some form of assistance as shown in Table 2. These women have an understanding of the significance of sustainable development in relation to their economic activity, and contribute to the daily food supply for their families. To increase the income earned from marine and fresh water resources, 44% of women said they intended to diversify their products in the future. About 8% of women said they plan to stop selling when their children start working, and 48% did not have any future plan about their business.

Women in industrial fisheries

Fiji Fish and Voko

There are clear differences between these two fishing companies with regard to their operations. Fiji Fish concentrates on fish exports whereas Voko focuses on canned fish. Due to the nature of their operations, more women are employed at Voko than Fiji Fish. Altogether, 21 women were interviewed.

Social status of women in industrial fisheries

Among women employed at both fishing companies, 81% were married, 9.5% were single, and 9.5% were divorced. Most women (69%) were supporting their working spouses as income earners for their families, and 31% were the main providers for their families. Seven employees from Fiji Fish attained a high school education, and one had only a primary education. All Voko employees had a high school education, and one even had a tertiary education.

In total, 57% of women had children, and 50% of these children were attending school. Some of the children were attending either the Fiji Institute of Technology or the University of the South Pacific. A

portion of the income earned by female industrial fishing employees goes towards their children's education.

Employment status varies, from 38% for full-time employees to 62% for casual workers. More than 50% of women joined the fishing companies with previous work experience unrelated to fisheries. Promotion has only been given to 29% of female employees in the last five years. Most women have been working at the fishing companies for about five years and 19% for more than ten years.

Most female employees feel that they are playing an important role within the fishing companies that they work for. Similarly, they are satisfied with their working conditions. In anticipation of a job change, 39% stated they were contemplating changing their job in the future. These women are also involved in community work, with 61% contributing to some community activities while 39% do not participate in any community work.

Economic status of women in industrial fisheries

All female employees receive a weekly net income, with 62% earning between FJD 50 to FJD 100, 29% earning between FJD 100 and FJD 200, and 29% earning more than FJD 200. These women earn more than their weekly net income if they work overtime. The companies also pay the women's superannuation funds to the Fiji National Provident Fund.

The spending of female employees' weekly net income can be divided between weekly and monthly expenses. Table 3 shows the weekly distribution of income on groceries, bus fare and church. These are the main items to which women incur costs within a given week. Only 19 women were included in this analysis because two were just recently employed.

Table 3. Women's weekly income distribution

Items	Income distribution	Percentage of female employees
Groceries	< FJD 50	42.1
	FJD 50 – FJD 100	52.6
	FJD 100 – FJD 150	5.3
Bus fare	0 (walk to work)	31.6
	< FJD 10	21.1
	FJD 10 or >	47.3
Church	no contribution	47.3
	< FJD 10	42.1
	FJD 10 or >	10.6

In a week, most women's income is spent on household groceries.

Table 4 outlines the monthly income distribution of female employees from the two fishing companies. The table reflects the importance of women's financial contribution to their households.

Table 4. Women's monthly income distribution

Items	Income distribution	Percentage of female employees
House rent	Own house	10.5
	No contribution	73.7
	FJD 50 – FJD 150	10.5
	FJD 150 – FJD 250	5.3
Electricity	No electricity supply	10.5
	No contribution	31.6
	FJD 10 – FJD 50	57.9
	FJD 50 – FJD 100	0
Water	No contribution	36.8
	< FJD 10	26.4
	FJD 10 – FJD 50	36.8
Hire purchase	< FJD 10	0
	FJD 10 – FJD 50	10.5
	FJD 50 – FJD 100	0
Saving	No saving	26.3
	Saving	73.7
Insurance	No insurance	78.9
	Insurance	21.1

Most female employees have coverage through their company's insurance scheme but do not have their own individual insurance policies.

Of the 69% of female employees whose husbands also work, only one woman has another income source. About 14% of women who have other income sources, have unemployed spouses.

Conclusion

Even though artisanal fisherwomen have never been educated about basic business management, they have learned a lot about it first hand over the years by selling at the markets. They have also gained knowledge about the importance of keeping their resources as clean and hygienic as possible for the market. Hygiene is illustrated in the type of preservation and packaging of their resources.

Income generated from artisanal fisherwomen, small business owners, and female employees of

the two fishing companies has a multiplier effect on their families and communities. The contribution of women in industrial fisheries has a huge impact on the individual fishing companies and nation as a whole. In both fishing companies, more than 50% of all employees are women. A significant contribution of the income generated by women in both artisanal and industrial fisheries goes towards their children's education (e.g. primary school, high school and tertiary level).

This research has noted that women's involvement in fisheries in Fiji, although under-reported, is having a significant socioeconomic contribution towards their households, community and nation as a whole.

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1. Primary production: gathering fresh marine resources for the market
2. Primary production: the harvest
3. Secondary production: selling mud crabs at the market
4. Secondary production: selling processed marine resources at the market
(all images: Jese Verebalavu).