



Women in fisheries profiles

Jill Houma

Fisheries Officer, Malaita Provincial Fisheries Office

Jill Houma¹ and Chelcia Gomeze²

What is your current role? What do you do?

My current role as Fisheries Officer is to provide information to Malaita Provincial Government on fisheries development, resource management, and the operations of the provinces' fisheries centres. I often work closely with organisations that are implementing projects in Malaita Province. For example, I joined the Provincial Fisheries Office and WorldFish to visit 100 coastal communities around Malaita to collect information on the awareness of community-based fisheries management, and helped interview groups of women as part of developing community profiles. I supported a team from the Ministry of the Environment, and the Ministry of Fisheries who were leading consultations on ocean spatial planning in the four regions of Malaita (i.e. Northern, Southern, East Kwaio, and Central Kwara'ae). During the COVID-19 pandemic, I assisted with the deployment of fish aggregation devices (FADs) around Malaita funded by Malaita Provincial Government, to support the food security and livelihood needs of the three communities of Kwai, Tawahaule and Uhu. During my visits to communities, I also interviewed fisherwomen about how they experience marine resource scarcity and its impacts to food and household income.

Why are you passionate about your work in fisheries?

I am passionate about working with community resource owners to improve the sustainability of marine life, help enforce laws, and provide awareness to resource owners, women, children, youth, the elderly and those living with disabilities on best harvesting practices to ensure there are resources for income and livelihoods for future generations. I especially enjoy working with fisherwomen to share my knowledge on how to monitor the sustainability of their harvests, and have inspiring conversations on why marine resources are so important to manage.

What are some challenges working in a male-dominated workplace?

The challenge is that women are underrepresented at every level, starting from entry-level jobs to senior positions, and women often receive salaries that are less than their male counterparts. Decision-making for each programme is always done by male colleagues. I share my ideas but the ideas are not

“*My name is Jill Houma and I was born and grew up in Auki Town in Malaita Province in Solomon Islands. My mother is from Suholo Village in Makira-Ulawa Province, and my father is from Palasuú Village in South Malaita Province. My father is Senior Revenue Officer at Malaita Provincial Office and my mother takes care of the family home.*

I started my early childhood education at St Paul's kindergarten for three years (1999–2001). I went to Auki Primary School and was the Class Captain for Grades 2, 4, 5 and 6, and served as a school prefect in my final year. In 2009, I attended Auki Community High School in Auki Malaita Province where I completed most of my secondary school education before I moved to St Stephen Pamua Community college in Makira-Ulawa Province to complete Form 6. During my secondary school years, I was a school prefect and in my spare time I volunteered and served as the secretary for the Palasuú Village Committee.

I completed a Certificate of Environment and Applied Science at Solomon Islands National University (2016–2017). Following graduation, I joined Save the Children, doing data analysis and was an enumerator for a survey on justice for youth. I also worked with the Department of Environment Health in Auki as a food health inspector.

In 2019, I approached the Malaita Fisheries Office in the hope of building up my capacity of knowledge and skills, gaining more work experience, and receiving training in fisheries, especially the sustainable harvesting of marine resources. After volunteering for six months, I successfully applied and got the position of Research Fisheries Officer under the Malaita Provincial Government. I am proud to say I am the first woman to work in the Malaita Provincial Fisheries Office. Recently, I accepted a position as Fisheries Officer with the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources in Malaita.

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often considered. Another challenge that I face is how jobs are divided up between men and women – men get to do fieldwork, while women are expected to look after the office. Many people I meet do not value women's contributions to decision-making or their ideas for programme implementation.

What advice can you give other women who are interested in working in fisheries?

Small-scale fisheries is an interesting sector that most women, young girls and the elderly contribute to through the collection of shells, processing fish using motu (a traditional Solomon Islands method of cooking), drying fish, or selling fish to the market. Many contribute through a diversity of roles such as seaweed harvesters or workers in processing plants, or doing value adding to marine products, like marking shell money for valuable uses. We need more women in the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources who can work with women in the fisheries sector. I encourage more young women to come onboard the fisheries team so that we can demonstrate the valuable role women can play, and can all do our part to empower more women in rural areas who play critical roles in food security and livelihoods for their families and communities.



This picture was taken in July 2021 during the review of the Community Based Resource Management Plan for the Kamage community in Isabel Province that my work colleague and I facilitated, with the CBRM Section of the Ministry of Fisheries and WorldFish. ©Alick Konimalefo



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