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ESCAP/FAO PROJECT ON IMPROVING THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC  
CONDITION OF WOMEN IN FISHERIES: Relevance of the  
Fiji Study to other South Pacific Countries

by

Padma Narsey Lal  
Claire Slatter

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Introduction

1. Recently Asian and Pacific countries have shifted their strategy for national development from large scale commercial activities to that of small scale low technology programmes which would encourage rural development.
2. The Fisheries Division, of the Fiji Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, in implementing its national policy to increase fish production also has as one of its main objectives 'to generate employment opportunities and cash inputs into rural communities through small-scale low-technology fisheries'. The division's programmes are mainly geared to the rural population though some large scale industrial type projects are also encouraged.
3. In Fiji, both men and women are actively involved in commercial fisheries. It is known that both men and women are involved in fishing and fish-marketing and that women dominate the fishing and marketing of crustacean and molluscs. The extent of women's involvement in the commercial sector however, is not known although a survey carried out by the Fisheries Division in 1978-79 indicated that subsistence fishery is mainly carried out by women in inshore waters.
4. To determine the involvement of women in commercial fisheries, the Fisheries Division in Fiji along with the Centre for Applied Studies in Development of the University of the South Pacific, are participating in an ESCAP-organised project 'Improving the Socio-Economic Condition of Women in Fisheries'. Other participating countries in the project are Philippines, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. Unlike the Philippines and Indonesia, Fiji does not have fisheries programmes specifically aimed at women per se but it does have rural fisheries programmes directed at rural communities in general which both involve and have impact on women.
5. Phase I of the project, which involved a detailed survey in a selected number of villagers, collected data and identified the present and potential involvement of women in fisheries in Fiji. At the survey planning meeting held in Manila during 22nd-25th September 1981, each participating country prepared

a survey outline suitable to their own needs. The survey questionnaire presented by ESCAP was discussed and modified at the meeting. However, the preparation of the final questionnaire was left to each country to suit its own needs and requirements.

6. A second meeting proposed to be held in Fiji in October, at the completion of the survey, will discuss the conclusions of the survey and projects in the respective countries. Fiji was suggested as the location for the second meeting during the first meeting in Manila, for the purpose of focussing on the specific and distinctive situation of small-scale fisheries and the nature, of women's involvement in fisheries in the South Pacific, as compared with the situation in Asian countries. The Fiji meeting will not only greatly benefit Fiji but would also give an opportunity for other South Pacific countries to attend and focus interest both generally on the already noticeable shift in emphasis in rural Pacific fisheries from a wholly subsistence pattern to a mixed subsistence cum commercial fishing pattern, as well as specifically on the role women play in commercial fisheries.

7. This paper has been written to give background information on the Fiji project to representatives of participating governments at this technical meeting to interest them in both sending representatives to the Fiji meeting in October and in possibly replicating the project in their own countries.

#### THE FIJI STUDY

8. Seven villages throughout Fiji were selected for the detailed survey. Selection was made on the basis of their location, type of fishery project and their importance as a supply source of these fish and non-fish projects to the major outlets as indicated by the Fisheries Market Survey data and by a preliminary market survey conducted by the researchers on this project.

9. Two villages with fishing schemes initiated and assisted by the Fisheries Division were also included in the survey. While both the schemes have introduced non-traditional fishing techniques, one of these involved only women in both fishing and processing of mullet. Other villages were chosen to highlight the involvement of women in finfishing, shellfish and crustacean fishing and the importance of the factor of market proximity to the extent of their involvement in commercial fishing.

Preliminary Survey finding

10. Fishing is acquiring increased importance as a source of income for rural communities. This is partly due, as in the case of finfish, to the promotional activities of the Fisheries Division through its Extension programme. It is also due to the existing demand for specific products such as crustaceans and shellfish. These have been traditionally fished by women and therefore offer a ready source of income to women prepared to extend their fishing activities in these areas.
11. The survey findings have in general indicated that an increased need of income as well as changes in lifestyle, has gradually shifted rural communities from a pattern of principally subsistence fishing, with the sale of surplus fish products, to a mainly commercial involvement in fishery with surplus used for consumption. This trend has been accompanied by a shift towards a more regularised and structured involvement in commercial fishery with increased pressure on resources in some sectors. This trend or shift, though most evident in villages favourably placed in relation to market outlets, is also visible in outer islands such as the most distant Yasawas island of Viwa.
12. Within villages, patterns of commercial fishing are not uniform and may vary quite considerably from a more serious, regularised pattern in some households to a more casual or occasional involvement in others, depending upon factors such as other sources of income, perceived needs and other motivational factors. In some areas, despite seemingly prohibitive fishing, transport and marketing conditions, highly motivated households on an individual basis are seriously pursuing a regularised fishing pattern in order to obtain substantial income.
13. Given the wide variation in fishing patterns that exists, prospects for introducing communal type fishing schemes might not be too encouraging, and indeed the indications from the records and the results of this survey are that in most cases communal schemes have not been successful in the long run.

Role of Women in Fishing in Fiji

14. In the subsistence economy, Fiji women traditionally played a major role in both fishing of marine and fresh-water fish and non-fish products. The extensive traditional fishing knowledge of Fijian women bears out this prominent role.

15. However, the increased promotion of commercial fisheries development in the last 15 years through the introduction of new technologies and fishing techniques has had the effect of isolating women in in-shore fishing activities for non-fish products and placing fin-fishing in the hands of men. Although women do still fin-fish, this is mainly for subsistence purposes. Furthermore, although a pattern has emerged in some communal fishing schemes of women playing a major, if not the major role in fishing and processing; marketing of the fish caught under the schemes tends to be out of their hands.

16. This has not however prevented women from taking individually-caught or processed fish to market themselves. In fact, the commercial fishing and marketing of non-fish products and processed (smoked) fin-fish has become a major source of income for rural women. A total of approximately \$864,000 worth of non-fish products was sold at markets and other outlets throughout Fiji in 1981. Most of these products were fished and marketed by women. The popularity of commercial fishing of non-fish products by women in some areas raises questions of responsible resource management where increased levels of exploitation may run the risk of depleting the resource. With the pressure of the need for income on women, and the logical opportunity for income-earning in marketing surplus produce, it is expected that further increases in the fishing and marketing of non-fish products by women will be seen over the next decade. Indeed the impact of the need for income has been seen where fisheries is concerned, in the gradual shift from a principally subsistence-oriented fishing pattern with surplus being marketed, to a principally commercial fishing pattern, where surplus is consumed. This trend is indicated in the survey carried out by researchers on this project. Survey results show that where there is no other major source of income, women are the principal income-earners in the household. This is very noticeable in villages surveyed where alternative sources of income are insignificant. Conversely, in villages where there is a substantial alternative source of income (such as yaqona, cane or finfish) women's contribution to the household income is relatively smaller. Where women's fishing income contributes significantly to the household income, a noticeable increase in fishing time and regularity of fishing is evident.

Similarly, where women's income contributed less significantly to overall household income relatively less time tended to be spent on fisheries activities and these activities were pursued with less regularity and seriousness. The patterns generally confirm the hypothesis that it is principally need of income that influences commercial fishing patterns.

17. Generally, time spent by women in fishing and fish-marketing activities is considerably high, particularly in relation to financial returns. Costs of transport and marketing are high and, in one case the considerable effort involved in reaching the actual fishing ground appeared prohibitive to the expansion of fishing involvement by women. Yet increased participation and involvement in this case is evident, indicating the extent of need in the face of limited other options and the nature of women's response to this.

18. In four of the villages surveyed, women brought in more than half of the total household income in more than 50% of the households, indicating both the limited income-earning resources or options for these villages and the responsibilities that fall to women.

#### The Implications of the Fiji Study

19. A number of tentative conclusions can be drawn from the survey results. It is evident for instance that not all coastal villages with access to fisheries resources, are necessarily potential areas for successful commercial fisheries expansion. Much in fact depends on other resources available generally to the villages. It is evident from this study that where agriculture is already earning substantial incomes for villages, fisheries are seen as of secondary importance.

20. It is also evident that given the wide variation within villages in individual involvement in commercial fishing and the part that individual motivation plays in determining fishing patterns, fisheries development through communal type fisheries schemes may not be in the longterm the most successful approach.

21. The research has also shown that women have been relegated to a secondary position in the fisheries development programme. Where women have in fact benefitted from or participated in fisheries schemes or projects, this has tended to have been more by default than by design. The survey results indicate that Fisheries development in Fiji could greatly benefit from or be greatly enhanced by a more directly planned involvement of women in Fisheries programmes and by

generally assisting the fishing activities of women. Direct assistance can be provided both by increasing the market value of fish products they sell through proper fish-handling techniques and more specialized processing which would increase the value-added to the product; and by encouraging and identifying specialized markets for their fresh and processed fish and non-fish products.

22. Pilot projects that will be identified in the final report of this research will focus broadly on improving development options for rural communities involved in commercial fisheries as well as specifically on assisting women's fishing activities and improving financial returns to them from fishing. It is hoped that Fisheries development in Fiji will incorporate the findings of the research and adopt proposed new approaches to fisheries development in rural areas.

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