Gender Assessment

FP316: Coral Reef Resilience Project (CRRP)

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GREEN CLIMATE FUND

Fiji Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) Assessment

Coral Reef Rescue (CRR) Project

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Image above: 2019 LWCC 16 Days of Activism March. Source: Fiji Women's Crisis Centre

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Introduction

The World Wildlife Fund Pacific (WWF Pacific) is working with the Government of Fiji to develop a Green Climate Fund (GCF) Funding Proposal - The Coral Reef Resilience Project (CRRP).

The Fiji CRRP's vision is to ensure that by 2033 reefs and coastal ecosystems in Fiji's GSR are healthy and resilient to changing climate, supporting regenerative business, food security and the building of livelihoods and community wealth. The project activities will contribute towards the protection of Fiji's GSR to withstand the impacts of climate change and preserve the benefits it provides to communities in the provinces of Ba, Bua, Macuata and Ra. Moreover, the project will support reef productivity by addressing threats to the reefs from overfishing, land degradation and pollution.[1]

More specifically, the objectives of this project are to:

1. Enhance the resilience of communities and their livelihoods to the impacts of climate change in Fiji's GSR through: (a) the harmonization of existing policies and regulations which help achieve Fiji's national climate objectives, (b) passage of a new policy mandating the sustainable management of the GSR, (c) creation of seascape and adjacent landscape plans for the GSR, with necessary enforcement mechanisms, to ensure its proper management and protection, and (c) execution EbS and EbA measures to help reefs continue to withstand anticipated climate changes and provide critical ecosystem services to coastal communities and economies, increase GHG capture, and safeguard coral stocks essential for the future restoration of more vulnerable degraded reefs in the Pacific (adaptation/mitigation);
2. Promote the development of and investment into new reef-safe blue and green enterprises and providing the necessary regulatory capacity development, technical assistance, incubation, and access to finance to shift local incentives toward the development of sustainable business models and reduce dependence on environmentally destructive business practices (adaptation/mitigation);
3. To ensure that research and learning from the Fiji CRRP is effectively captured and shared across other CRRP countries and coastal ecosystem planning practitioners.

The three main components include the following:

Component 1: Ecosystem based Adaptation and Green Infrastructure Solutions to reduce threats in the GSR

Component 2: Enabling a paradigm shift toward integrated Ridge-to-Reef (R2R) coastal ecosystem management in Fiji's GSR

[1] The CRRP was initiated in 2017 through a participatory design, with Fiji as the pilot country. It was launched at COP23 and government entities met regularly to coordinate through the GSR Steering Committee. The accredited entity is WWF US and the implementing partners are the Ministries of Finance, Ministry of Fisheries and Ministry for Local Government. The delivery partner for market based solutions is Fiji Development Bank and the Executing entity is WWF Pacific.

Component 3: Strengthening access to finance for reef-positive enterprises

The expected results of the project are:

The WWF Pacific has conducted a GEDSI Assessment and an accompanying Gender Action Plan. The purpose of the GEDSI Assessment is to provide a clear background on the context and the situation relating to gender issues in the project area (covering local and national and regional). The Assessment includes an analysis of the legal framework, laws, policies and institutional practices on gender equality, women's and youth empowerment, disability inclusion, sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH) and other related fields. This can provide a positive enabling environment to promote and support gender (GEDSI) mainstreaming is integrated in the design phase of the project.

The framework for the GEDSI Assessment was undertaken through the following approaches:

• Literature Review and Secondary Data covering the status of women in Fiji, gender based violence (GBV) and SEAH (gender-based violence including sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment) situation, policies of relevant sectors, examples of relevant projects, women's participation and leadership in the environment sectors and impact of climate change.

The Gender Action Plan for the project is attached to this document as Annex 6b.

Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion in the Coral Reef Rescue Project

WWF Pacific is working with the Government of Fiji to develop a Green Climate Fund (GCF) Funding Proposal to execute the necessary in-country regulation harmonization and development, Nature-based Solutions and Ecosystem-based Adaptation measures to enhance coastal ecosystem functioning, monitoring of coastal ecosystems and community impacts, local science and research to improve coastal ecosystem management, country-driven pipelines of local business and projects for investors, and learning products for other countries with coastal ecosystems under threat from climate change.

The GCF, and virtually every other financier, requires that all funded projects be attentive to gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) considerations. This is because the impacts of climate change do not affect people equally. The GCF in particular, requires that all funded projects proactively work to reduce gender inequalities and address other factors that lead to the marginalization of certain groups.

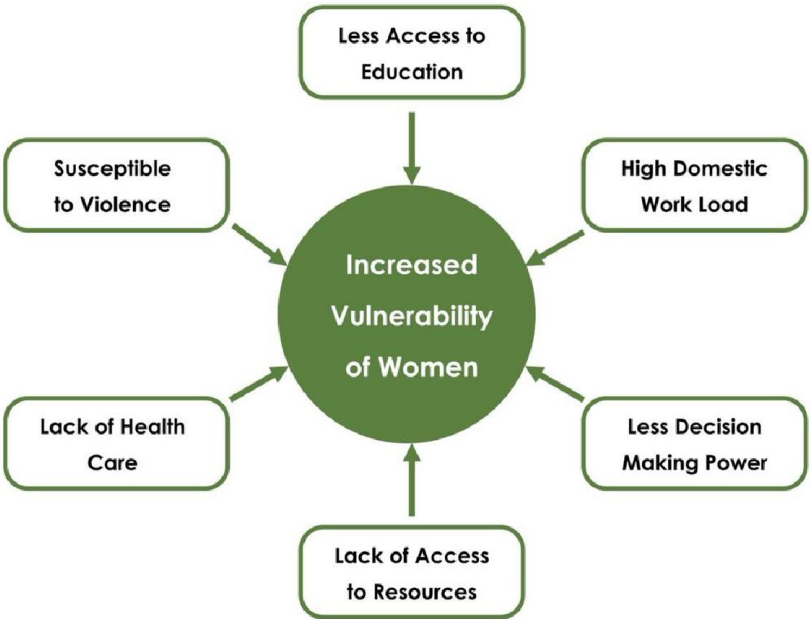


Figure 1: Factors that potentially increase the vulnerability of women.
Source: Mainstreaming Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion in GCF (p.2) by Regional Resource Centre for Asia and the Pacific.

GEDSI analysis needs to be considered at the earliest stages of any GCF project design, otherwise, there is a tendency to conduct the GEDSI analysis once major elements of the project have been designed, thus diminishing the likelihood of positive GEDSI outcomes. A gender-differentiated vulnerability assessment of relevant factors provides useful information for designing gender-responsive adaptation plans and actions.

Glossary of Terms

Gender	Gender, as opposed to biological sex (male/ female), is the socio-culturally constructed concept defining what it means to be women or men, or those of diverse gender identities. Gender means both men and women and the relationships and power dynamics between them. Gender inclusion is the concept or belief that all establishments, services and opportunities, are open to all people without bias and not determined by gender stereotypes, norms and expectations. Gender inclusive approaches consider differences in roles, responsibilities, experiences, obligations, needs, rights, and power relations associated with being female or male, the opportunities associated with particular projects and programs, and if organizational practices are fair and equitable.
Gender Analysis	Gender analysis is the systematic attempt to identify key issues contributing to gender inequalities. It collects, identifies, examines and analyses information on the different roles of women and men and examines gender relations at interpersonal, household, community, and national levels in both public and private spheres. It seeks to understand the differing priorities, needs, activities and responsibilities of men and women, boys and girls across different life stages. At its core gender analysis explores how gendered power relations give rise to discrimination, subordination and exclusion in society, particularly when overlaid across other areas of marginalization due to ethnicity, age, disability status, sexuality, and other factors.

Gender-based violence	Gender-based violence (GBV), used interchangeably with Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), is any act (including threats of such act) that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, emotional or psychological harm to women, and that is perpetrated against a person because of their gender identity and the socially ascribed norms, roles, and expectations that society has for women and men. GBV highlights the gender dimension of violence, specifically the relationship between women's subordinate/ unequal status, and their increased vulnerability to violence. Men and boys may also be survivors of GBV, especially sexual violence, however survivors are predominately women and girls. GBV is commonly used as an example to demonstrate how the inequalities between women and men in society underscore the daily lives of people. Inequality is a unifying characteristic of most forms of GBV and occurs throughout the lifecycle: from early childhood marriage and genital mutilation to sexual abuse, domestic violence, coercion and structural violence and legal discrimination and exploitation. The common thread to all types of GBV is that it is founded on the dynamic of exerting power to gain control.
Gender equality	Gender equality is when people of all genders enjoy the same status. This means women, men and people of all gender identities have equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities. For instance, women and men have equal access to education, health, managerial positions, pay for work of equal value, and equal representation in government. Women, men and people of all gender identities have equal conditions enabling them to realise their full human rights and potential to contribute to political, economic, social and cultural development, locally, nationally and internationally, and to benefit from the results. Sameness of treatment and opportunity does not necessarily ensure equality in outcomes. Thus, gender equality must be accompanied by gender equity (fairness).
Gender inequality	Gender inequality is the unequal distribution of power, resources, opportunity, and value to men and women in a society due to widely accepted gender norms, roles, expectations and structures.
Gender-responsive	A gender-responsive approach proactively identifies gender-based gaps, discriminations and biases, and then takes coordinated steps to develop and implement actions to address and overcome them.
Intersectionality	Intersectionality is the concept that all oppression is linked. Intersectionality is a lens or framework of analysis through which to look at systems of oppression, discrimination and disadvantage that impact different social categories of people (gender, race, class, ability, sexual orientation). It acknowledges that everyone across social categories has their own unique experience of discrimination. While interconnected, intersections of race, ability, gender identity (i.e., cisgender, gender non-conforming), employment insecurity, rural and remote location, colonised history, poverty, migrant status, can result in added harm and increased vulnerability. These oppressions can speak to common experiences as well as experiences that are unique to specific communities. Intersectionality recognises that we must consider all factors that can marginalize people and provide privilege/power to others. To ignore different oppressions and the intersections of oppressions undermines our efforts to tackle inequality. Rather it reinforces systems of inequality and existing power dynamics and renders diverse people more vulnerable to victimisation based on their identity. Use of an intersectional framework of analysis to address GBV is essential, to understand how it affects different groups of people and to provide a key element for an inclusive approach.
Patriarchy	Patriarchy is characterised by current and historic unequal power relations between women and men, women and women and gender-diverse individuals and men and

	men and gender diverse individuals. Patriarchy is the system – social arrangements and structures – that maintain gender, class, racial and heterosexual power and privilege. It relies on mechanisms such as the law and violence to perpetuate inequality and reinforce domination based on gender. Within this system power operates through norms, beliefs and practices, all of which effectively limit the rights, agency, independence, and well-being of women and gender-diverse individuals. Put simply, the structures created systematically disadvantage and oppress women and gender diverse individuals. Patriarchal beliefs of male, heterosexual dominance and the devaluation of women, girls and gender diverse individuals lie at the root of GBV.

Fiji Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) Situational Analysis

It is well established that women are vital to conservation and resilience-building efforts, and women's empowerment is intrinsically linked to achieving sustainable development. Yet, gender inequalities and gaps persist. In 2022, Fiji was ranked 107 out of 146 countries from East Asia and the Pacific in the Global Gender Gap Index[2] (World Economic Forum (2022).

Despite the robust work of gender empowerment initiatives implemented at the national level, Fiji's rating in the Gender Gap Index has improved only marginally since 2010 (Fig. 1).

Fiji - Global Gender Gap Index

Date	Gender Gap Ranking	Gender Gap Index
2022	107º	0.6760
2021	113º	0.6740
2020	103º	0.6780
2018	106º	0.6690
2017	125º	0.6380
2015	121º	0.6450
2014	122º	0.6286
2013	117º	0.6286
2012	113º	0.6285
2011	109º	0.6255
2010	108º	0.6256
2009	103º	0.6414

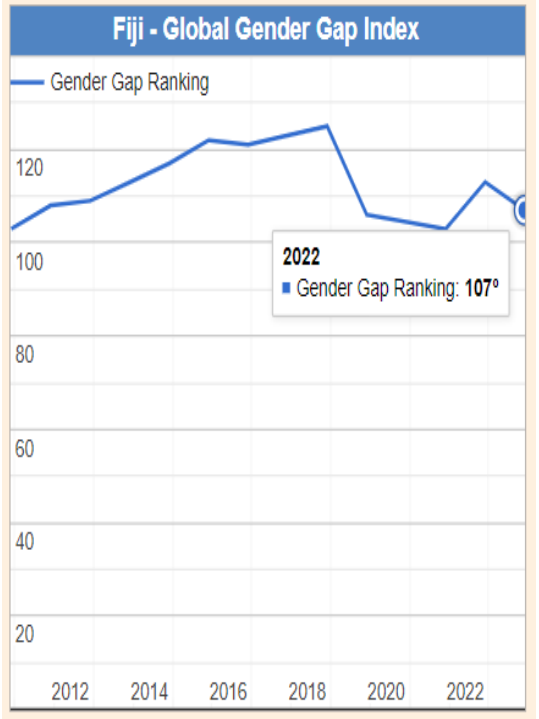


Figure 1. Source: Fiji - Global Gender Gap Index 2022[3]

Gender norms are the explicit and implicit rules that define socially appropriate behaviours, based on the values and beliefs shared by people within a social or cultural group. These are powerful influencers of what is considered normal or acceptable behaviour; norms also reflect the shared values and ideals of a social or cultural group that, when translated into behaviours and practices, define what people should and should not do.

Gender relations in Fiji, and among the two dominant ethnic categories, are underpinned by the norms and values of patriarchy which entrust men with power and privilege, and a sense of entitlement, over women (University of South Pacific and Fiji University 2022, p.7)[4].

[2] For a country to be included, it must report data for a minimum 12 of the 14 indicators that comprise the index.

[3] Adapted from https://countryeconomy.com/demography/global-gender-gap-index/fiji?year=2022

[4] Traditional norms that men, not women, make decisions in the household and the community are being challenged and are changing; for example, by the growing numbers of Fijian women involved in paid work in the formal and informal sectors. The Government is committed to gender equality and is developing policies and programmes that favour gender equality and women's empowerment.

1. National Context

Fiji consists of about 330 islands and over 500 islets. The country became independent in 1970 and has faced periods of political instability and ethnic tension. While nearly half of Fijians live in rural areas, that proportion is decreasing while the urban population is rapidly growing. This shift, along with limited access to basic health infrastructure—such as sanitation systems and clean water—creates various service planning and delivery challenges. Domestically, Fiji is a multiracial and multicultural country. The Fijian population comprises approximately 63 per cent *iTaukei* (Indigenous Fijians) and 33 per cent Indo-Fijians. The remainder of the population are Chinese, Caucasians, and other Pacific Islanders (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2018).

Fiji is divided into four divisions—western, central, eastern and northern—with the highest percentage of the population residing in the central division, where the capital, Suva, is located. These divisions are further divided into 14 provinces, in addition to the island of Rotuma which retains a degree of independence. The 2017 Census data of Fiji (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2018) provides a detailed examination of Fiji's demographic landscape and socioeconomic indicators. Fiji's total population has increased to 884,887 from 837,271 in 2007, marking a growth of 5.7 per cent. Census data show that 44 per cent of Fijians live in rural areas; however, that proportion is decreasing. Between 2007 and 2017 the urban population increased by 16.3 per cent, while the rural population decreased by 5.1 per cent (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2018; UNPF, 2022).

In terms of the working age population (aged 15 and above), there are more females in the urban areas throughout the four administrative divisions. However, there is a significant gender differential in the labour force participation rates (76.4% males, 37.4% females), and in the unemployment rates (2.9% for males, 7.8% for females) in Fiji (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2018).

Fiji has an online Gender Data Hub with a collection of statistical resources on gender curated by the Research and Library Services of the Fiji Parliament. The main aim is to help Members of Parliament find information they need to consider gender issues in their work. The hub provides a central location for information, research and data. The section includes -general statistics, economic statistics, Health statistics, Education and children statistics. UNICEF Indicators on Children, Crime Justice and representation statistics, and Environment Statistics. (Parliament of the Republic of Fiji, 2021) .

Language Diversity

The Fijian constitution protects the use of *iTaukei* language, Fiji Hindi, and English; however, English tends to be the language common to all. Section 31(3) of the Constitution provides that both *iTaukei* and Fiji Hindi shall be compulsory subjects in primary schools. The majority of *iTaukei* identify as Christian and most Indo-Fijians are Hindu with a minority identifying as Muslim (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2007).

National Gender Assessment

The Fiji Country Gender Assessment (MWCPA, 2023) involved a broad and comprehensive analysis of gender issues in Fijian society with respect to (1) Education, (2) Women in Leadership and Decision-Making, (3) Ending Violence Against All Women and Girls, (4) Health, (5) Economy, (6) Environment, and (7) Social and Cultural Norms. The FCGA is divided into seven thematic chapters, corresponding to each of these areas, and provides key and updated statistics, sex-disaggregated data and analysis with specific regard to women and girls in all diversity in Fiji. These include:

- Women represent over one half of Fiji's civil service, and in politics, women are increasingly holding leadership and decision-making roles. At the national level, more women are standing for election to Parliament and serving as Members of Parliament.
- Most Fijian women own mobile phones that they use regularly to access the Internet.

- Women are leveraging this connectivity to explore new avenues of income generation or utilizing it to save time and overcome distance constraints in accessing information that supports their economic and income-generating activities. Digital technologies are providing young women with a new forum to advocate for social change and inclusion.
- The 2017 Fiji National Census found 13.7 per cent of Fiji's population to have a disability with a total of 113,595 persons (aged three and above) reporting at least one functional challenge, or disability (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2018; FGCA, 2023).

The Fiji Country Gender Assessment notes that cultural and gender norms pose significant challenges to women's economic empowerment, including traditional beliefs that limit women to the home and that prioritize women's unpaid care work over their pursuit of work outside the home (MWCPA, 2023). Gender norms, societal constructs and religious traditions are strongly linked to beliefs that sustain the patriarchal hierarchy of men's power and privilege over women. For example, a recent study exploring gender inequality and socio-cultural factors in Fiji found that patriarchal traditions and religious practices play a significant role in upholding gender imbalance in Fiji (Saliya 2024). MWCPA (2023) and many other publications, highlight the importance of addressing gender inequality in leadership positions to promote inclusive and sustainable growth.

Representation and participation in decision-making

In *iTaukei* communities, leadership is passed on through the kinship systems. The decisions are made by the chief, often based on the collective views from the village committee members. The outcome is greatly influenced by the traditional leadership structure which is patriarchal and therefore leadership is likely to be dominated by men (though there are a small number of exceptions). Women often take up leadership roles in Women's Groups, Community-Based Organisations, and Religious Groups, and it is by merit. In most cases, a married woman who takes up the leadership role does discuss with her husband who is the head of the family. This helps the family to understand the extra responsibility that she has taken onboard so they can step in to share the domestic work and other care duties. Women express that having leadership roles outside of family responsibilities does come with challenges.

iTaukei women have different perspectives and knowledge stemming from their different roles which can strengthen community planning processes. However, women are, in general, under-represented in community consultations, planning and decision-making processes at the village and household level. This means their priorities and concerns may not be heard or addressed unless they are specifically sought, and their contribution not recognized or valued. Women tend not to be well represented in community decision-making bodies that govern the village and clan, which restricts their control over community land use, management of natural resources (terrestrial and marine) and engagement with government and civil society. When they do attend consultations or planning processes, it can be difficult for them to voice their opinions and have these heard because it is normal for men to lead or dominate these discussions (Singh et al., 2022).

Access to information is also often mediated by iTaukei men at the village level. Women are underrepresented in decision making roles in both community and national levels, which can result in women being restricted from using land or marine areas without their knowledge. Their activities and needs can be overlooked in land use and marine planning, and this can increase women's marginalization, vulnerabilities and affect economic opportunities. Some iTaukei women can however, have some influence at the household level and through informal networks, for example church groups. However, typically women need to be 'invited' by men of status to participate in formal decision-making forums. Additional barriers to women's participation in decision-making includes their household and caregiving responsibilities which places competing demands on their time (MWCPA, 2022).

In contrast, there is very little published on Indo-Fijian communities on representation and participation in decision-making. However, gender and cultural norms suggest that women do not have the same opportunities as men. For example, the District Advisory Councillor normally calls and organises a meeting especially for Indo-Fijians regarding NGO activities or visits from the government but only men attend, and women don't know much about any of this (ADRA, CARE & UN Women 20197).

Gender and cultural norms are shaped by colonial history and the indentured labour system as well as religion. Between 1879 and 1920, nearly 61,000 Indians were brought to Fiji to work on sugar plantations as indentured labourers (girmitiyas). Men far outnumbered women: For every 100 men there were only 40 women. While some husbands and wives travelled together to Fiji, 64% of the women were single. The Indians represented over 260 different castes, religions, occupations, language groups and ethnic backgrounds. In Fiji, however, "castes and religions were mixed together in a common jumble". Their shared experiences as girmitiyas rendered them a single race-based underclass, the Indian "coolie".

The changes to the caste system did not alter traditional attitudes and practices that subjugated women: "On the plantations, men sought to reassert the patriarchal structure of agrarian Indian society. While women were paid less than men, evidence suggests women worked as hard and performed as efficiently as men. In addition to their daily quota of work in the cane fields, married women were also expected to carry out all domestic tasks, including cooking meals at the beginning and the end of the day and taking care of children. They were absent from work more often than men due to the pressures of domestic work, pregnancy, child-rearing and illness, and they regularly had their pay docked for these absences. Women girmitiyas were employed and paid as individual workers, as were men girmitiyas. As a consequence, "during indenture, women had access to an independent income, meagre though it was, they were not economically dependent on their fathers, brothers or husbands". The immigration of women to Fiji and the breakdown of the caste system effectively created a new self-identity for women girmitiyas and their relationship to men, a situation that was not appreciated or easily countenanced by their fellow, male girmitiyas.

The disproportionately small number of women girmitiyas led to high levels of rape and sexual abuse by plantation owners, sardars and men girmitiyas. At the same time, the gender imbalance emboldened many women girmitiyas to use sex and intimate relationships as acts of agency and resistance. Women exercised their sexual bargaining power to negotiate with sardars and men girmitiyas, choosing sex work over work in the plantation fields and/or refusing to have sex unless they were paid. (MWCPA, Fiji Country Gender Assessment Deep Dive 2023).

Violence Against Women and Girls , and Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment

Fiji faces one of the highest rates of violence against women and girls (VAWG) in the world: 64%, compared to a 35% global average (UN Women Global Database on Violence against Women, "Ending Violence Against Women", available at: https://evaw-globaldatabase.unwomen.org/en (accessed 28 February 2022). Particular groups of women and girls, especially women and girls with disabilities, women who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI+), and older women, are at elevated risk of VAWG.[5]

The Fiji Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation (MWCPA) (alongside Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts, Ministry of Health and Medical Services, Ministry of Employment,

[5] To address these alarming rates of violence, Fiji has taken a whole of government approach through the National Action Plan (NAP 2023-2028) to prevent violence against all women and girls. The NAP is led by the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation (MWCPA through the Government of Fiji's gender mainstreaming and Ending Violence against Women and Girls (EVAWG) infrastructure.

Productivity, Industrial Relations, and the Ministry of Youth and Sports) has developed a five-year 'National Action Plan' (NAP) to Prevent VAWG. The Fiji NAP (2023-2028) is the first of two five-year plans intended to establish the foundations for the Government of Fiji's long-term commitment to prevent VAWG (*further details are outlined in the Policy section of this report*).

Around two thirds of ever-partnered Fijian women experience intimate partner violence (IPV) over the course of their lives and four out of ten women experience severe physical violence (Fiji NAP 2023-2028). As climate change drives conflict across the world, women and girls face increased vulnerabilities to all forms of GBV, including conflict-related sexual violence, human trafficking, child marriage, and other forms of violence.

The most common form of sexual violence in Fiji is child sexual abuse, primarily of girls[6] and some boys under the age of 18 years[7]. Women and girls with disabilities are particularly at risk for experiencing physical, economic, sexual, and emotional violence from family members, partners, caregivers and institutions (health, social services, etc.) with more rigorous research required to understand the full extent of violence experienced (Fiji NAP 2023-2028).

Table 1 : The Root Causes of Violence in Fiji

Violence is acceptable and justified.	Men and boys have power and control over women and girls.	Men and boys engage in peer relations that promote aggression and disrespect towards women and girls.	Traditional gender roles about what it means to be a man or a woman reinforce gender inequality.
• Lack of consequences for men using violence • Women are punished for not following gender norms of what it means to be a good woman • Women are blamed for men's use of violence • Men's use of violence is excused, condoned, justified • Women police other women reinforcing patriarchy • Women and girls are shamed for reporting violence and seeking help	• Men's abuse of power and control over women • Women and girls are not equal to men and boys and are seen as inferior • Men are the decision-makers in women's lives • Men have an entitlement and ownership over women	• Misogynistic views of women are encouraged leading to an exposure to multiple forms of hostility towards wom-en • Men lack respect for women • Men abuse power • Militarization encour-ages harmful forms of masculinity • Toxic, hyper masculini-ty is promoted and awarded	• Cultural and religious traditions and their interpretations link to men's power and control over women • Upholding traditional gender norms and learned behaviours entrench patriarchy • Harmful gender norms are learned with boys raised to believe they have privileges and power over girls • Leads to layers of discrimination for women • Leads to different rules for women and men's behaviours

Source: Fiji National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against All Women and Girls 2023-2028, p.55

While child sexual abuse is a problem worldwide, the risk factors for the perpetration of child sexual abuse within Fiji are unique in their relation to the traditional and communal nature of Fijian society

[6] Child sexual abuse is predominantly suffered by girls and starts from as young as under 5 years, continues through teens and into adulthood as women, sisters, spouses/partners. This makes child sexual abuse part of the gender-based violence issue in the country.

[7] Fiji ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1993. Following this, the government took steps to implement the terms of the Convention with the establishment of a national Coordinating Committee on Children (NCCC). The NCCC acts as an advisory body to assist government on issues pertaining to child abuse.

(Whitehead & Roffee, 2016). Disturbingly, the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) takes place in Fiji and mostly affects girls aged between 13-17 (Save the Children Fiji, 2019).

A 2019 report by End Child Prostitution and Trafficking (ECPAT) International on the scale, scope and context of the sexual exploitation of children in Fiji identified prominent factors leading to children's vulnerability to sexual exploitation in Fiji, which include poverty, being in street situations, disabilities as well as gender inequalities, violence and cultural taboos in talking about sex. Fiji's traditional and conservative social context is another primary contributor to children's vulnerability to sexual exploitation. Similarly to some (but not all) cultures in Pacific Island countries, gender and age determine a person's status in society in Fiji. Men's power and authority are supposed to be unquestionable within the community and the family. This superiority is frequently reinforced with violence. The range of violence that children may witness, and experience has considerable implications for their vulnerability to sexual abuse and exploitation as children and into adulthood. A deeply rooted "tradition of shame and silence" shapes this culture of violence. In the context of sexual abuse and exploitation, cultural taboos surrounding sex make the stigma against victims of violence even more detrimental. Historically, reporting incidents of sexual violence has resulted in shame for the victim and their family, making them an even more vulnerable target for further violence (ECPAT, 2019).

Global research conducted by IUCN (Castañeda Camey et al., 2021) in collaboration with USAID as part of Advancing Gender in the Environment (AGENT), found GBV (ranging from sexual, physical and psychological violence, to trafficking, sexual harassment, sexual coercion and in some cases rape) can be linked to environmental issues. GBV is often employed to maintain power imbalances between men and women and their rights and roles in accessing, using and managing natural resources by violently reinforcing sociocultural expectations and norms and exacerbating gender inequality. Moreover, gender-differentiated roles related to land and resources can also put women in a more vulnerable position to suffer GBV while carrying out daily responsibilities (Castañeda Camey et al., 2021).

> Environmental organisations have an important role to play in ending gender-based violence. Policies, standards and safeguards should include gender-based violence feedback and grievance mechanisms. Throughout project cycles, gender analyses should be conducted to identify gender-based violence and develop preventative and responsive measures, such as working directly with men to reduce potential tension and violence. Funders should require gender analyses and action that takes gender-based violence into account to ensure that these approaches are widely adopted. (IUCN, 2020 p.2)

As threats and pressures on the environment and its resources amplify gender inequality and power imbalances in communities and households coping with resource scarcity and societal stress, gender-based attacks and harassment are employed to restrict women from exercising their rights over and use of resources—augmenting the loss of traditional knowledge, biodiversity and ecosystem services and resulting in new, more damaging forms of violent control and exploitation. Gender-based violence is used to systematically maintain and exert gendered power dynamics over natural resources and environmental roles – affecting and restricting human rights as well as environmental action and outcomes (Castañeda Camey et al., 2021).

Multiple risks of GBV occur if women are excluded from consultations and preparations for resource management and conservation project implementation leading to low levels of awareness of obligations as well as benefits. This has been found to lead to grievances and conflicts in relation to land agreements which can manifest as GBV. Lack of awareness can also create confusion regarding distinctions between allowable and prohibited activities, leading some women to believe collecting certain non-timber forest products (NFTPs) is prohibited which in turn impacts their livelihood options,

can create instability within the household, and place women at risk of domestic violence. Women are also often excluded from enjoying the benefits distributed by conservation initiatives. This exclusion results from women not being considered beneficiaries alongside men due to their subordinate social status within community and family structures, as well as their lack of access to bank accounts through which benefits are distributed. Women who voice complaints over their exclusion from program activities and benefits risk facing repercussions including violence, and women receiving benefits can also trigger violence if this is perceived to threaten men's traditional position of power in relation to money and family income (Castañeda Camey et al., 2021)

Conservation initiatives should also ensure not to exacerbate or reinforce existing risks that women face such as backlash from community leaders and male community members. For example, there have been reports of incidents where women have been subjected to domestic violence for participating in activities without their husband's permission, and such risks may serve to dissuade women from participating in projects, limiting their own empowerment opportunities and their valuable contributions to sustainability efforts.

The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre was established in 1984. The organisation raises awareness on violence against women and as a human rights violation. They offer counselling and support services to victims of domestic violence, sexual assault child abuse and sexual harassment. The head office is in Suva and they have four branches in Ba, Rakiraki, Nadi and Labasa. Sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) lie at the foundation of families and communities and at the heart of what it means to be human and alive. The concept of SRHR originated at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) 1994. This saw the expansion of reproductive health to include sexual health and to mobilise to clearly advocate that sexual and reproductive health as a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity[8].

Gender and Climate Change

Gender inequality coupled with climate change poses threats to ways of life, livelihoods, health, safety and security for women, girls and marginalized groups (UN Women, 2022). While climate change impacts everyone, women are often disproportionately negatively affected. Women and girls experience the greatest impacts, which amplifies existing gender inequalities and poses unique threats to livelihoods, health, and safety (UN Women, 2022). Gender roles and social inequalities in access to resources, care responsibilities, and lower levels of education systematically disadvantage women and girls, rendering them more vulnerable to the impact of climate change and disasters (Singh et al., 2022). Persistent disparities impact women's ability to build resilience to increasing climate change and disaster risks (ADB, 2022; Singh et al., 2022).

It has been noted that the socioeconomic profile of women in Fiji does not provide a good basis for women's resilience to disaster and climate risks, as women rate significantly behind men in access to secure and well-paid employment, occupy few senior and decision-making roles, and suffer very significant levels of sexual harassment in the workplace and domestic violence at home. To address this, a National Good Practice Legislative Framework for Strengthening Women's Resilience to Climate Change and Disasters was developed (ADB, 2022).

In its National Action Plan (NAP 2023-2028), the Fiji government aims to ensure the full and effective participation of women in decision-making, equal opportunities for leadership, equitable access to economic resources and financial services, and equal rights to opportunities stemming from adaptation action. The specific functions that women have in different sectors, such as selling farm produce or fishing, are identified as entry points for women to play an active part in the

[8] https://docs.google.com/document/d/1dB0ofdIJPFumb0Re9CGYuaVLfpc0pnwmRY3YvvNX-vg/edit

implementation of adaptation activities in these areas (UNFCCC 2023). Moreover, the knowledge that women acquire on sustainable resource use and management is likely to be passed on to children and thus be applied in the longer term (Ram-Bidesi, 2015; Government of Fiji, 2018 cited in UNFCCC, 2023, p.7).

Gender and Land Access and Ownership

Under Fiji's Constitution, women have equal rights to own and use and inherit land. Despite its complex nature, land ownership and control of land use needs to be critically examined from the perspective of gender equality, and efforts to promote women's access to assets needs to be included in laws and policies related to climate change and disaster risk (ADB, 2022).

Land is a complex asset often governed by cultural traditions. Fiji has native (customary) land, freehold land and Crown or state land. Eighty-eight per cent of the land is customary land, owned by the *iTaukei* Indigenous population in collective groupings according to custom (Ward 1995). Customary *iTaukei* worldviews see land and water as more than simply resources, with the concept of *vanua* inextricably and holistically linking land, identity, resources, culture and spirituality (Veitayaki, 2008; Jupiter, 2013). Land is therefore not just a means of sustenance or a source of value or income but is home to sacred sites and crucial to cultural identity. *iTaukei* land is at the legal propriety unit of the *mataqalis* (clans) (Ward 1995). Women who want to use this land often rely on the *mataqali* to give them access, however these bodies are generally male-dominated and can be a barrier for women wanting to use land for economic purposes (MWCPA, 2022).

Members of a customary landowning unit hold rights over land collectively but cannot individually sell or lease their land. Under the *iTaukei* Land Trust Act 1940, the majority of the nation's land (91 per cent) is controlled by *iTaukei* people. The *iTaukei* Land Trust Board (ILTB) controls and administers land on behalf of the customary landowners and may grant leases or licences over this land, under specific conditions (but not sold) (*iTaukei* Land Trust Board, 2020). Land is a fundamental aspect of social, religious, and economic practices. The amount of land that a chief controls, indicates his status in society.

Land tenure is a critical issue for women, and it has been said that the question of land itself is a lens through which structural patterns of gender inequality can be revealed.

Communal land tenure has historically revolved around a man's relationship with the chief, who has influence over all land in the area (Singh et al., 2022). Ownership practices are generally based on systems where males inherit property, which is true even in minority groups influenced by Islamic law that provides that female children inherit at least half of what their brothers inherit. There are a few areas of Fiji where social groups practice matrilineal land inheritance and women have some decision-making rights concerning land, however this is uncommon. Furthermore, while women can technically own and inherit land, often decisions around how that land is used are made by male family members. This results in women having substantially less access to land than men – a key barrier to economic production (MWCPA, 2022).

Traditionally, community dispute resolution mechanisms for families on the land will result in a compromise and future agreement, prioritizing communal interests. This method involves addressing dispute issues in a public manner for a restorative justice purpose, distinct to the (often adversarial) court system. *Women's voices are not often considered equal to men's in these circumstances.*

Local Governance Structures

In Fiji, local government arrangements consist of a mixture of customary governance and western-type of institutional structures. This comprises two intersecting administrative bodies which govern *iTaukei* affairs. All nucleated traditional *iTaukei* villages are governed by the provincial council administered under the *iTaukei* Affairs Act 1944. The *iTaukei* villages are administered by the Provincial Councils, and are part of the administrative structure of the Ministry of *iTaukei* Affairs.

Village councils are found at the bottom of the formal administrative structure. Village matters and concerns are discussed at this level, organized into committees tasked with caring for aspects of village life such as health, youth, women and income-generation. The *Turaga ni Koro* or village headman usually channels issues through the district to the provincial council. The Village has a traditional governance structure, which is the Village Chief "*Turaga na Ratu*" and the *Vanua Votua*.

Typically, each rural *iTaukei* village will have several development committees composed of community members and leaders. Each committee oversees a specific component of the development of that community. Committees typically include education, church, health, environment and village development. In addition, women and youth normally have a committee. Committees report to the wider village meetings. Village meetings are held at least monthly; often every fortnight or weekly (SPC, 2016)

Gender in Marine Communities and Fisheries

The reef is a critical part of the Fijian culture and way of life, providing sustenance, protection and supports a diverse range of industries from fishing to tourism, the latter being the highest revenue earner for the country for the past decade. Fiji's Great Sea Reef (GSR), locally known as the Cakaulevu is home to a high value coral reef biodiversity area (Adradi-Brown et al., 2022). Four of the six major rivers of Fiji (Labasa, Dreketi, Ba and Nadi) drain into the GSR. Two of the major deltas Labasa and Ba Deltas consist of mangrove systems and much of the sea grasses which are important for turtles, fish nursery grounds, food and economic security and protect coastal communities from erosion and extreme weather.

Fiji recognizes customary fishing grounds, known as *qoliqoli.* While the State has ownership of Fiji's territorial waters, *iTaukei* groups hold rights to access and fish within their traditional waters. *iTaukei* communities hold access rights to fishing grounds (*qoliqoli*) which extend from the foreshore to just beyond the fringing reef, organised through a system of both customary and statutory management. Communities can fish for subsistence purposes but require a license for commercial fishing.

Fisheries in Fiji are highly gendered across ethnic groups. *iTaukei* women who use fishing grounds for both subsistence and commercial purposes may need to navigate a customary system with multiple communities having access rights to a fishing ground, and where men more often make decisions on the fishing grounds. While women have the same access rights, they are not often included in decision-making on natural resource management, though this is increasing in locally-managed marine areas (LMMA) and where international NGOs like WWF and the Fiji LMMA network[9] work. There is evidence to suggest that in some villages *iTaukei* women do want to have a greater voice and influence on decision-making (Harper et al. 2024) Women do not always receive equal benefits from commercial fisheries in their customary fishing grounds due to middlemen sometimes offering men higher prices than women (e.g. Mangubhai et al., 2016).

Family aquaculture businesses in Fiji are often registered to men, and women can miss out on aquaculture extension services and information because they may not be listed as a primary contact though they are actively engaged in the family business, performing roles such as digging ponds, piping water, heavy maintenance and doing all the post-harvesting processing (SPC, 2018; MWCPA, 2022).

[9] Fiji Locally-Managed Marine Area network - https://lmmanetwork.org/fiji/

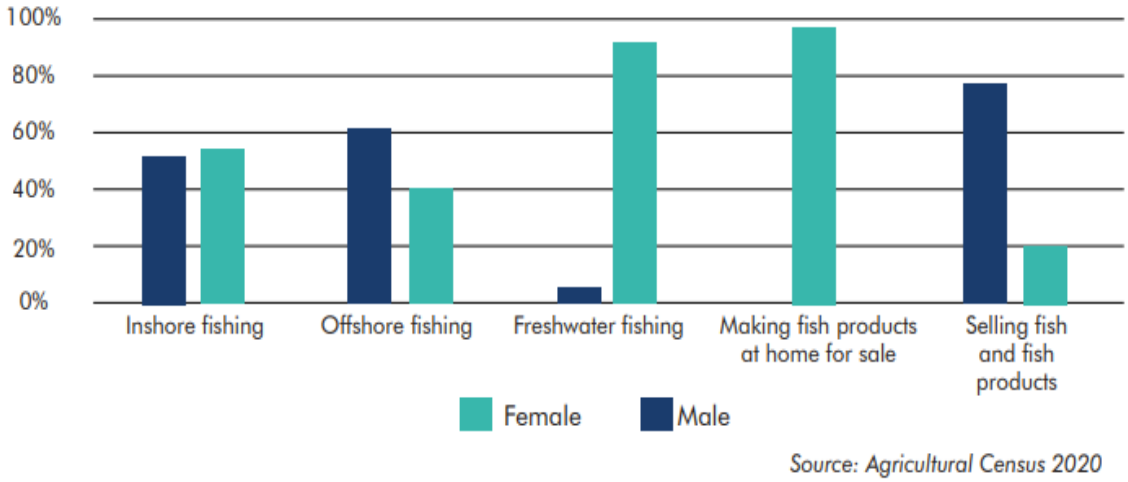


Figure 2: Participation in fisheries activities by gender. Source: *The Gender Transformative Institutional Capacity Development Initiative (ICD) Report (MWCPA, 2022, p.36*.)

Both women and men participate in inshore and offshore fisheries in distinct ways (Fig. 2). In some villages there are certain areas where only men or only women are allowed to fish, with women generally concentrating their fishing efforts closer to the village and men fishing on deepwater coral reef and pelagic habitats. Women dominate the inshore and freshwater fisheries where they account for 51 per cent and 94 per cent of fishers respectively (MWCPA, 2022).[10] *iTaukei* women tend to fish in sites closer to the village, largely due to their domestic work burden so that they remain close to their homes, but also due to limited access to equipment such as boats. This can limit their access to fishing habitats where they can fish species that are larger, diverse, more readily available, for both commercial sale, and household consumption (MWCPA, 2022, p.38).

Research demonstrates the value of women's fishing practices and contributions to household food and income; for example, Thomas et al. (2021) found that in addition to gleaning for invertebrates and seaweed, *iTaukei* women caught over 100 species of fish. Most women have multiple motivations for fishing, although subsistence is the most common reason provided (99%). For 43 per cent of women, fishing was also identified as a source of income. However, 'cultural events' was the second most common motivation (64%) for women to go fishing, followed by social activities (48%) (Thomas et al., 2021).

Comparatively little is known and documented on the role and contribution of non-Indigenous groups to coastal (including coral reef) fisheries. The primary motivations for Indo-Fijians involved in fishing and fish trading were income and food security. On average, fishers had been active in the industry for about thirty years, while traders had been involved for around twenty years. Among Indo-Fijians, men predominantly took up fishing, whereas women were more engaged in the trade and sale of fish (Reddy 2021; Nand et al., 2021). The majority of those in the fisheries sector were self-employed, although certain groups, such as crew members, were employed by boat owners or companies; some independent fishers also worked for other businesses. Fishers primarily focused on coral reefs and

[10] A total of 4,513 agricultural household members identified fisheries as their primary or secondary occupation, representing 1.8% of the total agricultural household members. Of these, 66.6% were male and 33.4% were female. Of this, 48.02% of male fishers identify fishing as a primary occupation compared to 52.59% of women fishers (MWCPA, *2022, p.35)*.

oceanic habitats, with deep-sea slopes being targeted for species like deepwater snapper and groupers. Additionally, some fishers concentrated on mangrove and nearshore areas to catch mud crabs, reef crabs, and other invertebrates. Most seafood was sold either live or frozen, with limited investment in post-harvest processing.

Government extension services support a range of fisheries value chains where women are lead actors, including freshwater aquaculture, gleaning, inshore fishing, kai (mussel) fishing, pearl and prawn farming, pearl spat raising and mud crab harvesting. Through digital apps such as PacFarmer, women growers and market vendors obtain crucial information about government support schemes, weather conditions and commodity prices, and establish market linkages with potential buyers (MWCPA, 2022, p.35*)*. Some government extension services are only available to groups (not individuals) which is easier for iTaukei communities given their communal living; for non-Indongeous groups unless they are part of a fishers' association, they may not be able to access all extension services.

Despite the crucial role that women play in community fisheries (Harper et al., 2017), gender norms shaped by cultural and social expectations of women have meant women's contribution to the fisheries sector are often unpaid, part-time, opportunistic, and viewed as an extension of household duties, resulting in women being under-represented in decision-making around fisheries, and having inequitable access to natural, social and material resources (Thomas et al., 2020, 2021; Mangubhai & Lawless, 2021). The substantial role of women in fisheries is also overlooked in management and policy, and there is a lack of disaggregated data collection and management to assist reliable and liable gender responsive decision-making by national and regional authorities (Michalena et al., 2019; Harper et al., 2022). There has also been little consistent data collected on women participation in fisheries and how their engagement has empowered and changed their social status. Sex disaggregated data is needed in fishing sectors so small-scale commercial activities that women are engaged in can be accurately enumerated and areas of their participation strengthened to enable their full inclusion in development planning (Vunisea, 2014; Harper et al., 2022).

Gaps and challenges faced by women fishers are primarily related to cultural and social norms and practices, which in many cases limit women's progress in the fisheries sectors and places fisherwomen at a disadvantage where they have to depend on their menfolk when trying to access financial support and to be their voices in decision making relating to fisheries development and management. Gendered barriers for market for subsistence farmers in Fiji are increasingly acknowledged as constraints to gender equality and social inclusion of women seafood sellers (Singh-Peterson, & Iranacolaivalu, 2018; Vitukawalu et al., 2020), and value chain analysis (VCA) is recognised as a valuable tool to guide targeted value chain development interventions to address social wellbeing and environmental performance conditions (Mangubhai et al., 2016, 2017, 2024; Ram-Bidesi, 2015).

To bridge the gender gap in fisheries participation in the offshore and inshore fisheries sector there is need for training and capacity building targeted towards women fishers. Identification of key outlets**,** buyers and markets will ensure that women fishers have equal access to distribution and export opportunities. Steps to accurately define women fishers' work, to include women fishers in the enumerated sector and to classify unpaid household work under various classifications including self-employment, will help progress women fishers' status. This will also assist in advancing the changing participation of women in the different fisheries sectors. The shift in women's participation from the informal to the formal sector can then start to be addressed by the inclusion of women fishers in all aspects of fisheries training and capacity building (Vunisea, 2014).[11]

[11] The Women in Fisheries Network Health or FEESH Programme – Fiji was formally launched in October 2016 as a network that brings together scientists, researchers, gender and development scholars and practitioners from business, Government and non-Government agencies. FEESH GOAL: By 2030, healthy recovering and resilient ecosystems providing improved food security, livelihoods, and well-being for dependent fisherwomen

To advance more inclusive and equitable engagement in coastal ecosystems, a recent commentary by the Blue Justice Working Group recommends adopting a "multipronged shallow and deep approach" (Claudet et al., 2024). The authors propose both shallow and deep leverage points to advance ocean equity. Shallow leverage points (such as taxes and incentives) are more easily achievable and more often targeted by organizations and policymakers, but their ability to create change is limited compared to deep leverage points, which address the deeply rooted norms, values and structure that underpin structural and historical injustices. Addressing deep leverage points requires rebalancing existing power asymmetries and risks resistance from those with vested interests in the status quo. The authors argue that addressing shallow and deep leverage points together could catalyse more lasting change. *For instance, developing new capacities and fostering culture change within existing organizational structures may help to unlock deeper reflections on the norms that influence how equity is considered* (Claudet et al., 2024).

Women in Agriculture

Fijian women make significant contributions to Fiji's agriculture sector (Fig. 3): nearly 90,000 or 61% of Fijian women in agricultural households are actively engaged in agricultural value chains and subsistence agriculture. The importance of women's roles in subsistence agriculture is evidenced by the significantly higher proportion of women who are not designated as farmers but are engaged in crop cultivation (85%), compared with men (29%). Women assist men with harvesting and account for 88% of people engaged in value-added processing of produce for sale. Fijian women are increasingly involved in semi-commercial agricultural activities, selling surplus production from their home gardens; and, in the cultivation of crops specifically for value-added processing and commercial sales. One-third of rural women (35%) earn wages as skilled labourers in agriculture, forestry and fisheries (MWCPA, 2022, p.8).

Land inheritance traditions (discussed above) that favour patriarchal lineages influence land use practices. Land tenure also impacts on women's access to resources, because owning land facilitates the ability to register as a farmer, participate in agricultural programmes and have access to in addition, women in Fiji are less likely to have access to key productive resources such as transport, technology, extension services and markets. This was confirmed by the 2020 Agricultural Census where female-headed households reported substantially less access to markets (25.3% compared to 46.2% of male-headed households) and were more likely to use public transport to access markets than male-headed households (Gender Transformative ICD Initiative 2022, p. 12).

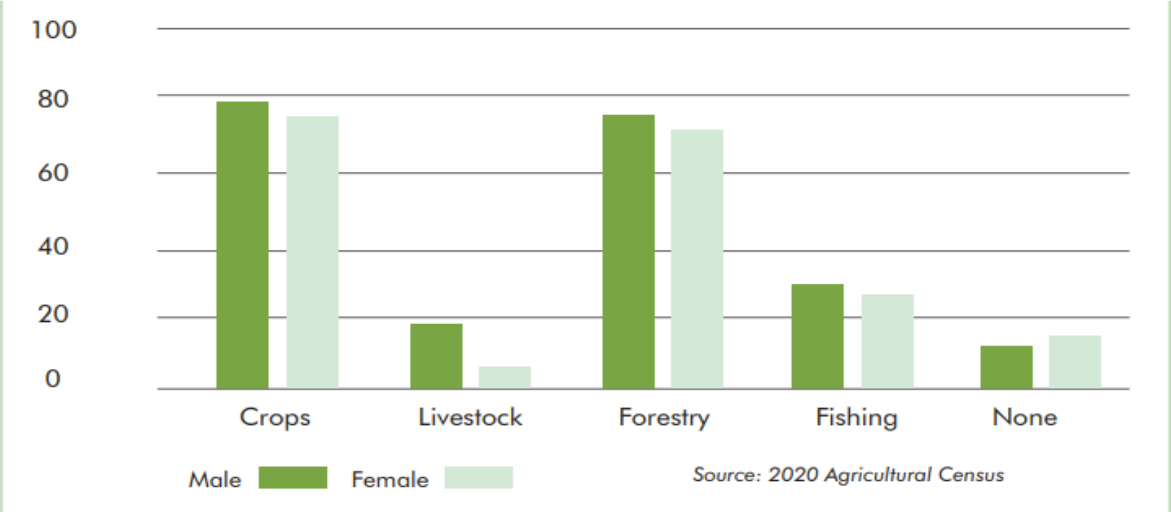


Figure 3: Percentage of agricultural household members engaged in agricultural tasks by gender.
Source: FAO and Ministry of Agriculture(2020), p.9.

Although just 14.4% of women in agricultural households declare farming as an occupation, at least 74.1% of female agricultural household members perform some kind of agricultural tasks. This indicates that many women are engaged in agriculture but do not perceive it as a formal occupation (FAO and Ministry of Agriculture, 2020). Women are more engaged in tasks that are compatible with their chores in the household and role in feeding the family, such as onshore fishing and growing crops for home consumption, feeding poultry and processing home produce for sale. Women are also involved in niche agricultural ventures such as vanilla, honey, and floriculture and making handicrafts. Tasks equally performed by men and women include planting temporary crops, weeding, harvesting, all tasks related to coconut crops; drying, peeling, and cleaning produce; and collecting firewood. Women's participation in commercial agriculture and agri-business is minimal or primarily at the cottage level. Addressing this imbalance is challenging, because there is a complex set of interconnected factors which influence women's involvement in agriculture (MWCPA, 2022, p.11).

Gender and Economic Development

Fiji's score on the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index has improved from 0.638 in 2017 to 0.674 in 2021, and gender parity is at 1.00; the proportion of women earning wages, or a salary increased from 62% in 2015 to 66% in 2019[12]. However, gender gaps remained among working-age Fijians (15–54 years): 46% of women are in the labour force, compared with 83% of men (Global Gender Gap Index, 2022).

Women have a higher domestic workload, which limits their ability to engage in economic activities (Singh et al., 2022). Women and girls in Fiji undertake most of the caregiving and domestic work such as child-rearing, cooking, cleaning, caring for the elderly or sick, meeting community obligations and collecting water. The workload for women increases when there are community events. They noted that it usually takes two to three days to prepare for activities or events in the village such as church gatherings, religious holidays, weddings, funerals. During these times, women work together in one place in the village as they find it easier to help one another and find the activities enjoyable, largely due to the social aspect. They assist one another to prepare and cook food, bake, collect firewood and prepare the lovo, clean and decorate the village hall, wash dishes and other tasks. These community events also result in additional work for men, but they added that everyone works well together and 'teamwork in the village is well practiced.' Women noted that 'during preparations for weddings the whole village gets together to help each other in whatever duties need to be done and duties are allocated by the Village Headman or by the *Vanua*.' Both *iTaukei* and Indo-Fijian women cook extra food, do extra cleaning and decorating for special events and find these activities enjoyable. Indo-Fijian women make food for funerals of neighbours, puja and Ramadan– religious rituals, as well as vegetarian food and sweets for religious days about once a month or maybe 12 times a year (ADRA, CARE & UN Women 2019, p.45).

Women spend 26 hours a week on average on these unpaid tasks, compared to 10 hours a week for men, however this increases to 39 hours for women aged 30-34, 25 hours more than men. Domestic workload is higher when care related services (such as healthcare, childcare and community services) are poor quality or less available. This high unpaid workload, which exists within the care economy where women have a disproportionate share of unpaid care work, often remains undervalued and has major impacts on their ability to engage in more commercially oriented agricultural activities, participate in training activities or other productive activities (MWCPA, 2022). Widows and single mothers often face very heavy workloads, care burden challenges, and often lack money and family support to assist them to produce food and may have no other option but to purchase less nutritious

[12] Adapted from https://countryeconomy.com/demography/global-gender-gap-index/fiji?year=2022

food at a nearby shop. They also face difficulties in accessing essential services which further relates to other issues affecting lives and lives of their families (Avtar et al., Navia, Sassen & Fujii, 2021). The government provides financial support in the form of social welfare to the poorest members of society. However, multiple factors can constrain some people's ability to access these funds (ADRA, CARE, & UN Women, 2019, p.53).

Both women and men play key roles related to food security in their homes and communities. These are largely based on existing gender and social norms and expectations (ADRA, CARE, & UN Women, 2019, p.41). Household activities are undertaken either alone or with the support of spouses and children and extended family. In some cases, women and men work together with other members of the community or groups of women or men to support their livelihoods and community events. Men usually prepare land for root crops and vegetable gardens while women generally plant and tend vegetable gardens.

Research suggests that women are more likely to participate in agricultural training activities if it is provided by female extension workers; they are part of farming groups; women have access to markets; and are able to access market information related to pricing. Transformational change in traditional gender roles and increased decision-making have been seen with women engaged in aquaculture through group-managed farming by women's collectives, committees, clusters or family run farms, suggesting that organised farming structures are giving women a greater sense of agency and collective voice (MWCPA, 2022, p.39). Women in rural and peri-urban areas are moving beyond subsistence farming and fishing to become more active in commercial production, processing and marketing. Women account for 7 per cent of vendors at the 13 municipal markets, which dominate domestic sales of farm produce and seafood in Fiji. Of the 13 municipal markets, there are 9 markets in the main island of Viti Levu and two markets in the North Island of Vanua Levu. Women working together in collectives gain confidence and strengthen their ability to grow their Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), most of which start out as informal businesses, and aim to transition to the formal sector.

During the COVID-19 pandemic in Fiji, primary breadwinners of Fijian households had lost their jobs or had their number of days or hours reduced. As a result, *iTaukei* and Indo-Fijian women started engaging in activities such as fishing, vegetable gardening, and planting sugarcane and root crops to enhance the food and income securities of their households (Ferguson et al., 2020; Mangubhai et al., 2021). For example, *iTaukei* women utilized their skills and knowledge of traditional cultural practices such as the bartering system which re-emerged as a coping mechanism to strengthen community resilience (Wairiu et al., 2020). Moreover, a collaborative effort between the government and World Bank, known as the Jobs for Nature initiative was launched in 2022 to create jobs for Fijians in rural areas to support men, women and the youth. Besides creating economic opportunities, this initiative contributes to mitigating climate change impacts (World Bank, 2022).

Gender and Education

Education represents a critical setting to shift gender norms and build the knowledge and capacity of young women and girls. Fiji's education sector is leading by example in its efforts to ensure inclusive, equitable quality education and learning opportunities for all, with exceptional school enrolment and completion rates coupled with efforts towards gender parity. Universal access to Early Childhood Education (ECE) is mandated and ECE is tuition free. Net enrolment in primary education is 100 per cent. At the secondary level, however, it falls to 85 per cent, just under the NDP target of 86 per cent (SDG 4.1), with adolescent girls (91%) experiencing higher secondary enrolment than adolescent boys (79%) (World Bank, 2020). According to the Fiji country gender assessment, 54 per cent of the women have been awarded with the National Topper Scholarships and 51 per cent female students qualified for the Tertiary Education Loan Scheme (TELS).

Women in Fiji outnumber men in programmes for environmental science and management, agriculture, fisheries, and forestry across universities. Women's shares in these fields exceed, in general, the shares of male students. In 2020, women's share in agriculture/fisheries/forestry in the Fiji National University was 56.6 per cent and 63.8 per cent in the University of the South Pacific (ADB, 2022). The Ministry of Agriculture reported in 2019 that almost 50 per cent of its extension workers were women. Women make up most of the students enrolled in agriculture programs at the Fiji National University and the University of the South Pacific, including in the specific areas of animal husbandry, fisheries and forestry. These are important precursors to strengthening women's formal participation in these sectors in the future (ADB, 2022).

Disability Inclusion

A WHO report estimates that 16% of the world's population experiences disability (WHO, 2023). Persons with disabilities (PWDs)are socially, politically and economically marginalized. Due to the attitudinal and structural barriers, PWDs are unable to access essential services such as water, sanitation and hygiene, health services and education. Women and young people with disabilities face significant barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. In particular, they are prevented from realising their sexual, and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and their right to legal capacity and to be free from gender-based violence (GBV). Due to stigma and stereotypes, many young people with disabilities only receive basic information about their SRHR which is neither fully accessible nor disability inclusive. Moreover, women and young people with disabilities are also typically discouraged from talking about and /or reporting GBV. Apart from attitudinal barriers, structural barriers also exist when institutions such as the police and members of the judiciary often disregard the complaints or refer them to informal reconciliation procedures contributing to high rates of impunity and perpetuating the cycle of violence (UNFPA, 2022).

There is no specific definition for the term disability in the local dialects. Disability is defined by impairment in local dialects. In cities and towns where English is commonly spoken and understood, the definition of disability as defined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) is used and translated into local dialects according to their use of language. People with disabilities (PWDs) are considered as 'special people' meaning the family values them and attends to them with much attention. The community also provides support to the PWDs during times of disaster and other major events. The moral support for the immediate family empowers most individuals; however accessibility to essential services by PWDs and families is a challenge depending on the severity of the impairment, transport accessibility and financial capacity and other barriers also exist. Women living on their own, as well as people with disabilities as being groups particularly at risk of food scarcity or poor nutrition (ADRA, CARE, & UN Women, 2019).

In every village committee there is a women and a youth representative to present the agendas for the population they represent to the Committee to be addressed or integrated into the development plan. While there is representation of women and youth, there is no representation of PWD on the Committee, therefore their challenges and agendas are not addressed. This is a gap in the existing governing model.

- Participation of PWDs at the community level depends on the individual and the amount of support received from the family and the community. The individuals who are self-motivated and receive support from families including recognition of their leadership turn to participate well in the community activities.
- Development partners delivering projects in the communities do create platforms for PWDs to engage in various activities.

In communities that have been greatly affected by climate change, the immediate families of PWDs provide most of the support while the community steps in as per the needs arise. In cases where major crises occur, the government and respective non-government organizations (NGOs) assist with needed services. The PWDs mentioned that, when it comes to climate adaptation and mitigation planning, they are not consulted. For example, relocation assessment and planning are done without PWD consultation, the PWDs face more challenges because of the new location being inaccessible. Fear of accidents and accessible barriers, at times they hesitate to be relocated.

The impact of climate change on food security is also seen as a threat to the family and PWDs. Climate change has affected the number of yields every year, most families with PWDs harvest less than what they used to harvest, and disasters destroy the food crops. Families with low incomes are affected the most. They are less able to sell food crops and generate income to meet the daily needs because of low production or food crops destroyed by disasters. Accessing essential services like transport, health, education etc. is mostly unaffordable, leaving them vulnerable to health issues, being illiterate, and denying their rights to actively partake in a society.

Gaps and Challenges

PWDs face a number of challenges.

- There is no strong partnership or absence of partnership between the village committee and Organisation of PWDs, the disability service providers and the key Government agencies delivering disability services to PWDs.
- The representation of PWDs at the committee level is not visible.
- There is representation of women and youth but their participation in leadership platforms is lacking.
- The reasons for PWDs not being included on the committee level depend on communities' perspective about disability, and persons with disabilities. It is important to differentiate and understand the right to protect the vulnerable and respect the rights of PWDs as an individual to be fully engaged in community activities. PWDs representation is likely to be influenced by accessibility and accommodation of disability principles in the institutional framework and committees' attitude towards PWDs.
- There is a policy gap. The disability policies and practices are not contextualized and are not accommodated into the existing governing structures to be implemented.

Recommendations

- Identify project communities and collect disability data disaggregated by disability, sex and age to identify population, map out service provision and inform inclusive design, planning and budgeting for project implementation.
- Identify and develop a disability stakeholder map to inform project design and implementation.
- Identify a clear referral pathway for partnership and service provision.
- Establish partnership with Organizations of Persons with Disabilities, women's organizations, youth groups and engage them in activities.
- Support in the partnership coordination between the project communities and GEDSI key stakeholders and service providers.
- Through the project, support and encourage communities to have PWD representatives in village committees.
- Conduct awareness and inclusive leadership training for leaders in the communities
- Consult the community leaders and understand the traditional leadership models
- Carry out surveys to understand the cultural dynamics, leadership structures and roles of men, women, and youths in the respective villages.
- Based on the needs assessment, map out referral pathways for service accessibility

2. Review of existing policies, strategies, and other documents supporting Gender Equality

The Gender Transformative Institutional Capacity Development (ICD) Initiative, launched in 2021, supports enhancing the knowledge, skills and capacity across the Government on transformative gender mainstreaming and gender-responsive budgeting (MWCPA, 2022). Whole of government initiatives such as the Gender Transformative ICD and gender- responsive budgeting are crucial to ensure delivery for all Fijian women and girls. ICD is expected to support: (a) strengthening capacity, knowledge and skill on Transformative Gender Mainstreaming and Gender Responsive Budgeting; (b) effective coordination and accountability for gender equality outcomes with the formation of Gender Mainstreaming Action Groups (GMAGs) and the development of the Gender Mainstreaming Action Plans (GMAPs) across government institutions and agencies; and c) development of series of sector/ context specific knowledge products and tools.

The Gender Transformative ICD has been rolled out across 9 Government agencies since 2021 with the formation of the Gender Mainstreaming Action Groups (GMAGs) replacing the previous system of gender focal points- and Fiji Government's Lead Gender Trainers (LGTs) team, including 10 senior officials from the Ministry of Economy and Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation (MWCPA). The priority task of the GMAGs and LGTs is to prepare and support the development of evidence based and transformative Gender Mainstreaming Action Plans (GMAPs) and to ensure their effective implementation is aligned with Fiji Government's GRB initiative. GMAGs are chaired by the respective Permanent Secretaries and consist of senior civil servant officials (MWCPA, 2022).

The Pacific Forum Leaders Declaration on achieving gender equality (PLGED) through the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent

There is a need to accelerate actions and adopt measures to strengthen the participation of all Pacific peoples particularly women and girls in all their diversity, at all levels of leadership and decision-making, and strengthen national systems to promote and mainstream gender equality and inclusivity (Pacific Islands Forum, 2023, p.13).

In 2022, the Pacific Island Forum Leaders endorsed a revitalisation of the PLGED. The revitalised PLGED considers the regional and and national contexts and priorities, including the thematic areas of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific continent. Under the Pacific Forum Leaders Declaration, People-Centred Development includes the following overarching priorities:

- To achieve the full, effective, and accelerated implementation of the Declaration a holistic approach to gender equality and social inclusion which include measures to fully engage men and boys in efforts to address gender inequality is required.
- Creating an enabling environment for the meaningful and equal participation of persons with disabilities particularly women and girls with disabilities, through transformative and innovative approaches.
- Further investments in all aspects of the health and wellbeing of all Pacific peoples, including Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), Communicable and Non-Communicable Diseases and mental health.
- Encourage lifelong learning for women and girls, in all their diversity by providing an enabling environment and encouraging them to develop their skills, including in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and economics.
- Attitudinal and behavioural change towards gender equality and social inclusion needs to start with children including strengthening the gender equality and social inclusion content in Pacific education curriculum.
- Given the importance of culture in the lives of Pacific people, it is critical to utilize Pacific cultures and values that support gender equality and social inclusion efforts.

- It is imperative that actions to prevent and eliminate gender-based violence, including violence against children, are survivor-centred and hold perpetrators of violence to account. Furthermore, considering the communal and kin-based ways of living, a whole of community and family approach to preventing and eliminating GBV is imperative.
- While GBV is an all-encompassing reference to violence, it must be acknowledged that women and girls face high rates of violence with statistics showing that 2 in 3 women will experience physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime – double the global rate of violence. It is imperative that all forms of violence against women are addressed.
- The creation of economic opportunities for women in all their diversity, including those working in the informal economy, women in the unpaid care economy, women and girls with disabilities, and women in rural, remote, and maritime areas will contribute to the development of the Blue Pacific.
- The climate crises, disaster risk management and humanitarian action and the protection, management of our environment and ocean actions need gender responsive and socially inclusive approaches that promote the active participation of women and girls in all their diversity, including in decision-making, development, and use of technologies, and through simplified access to finance. Women possess the specific skills and knowledge which they could use to provide non-monetary assistance to help communities prepare for and respond to disasters as well as to help cope with the impacts of climate change (Iese et al., 2021).

The People Centered Development is a broad approach with various applications and support of which includes the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat and covers disability, SRHR, skills development, prevention and elimination of violence (including against children), and the utilisation of Pacific cultures and values that support gender equality and social inclusion efforts. The section on ocean and environment states that the depletion of natural resources and environmental degradation displaces communities, and results in negative effects on the health, well-being, and quality of life of all Pacific peoples especially girls and women in all their diversity. The revised PLGED states that a gender and socially inclusive approach will ensure that all Pacific people's circumstances are considered when addressing resource and environmental displacement (Pacific Islands Forum 2023, p.13-16).

Government Assistance Programs

Social assistance programs are critical in Fiji, with the majority of Fijian households benefiting. Fiji's social protection policy (2021) prioritises responding to peoples' needs in a gender-responsive way. Women are the primary recipients of the Poverty Benefit Scheme, Social Pension Scheme for older people, and the Care and Protection Allowance targeting the families of vulnerable children. The Disability Allowance Scheme supports women with disabilities.

- The MSME Fiji Policy Framework, which includes a focus on formulating more responsive policies, legislation, and regulations for MSMEs, especially to address challenges faced by women led MSMEs and those operating informally.
- The Gender Transformational Institutional Capacity Development initiative is a whole of government initiative led by the MWCPA in partnership with the Ministry of Economy. It aims to strengthen the knowledge, skills and resources for gender transformative analysis and mainstreaming, gender responsive budgeting across government.
- The Micro Small Business Grants, National Development Program, Government Credit Guarantee Scheme, and Agriculture Sector Grant Scheme, all of which either include a specific focus on supporting women entrepreneurs or provide good entry points to reach more women in business activities.
- The Women Entrepreneurs Business Council, a council under the Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation dedicated to supporting the participation and advancement of formal and informal

women entrepreneurs through training, networking, and mentoring programs. » Department of Co-operatives initiatives directly benefit women, in particular empowering rural communities and supporting growth of MSMEs. Between 2017-2018, 66 women were appointed in management positions in Co-operatives.

- The Fijian 'Made-Buy Fijian' Campaign has had successful outreach to women owned businesses, many of which are handicraft businesses.

The Government of Fiji is committed to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. This is enshrined in Fiji's 2013 Constitution, the National Gender Policy 2014 and the National Development Plan 2025-2029. These key national policies and plans guide the work of the Fijian Government and are aligned to international commitments and frameworks including the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 Agenda (SDGs), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA). Advancing gender equality and opportunities for all women and girls are further embedded across Government sectoral policies and strategies (UN Women, 2008).

Fiji's 2013 Constitution adopts an intersectional approach to the protection of the rights of all Fijians to freedom from discrimination based on personal characteristics, including sex, age, dis/ability, religion and culture, sexual orientation and socioeconomic or marital status.

The Fiji Constitution includes The Bill of Rights, which contains several key rights that relate to gender equity and GBV:

- Section 11(2) protects the rights of persons to live free from violence: '(2) Every person has the right to security of the person, which includes the right to be free from any form of violence from any source, at home, school, work or in any other place.'

- Section 26 sets out certain rights 'to equality and freedom from discrimination', both direct and indirect (s 38 under the 1997 Constitution). Section 26(3)(a) prohibits discrimination based on 'supposed personal characteristics or circumstances, including race, culture, ethnic or social origin, colour, place of origin, sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, birth, primary language, economic or social or health status, disability, age, religion, conscience, marital status or pregnancy'.

The Constitution sets out specific protection of the rights of children under s 41(1)(d): 'Every child has the right to be protected from abuse, neglect, harmful cultural practices, any forms of violence, inhumane treatment and punishment, and hazardous and exploitative labour'. Furthermore, under s 41(2) the best interests of the child are the 'primary consideration in every matter concerning the child,' incorporating international law obligations (Government of Fiji , 2013).

The National Gender Policy 2014 includes provisions for gender sensitisation training, disaggregated data collection, gender analysis, and applying a gender lens to legislation and government decision-making, be it policy planning or budget allocation (MoSWWPA, 2014).

The National Development Plan 2024 is founded on the vision of empowering the people of Fiji through unity. It consists of three pillars: (i) Economic Resilience, (ii) People Empowerment, and (ii) Good Governance. Under these three pillars, the National Development Plan 2025-2029 and Vision 2050 sets out goals, policies, strategies, programs and projects, and the key performance indicators. The National Development Plan highlights gender mainstreaming as one of the cross cutting priorities. More specifically, it states that gender considerations must be "integrated into the development process, sectoral policies and strategies and government budgeting for sustainable development ensuring equality and inclusivity" (Ministry of Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics, 2024).

The Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission (HRADC), also governed by the Human Rights Commission Decree 2009, is responsible for monitoring Fiji's compliance with human rights obligations and making recommendations to the government about existing and proposed laws that affect rights and freedom. The commission has the power to investigate matters on its own initiative and complaints received that relate to human rights violations and discrimination. It cannot make enforceable determinations; however, it can make applications to court for legal remedies or redress.

Fiji's commitments and obligations to uphold gender equality and address violence against all women and girls

The Fiji National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against All Women and Girls (2023-2028 NAP) launched by the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation is the first of two five-year plans intended to establish the foundations for the Government of Fiji's long-term commitment to prevent VAWG (UN Women, 2023). The NAP is a whole-of-government, whole-of-population, inclusive, evidence-based, costed five-year plan with an emphasis on stopping violence before it starts. The NAP will work strategically across 13 key and influential settings (see Figure 4) in Fiji to address VAWG holistically in all aspects of public and private life. Furthermore, the NAP operates across all levels of Fijian society to meaningfully reduce and stop violence before it starts (primary prevention) and ensure a strong linkage to response services for survivors who have experienced violence (secondary prevention). (Fiji NAP 2023-2028, p.13).



Figure 4: Whole-population: 13 critical and influential settings (source: Fiji NAP 2023-2028)

A whole-of-government approach recognises the primary responsibility of the Government of Fiji in fulfilling international, regional and national obligations to prevent VAWG and foster gender equality and women's human rights. It recognises the need for an integrated, cross ministerial response, collaboration and vertical and horizontal coordination between ministries, public administration, and public agencies. Preventing VAWG requires all of government to be engaged in the NAP.

A whole-of-population approach recognises that VAWG is everyone's business because patriarchy and gender inequality seep into all aspects of daily life and all levels of society. To transform Fiji, everyone has a role to play, and every sector of Fijian society has a responsibility to create a safer society. The NAP's 13 key and influential settings encompass engagement across all of Fiji.

The 13 settings were identified at the 2019 Advisory Group meeting on the Fiji National Action Plan to Prevent VAWG. The settings were chosen based on their relevance to Fijian society (Fiji NAP 2023-2028, pp.23-24).

Gender based violence and Sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment (SEAH) is important to address. The issue is ingrained in entrenched cultural and social norms that impede women's full participation in the labour force. Moreover traditional beliefs continue to confine women to domestic roles, prioritising unpaid care work over their engagement in paid employment. The issues are also engrained with women's limited access to land and finance compounded by unpaid care responsibilities. Women are engaged in vulnerable employment, lacking formal work arrangements, and increasing their vulnerability to poverty and to withstand social shocks[13].

The prevalence of sexual harassment in the workplace survey was commissioned by Fiji Women's Rights Movement and found that 1 in 3 women faced SH in the workplace. FWRM updated the research in 2016 and found that 1 in 5 Fijian women were found to have been sexually harassed in the workplace. [14]

WWF does not currently have a team or program or cross-cutting approach to cover these components. However, the organization believes that climate resilience can only be achieved when rights and privileges of vulnerable populations are protected by the state. Despite GBV and SEAHs being critical to women rights, preventive measures can only be taken within the boundaries of the project. WWF will ensure that preventive measures are in place to mitigate future GBV and SEAH related instances in the project sites. The GAP also outlines gender specific actions to proactively recognize and address issues related to GBV and SEAHs.

GBV and SEAH will be addressed in the GCF project, through various strategies and recruiting relevant expertise. A Gender and SEAH Specialist will be in the project team, who will be dedicated to work on ensuring the implementation of the Gender Action Plan. The GCF and WWF's own policies and documents form a strong basis for training and orientation on gender-based violence issues and for mainstreaming GBV concerns in its projects. Other strategies to ensure challenges relating to GBV and SEAH the project will employ include: the development of a terms of reference to recruit a Gender and SEAH Specialist in the PMU, who has strong and proven expertise in working on issues of GBV and SEAH in Fiji, among other essential and important experience. The Gender and SEAH Specialist will be the resource person in the project who will conduct capacity needs assessment, provide training (including recurrent/refresher training) and support capacity building of all project staff and relevant partners, to recognize and address SEAH and GBV issues identified during project implementation.

Fiji Women's Economic Empowerment National Action Plan (2024-2029)

The Ministry of Women, Children, and Social Protection and Cabinet endorsed the initiation of the first Fiji Women's Economic Empowerment National Action Plan (WEE NAP) (2024-2029). WEE-NAP is aimed at leveling the playing field for all Fijian women and girls to have greater access to and

[13] 2024 Pacific Private Develpment Initiaitve. PSDI Leadership Matters: Benchmarking women's business leadership in the Pacific. pp 49-55 https://www.pacificpsdi.org/publications-2/psdi-publications/read/leadership-matters-2024-benchmarking-women-in-business-leadership-in-the-pacific

[14] https://www.fwrm.org.fj/about/pillar/women-in-decent-work#:~:text=FWRM%20updated%20our%20research%20in,training%20workshops%20and%20policy%20drafting.

control over economic opportunities. It's about gaining access to resources, information, decent work, and bodily autonomy. It also means having a stronger voice and real influence in economic decisions, whether at home or in institutions. The approach is taken from the outcomes document generated from the WEE High-Level Advisory Workshop held in April 2023. This high-level Advisory workshop brought together key stakeholders in the economic sector, including representatives from civil society and women's rights organizations. A WEE NAP Secretariat and WEE Task Force has been formed. The WEE Task force is expected to play a pivotal role in overseeing and supporting the development and implementation of the Fiji WEE NAP and to ensure extensive engagement and ownership of the plan across diverse sectors and settings[15].

People with disabilities

There is notable legal and policy support for the needs of people with disabilities in Fiji.

The Fiji Constitution prohibits discrimination based on disability, and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2018 (Government of Fiji, 2018) protects the rights of persons with disabilities, and not only establishes the National Council for Persons with Disabilities, but also setting out rights including the right to work and employment, non−discrimination, equal recognition before the law, freedom from exploitation, access to justice, health, participation in political life and adequate standard of living and social protection (Ministry of Health and Medical Services, 2023).

The national coordinating body for all organizations dealing with the care and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities in Fiji, is the National Council for Persons with disabilities.

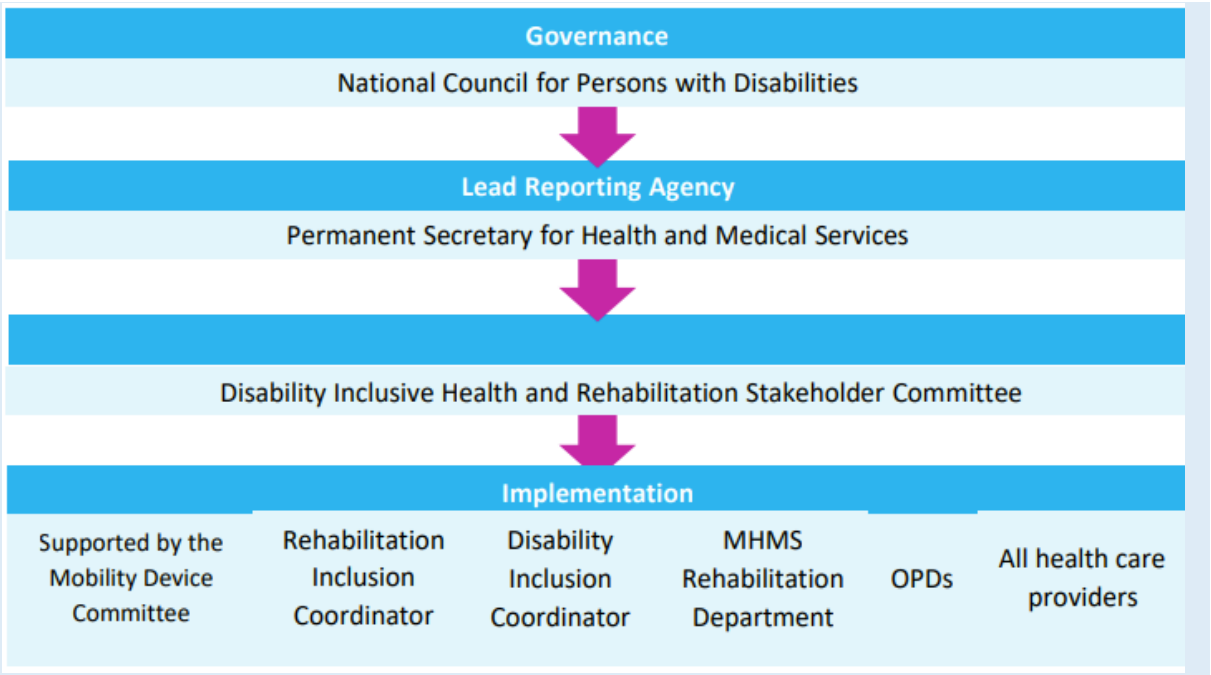
The Fiji Disabled Peoples Federation (FDPF) is a collective body comprising four major affiliates, each of which is managed and led by individuals with disabilities. These affiliates include the Fiji Association of the Deaf (FAD), Psychiatric Survivors Association of Fiji (PSA), Spinal Injury Association of Fiji (SIA), and the United Blind Persons of Fiji (UBP). Since its inception, the FDPF has been acknowledged as the primary voice for people with disabilities in Fiji (Ministry of Health and Medical Services, 2023).

The Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) will continue to collaborate towards the inclusion of people with disabilities and provide their full support for the implementation of the National Disability Inclusive Health and Rehabilitation Action Plan, ensuring that the participation of individuals with disabilities is realized.

The National Disability Inclusive Health and Rehabilitation Action Plan (2023-2027) developed by the Ministry of Health and Medical Services (2023) addresses inclusive socio−economic development to improve the social well−being and livelihoods of persons with disabilities.

Governance Structure (Ministry of Health and Medical Services, 2023, p.24)

[15] MWCSP Concept Note, https://www.mwcsp.gov.fj/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/WEE-NAP-Concept-Note.pdf



Gender in Laws, Policies and Action Plans for Marine Use and Fisheries

Gender laws, policies and action plans for marine use and fisheries apply to all citizens of Fiji. There is strong commitment within the Ministry of Fisheries to address gender issues, with gender balance at the heads of Divisions in headquarters level and half of field divisional offices led by women. In 2021, the Ministry of Fisheries implemented several initiatives to strengthen the involvement of women in fisheries as part of the GRB and ICD initiatives. These include:

- Food Security Programme – seeking to increase the number of women applying for the Ministry's grant relating to food security by allocating 40% of the budget to target women and vulnerable communities.
- Oyster and Mabe Development Project – seeking to increase the participation of women in a male dominated area of fishing, and their accessibility to earn a sustainable income, and promote their leadership and decision-making in the management of natural resources. The Ministry of Fisheries Inshore Fisheries Management Division provides extension services to both men and women engaged in fishing and aquaculture, specifically in areas where women play a primary role including freshwater aquaculture, gleaning, inshore fishing, kai fishing, pearl and prawn farming, pearl spat raising and mud crab harvesting (MWCPA, 2022).

The National Fisheries Policy states that a key focus of policy discussions is how the Ministry can ensure an inclusive approach to gender equality and youth participation in all fisheries sectors. Two specific policy objectives include:

1. Promote active participation, engagement and involvement of women and youth in offshore fisheries, coastal fisheries, and aquaculture.
2. Develop gender and youth sensitive communications and campaign strategies for the Ministry of Fisheries to promote and increase awareness on current and future fisheries issues.

Fiji's National Development Plan 2025-2029 and Vision 2050 outlines a number of strategies that aim to promote a more inclusive fisheries sector under the following policies:

- Strengthen offshore, inshore and aquaculture fisheries with a sustainable market access environment supported by sound governance and innovative service delivery.
- Provide supportive legislative framework to facilitate *iTaukei* fishery business ownership.

The NDP also commits the Ministry of Fisheries to prioritise gender issues in the Ministry's core functions. These initiatives and policy commitments could be supplemented by further mainstreaming efforts to ensure women can equally benefit from all the initiatives implemented by the Ministry of Fisheries. The Ministry's participation in the ICD and GRB initiatives is a positive indication of the Ministry's commitment to greater gender equality across the fisheries sector (MWCPA, 2022, p.35).

Focus Area 3 covers Sustainably Managing Natural Resources. Under forestry, the focus will be to develop and sustainably manage Fiji's forest resources by encouraging private sector participation. For marine resources, the plan offers an opportunity to diversify the economic base. The NDP will promote the sustainable management of offshore and inshore fishing, review of legislation, and enhancement of related infrastructure. It will promote greater private sector participation in inshore and offshore fishing as well as aquaculture.

Recognising that access to land is an essential asset to support economic activities and social wellbeing, the NDP outlines several strategies to improve access to land including the review of institutions and legislations, fast-tracking lease applications and initiating *iTaukei* land legislation reforms. There is a need to adopt a holistic approach to mineral and groundwater resource management by balancing economic development with environmental preservation and social welfare. The focus during the Plan period will be to promote sustainable development of groundwater resources and review legislations and regulations to strengthen compliance and monitoring of mineral exploration and quarrying activities (Ministry of Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics, 2024).

Gender in Environmental Laws and Policies

A summary of gender inclusion and environmental laws and policies is provided below (Table 2).

Table 2: Summary of Gender Inclusion in Climate and Environmental Laws and Policies Reference for Diagram: (ADB, 2022; p.25)

Law/Policy	Summary of Gender References
Environment Management Act 2005 (Rev. 2018) and Environment Management (EIA Process) Regulations 2007 (Rev. 2016)	There is no mention of gender issues or any distinctions between men and women concerning environmental management issues. No statement of equality or nondiscrimination principles. The EIA Process Regulations require extensive consultation with "stakeholders" but there are no mentions of gender-inclusive processes.
Climate Change Act 2021	There are references such as "when taking action to address climate change Fiji will respect, promote and consider the Sustainable Development Goals, gender equality and responsiveness, women's human rights and the empowerment of women..." There is also mention of gender and inclusive processes in regard to displacement, where "to relocate at-risk communities only with the full free and prior informed consent of the communities, following inclusive and gender-responsive consultation and participatory processes," and to ensure nondiscrimination in this process. There is also mention of a gender balance when appointing representatives to climate-relevant committees.
National Climate Change Policy 2018–2030 (NCCP)	There is reference to inequality, gender responsiveness, and gender-inclusive processes. One of the purposes of the NCCP is to avoid exacerbating vulnerabilities or deepening gender inequality. There is mention of the need to increase women's participation and representation and plan to reduce gender inequalities.
Planned Relocation Guidelines: A Framework to Undertake Climate Change Related Relocation 2018	The guidelines mention gender equality and gender responsiveness as well as human rights. There is a commitment to "ensure an inclusive and gender-responsive consultative and participatory process."
Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), updated in 2020	There is reference to gender responsiveness, improved gender balance in decision-making and implementation, and ensuring gender outcomes in climate action.

EIA = Environmental Impact Assessment.

Note: Color coding: gender-responsive (green), gender sensitive (yellow), not yet gender mainstreamed (orange).

Source: Asian Development Bank.

The Environment Management Act and the EIA Process Regulations do not address gender issues or make any distinctions between men and women in environmental management issues (Government of Fiji, 2005). The EIA Process Regulations do require extensive consultation with "stakeholders" and in this respect, they represent good practice law (Government of Fiji, 2007). However, there is no requirement to undertake gender-inclusive consultations on new development proposals among the stakeholders. If the stakeholders are living in a village where community decisions are made according to customary law and practice, according to CEDAW, these should also be subject to scrutiny to ensure there is no discrimination against women.[16]

The Fiji Climate Change Act 2021 makes a specific requirement that consultations for climate change relocation of communities must be inclusive and gender responsive (Sloan 2021). The same principle should be applied to community consultations on development proposals under the EIA process, including "green development" and large-scale climate change adaptation and mitigation measures, to ensure that the concerns and needs of all women (as well as men) are considered in affected communities.

Human rights and gender equality in the Climate Change Act 2021 expressly import the rights and freedoms of the Constitution and the link between gender equality and women's empowerment and sustainable development in the face of climate change Articles 5(a), 5(c), and 5(i):96 "There are inextricable links between gender equity, social inclusion and the Sustainable Development Goals including the pledge that no one will be left behind, and when taking action to address climate change, Fiji will respect, promote and consider the Sustainable Development Goals, gender equality and responsiveness, women's human rights and the empowerment of women, rights of people with disabilities and disability inclusive approaches, the elderly, children's inalienable right to a healthy environment, youth, and vulnerable and marginalised groups and communities, including in the areas of formal sector employment and livelihoods, participation in decision-making and access to services, health, education, water, sanitation, housing and transport." (Climate Change Act 2021 cited in ADB, 2022, 26).

The Climate Change Act 2021 is one of the most comprehensive national laws on this issue. It regulates climate change adaptation and mitigation and includes specific sections on climate change and resilient development, displacement and relocation, carbon sequestration, and oceans, as well as sustainable financing and private sector transition. In terms of gender equality and women's resilience to climate change it has the following key features:

(i) The most important gender element is that there are principles set out in section 5 that must be applied by all the responsible persons and bodies whenever making policy and implementation decisions under the act:

> (a) the bill of rights in Chapter 2 of the Constitution is included, with its right to formal equality and freedom from discrimination based on "sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression," and other human rights.
>
> (b) the "intergenerational equity" concept includes "socially and gender-inclusive, equitable" development; and
>
> (c) it recognizes "inextricable links between gender equity, social inclusion" and the sustainable development goals—including the pledge that no one will be left behind—and makes a commitment that Fiji "will respect, promote and consider…gender equality and responsiveness,

[16] The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is the key international human rights document that seeks to ensure the enforcement of the human rights of women on an equal basis with men. Article 5 of CEDAW requires parties to address and change social and cultural patterns that reinforce the stereotyping of women and traditional gender roles, or that promote the relative superiority or inferiority of either of the sexes.

women's human rights and the empowerment of women" (and others identified) including in employment and livelihoods, participation in decision-making and access to services, health, education, water, sanitation, housing, and transport.

Review of the act: When the minister reviews the act every 5 years, they are specifically required to consult with the minister responsible for women "on the extent to which gender principles are adhered to in all aspects of implementation" (section 10).

(iii) Some sections also require specific inclusion of women or their interests, or gender equality:

(a) the National Climate Change Policy must "embed gender, human rights, and social and cultural issues" (section 27).

(b) benefit-sharing plans for carbon sequestration must include women (section 60); and (c) relocation of at-risk communities must protect women's rights and use "inclusive and gender responsive consultation and participatory processes" (section 77).

Article 10 mandates the minister to consult with the minister responsible for women on the extent to which gender principles are adhered to; on the promotion of gender balance in the National Adaptation Plan Steering Committee (Article 66[3]) and the National Ocean Policy Steering Committee (Article 82[4]); mandating gender-, age, and disability-sensitive performance indicators to measure the effectiveness of the implementation of the act (Article 10[2]); and in Part 77(e) on the relocation of at-risk communities, where the minister is to "relocate at-risk communities only with the full free and prior informed consent of the communities, following inclusive and gender-responsive consultation and participatory processes." This is a very significant requirement because community consultations about relocation are a key part of the policy framework, and the specific inclusion of gender-responsive consultation and participation processes is essential for effective gender mainstreaming and empowerment of all women.

Although gender equality, non-discrimination, and women's empowerment are included as a principle of the act and mainstreamed into the policymaking as one of a group of principles that must be considered, there is no mechanism to require gender assessments or gender analysis, and most implementers will likely require further guidance in this regard.

One of the purposes of the NCCP is to avoid exacerbating vulnerabilities or deepening gender inequality. The policy also includes gender responsiveness as one of its three key policy pillars, which is justified and expanded under seven points that can be summarized as:

(i) Women are agents of change and there is a need to improve and enhance the incorporation of all women's knowledge, skills, participation, and leadership into planning processes at the local and national levels.
(ii) Social adaptation is required, including addressing structural inequalities directly.
(iii) Benefits should be progressive and not reinforce the elements of traditionally and socially constructed roles for women and girls which contribute to gaps and inequalities.
(iv) There is a need to ensure that gender gaps are understood across government ministries and among stakeholders.
(v) It is necessary to plan for solutions that reduce inequality, through inclusive consultations and efforts that engage and incorporate all women's agency.
(vi) Use gender-sensitive indicators.
(vii) Recognize that natural resource management is not gender neutral. (ADB 2022, p26 & 27; Begg et al., 2023).

3. Relevant Provincial Studies

This section provides a summary of issues that are specific to each of the provinces. It includes information gathered through a literature review, as well as data collected in August 2024, as part of focus group discussions and key informant interviews conducted during consultations on the GCF CRRP project. The consultations were focused on the project's four provinces of Macuata, Bua, Ba and Ra. A total of 359 individuals were consulted across the four provinces, comprising 92% iTaukei and 8% Indo-Fijians. Informed by WWF Pacific previous consultations and University of Queensland-led feasibility study in early 2024, communities and villages were sampled from the districts where conservation interventions were anticipated to be clustered, and taking account a variety of geographic characteristics (e.g. island, coastal, inland, etc.). Stakeholder consultations were done in four villages in each of the provinces (16 villages in total), selected by WWF Pacific and validated by Provincial Councils. Three provincial multi-stakeholder roundtables, 19 focus group discussions and 47 key informant interviews took place, engaging Provincial Councils, community-based organization representatives, fishers and community members comprising Indigenous Peoples (iTaukei) and Local Communities (Indo-Fijians). There was a noted absence of LGBTQ+ informants in the consultations, highlighting the need for more targeted engagement with marginalized and less visible populations. The data was analyzed and is summarized for each of the provinces.

Ba Province

Demographics

Ba Province in the Western Division is on Viti Levu, Fiji's largest island. It has a land area of 2,634 square kilometers (1,017 square miles). Ba Province has 21 districts: Nailaga, Bulu, Magodro, Naloto, Nalotawa, Nadi, Sikituru, Tavua, Savatu, Qaliyalatini, Vuda, Sabeto, Vitogo, Nacula, Yasawa, Naviti, Waya, Viwa, Nawaka, Vaturu, and Rukuruku. These districts comprise 107 villages. Ba is Fiji's largest province with a population of 247,708 recorded in the 2017 census. Over 31 per cent of the population of Ba Province lives in rural areas (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2018). The main towns in Ba Province are Tavua, Ba and Nadi, and Lautoka is the only city. The islands of the blue Yasawas are westward of the mainland part of Ba on Viti Levu (UNDP, 2019; Jubilee, 2021).

Livelihoods

Tourism, the sugarcane economy and manufacturing ventures dominate the province. The villagers in Ba Province are mostly fishers (i.e. women and men), while the members of Indo-Fijian population are often sugarcane farmers. There are however Indo-Fijians, largely men, who are dependent on fishing for income full time or part-time (Nand et al., 2021). Indo-Fijian women married to fishermen grow seedlings to sell and engaged in various income-generating activities such as catering, floriculture, raising ducks and chickens for sale, and helping their husbands in fishing. They also manage households while their husbands are at sea and help with fish grading

A major source of income for the local population, particularly *iTaukei* women, is selling *kai waidranu* (river mussels or freshwater clams). Mussels also provide a source of protein on a subsistence basis. While iTaukei women collect invertebrates (e.g. mussels, land crabs), men generally fish in the river or go out to sea to catch crabs, mullet and other types of fish. Many families have their own small plots beside the river where they grow root crops like cassava, however these are susceptible to being wiped out in times of heavy rain and flooding (Jubilee 2021; Singh et al., 2022).

Community-based projects related to the conservation of freshwater and marine resources provide opportunities for *iTaukei* women to exhibit their leadership skills and promote social relationships (Singh et al. 2022). These in turn help women in becoming confident decision makers. For instance,

Votua Village in Ba Province has a social club administered by the village women, known as *Gusunituba*. It has been named after the Ba River, which is the primary source of livelihood for many women and their households. This social club is the most active group in the province aiming to strengthen the social support networks of women and empower them by expanding their economic opportunities. Women members meet every fortnight to share ideas and experiences, and to exchange information to improve and diversify their food and income sources, and to promote disaster resilience. They also provide mutual assistance to one another in terms of finance, child-care support, exchange of labour, and provision of shelter and sharing of groceries, tools and equipment during disasters. The *Gusunituba* Club also works with the Ba Women's Forum to facilitate basic skills-based training and workshops to enhance the entrepreneurial skills of women in the village (Singh et al. 2022).

Governance and Participation in Decision-Making

Participants at the provincial roundtable consultations explained their adherence to the Integrated Rural Development Framework, which supported council meetings at village, district and provincial levels (such as the *Bose va Koro*) for iTaukei communities, as well as District Advisory Councillor (DAC) meetings for Indo-Fijian communities. Participants discussed efforts to ensure that the Provincial Council's operational plans are informed by village development plans, working with relevant ministries on issues of concern such as the Ministry of Fisheries or Ministry of Forestry, as well as with the *Roko Tui* and Conservation Officer for conservation matters.

In *iTaukei* communities, there was general satisfaction with decision-making structures but there was also concern at what they described as a top-down approach, in which concerns of villagers were not necessarily reflected in decisions made at district and provincial levels. For example, a male *iTaukei* key informant from Natutu village (Nailaga district) mentioned that district chiefs may not always be mindful of the voices of women and youth who have a lot to contribute to the project. He recommended that community engagement be generalized and also group specific to ensure there were programs targeted towards women and youth.

A male *iTaukei* informant in Toge village who is also a Naloto district representative saw the project as an opportunity to rejuvenate their *yaubula*[17] committee as well as the women and youth committees. Narewa village has a vibrant network of community groups that inform decision-making, including women, youth, church, elders, and resource management committees. According to the villagers, the resource management committee is active, playing a vital role in coordinating community development.

Villagers in Viseisei village (Vuda district) said that they were very clear on laws and regulations relating to coastal and marine areas, and currently have a legal case in progress in the courts relating to foreshore development in their district. They directed the project to the Vuda *Yaubula* Committee, which they said arose from a district council of chiefs meeting (*Bose Vanua o Vuda*) in 2011, to serve in an advisory role to chiefs. According to them, this *yaubula* committee is the entry point of all new projects in their area.

Women face marginalization in decision-making processes. During consultations, *iTaukei* women shared mixed views about their participation. While they hold positions in women's committees and other village groups within the *Bose va Koro* (village council), they reported challenges in securing

[17] a community based grouping that works to protect and ensure sustainable development of iTaukei resources. The Committee is formed at the provincial, district and village level. The administration follows a community based adaptive management model in which local landowners manage the committee and their local resources. The committee provides awareness advice and gender support to the community and helps organise management planning workshops, make recommendations to the village councils, district countries and provincial councils. They also monitor progress on conservation projects and programs.

resources and support. A women's focus group in Natutu village (Nailaga district) conveyed knowledge of specific legal restrictions like crab size limits, fishing gear and fish size regulations. However there was limited insight on legal enforcements and traditional restrictions. The challenge of decision making forums is implementation and ownership. While village council meetings (*Bose va Koro*) and related committees support all proposed projects, the committees are challenged with resourcing the implementation. This affects project sustainability and consistency.

Unregistered settlements face challenges in terms of their right to secure land to live. For example, Nakavika in Ba is populated by *iTaukei* who have lived there for generations. This (and other similar settlements) do not receive the same government support or recognition as they are not registered villages. This limits their access to *iTaukei* decision-making structures, including Provincial Council or village meetings. A focus group of male *iTaukei* fishers from Nakavika expressed frustration over uncertain land tenure and their inability to meet with the *Roko Tui Ba* to voice concerns. Despite following traditional customs, they receive inconsistent advice from landowning units and feel neglected by authorities. To address administrative challenges and reduce travel costs for fishing and boating licenses, they requested that training be brought to their community, as their roads are poorly maintained and access to urban centers is expensive.

For Indo-Fijians, the DAC has to call community members and organize a meeting. Hindus also have religious groups such as the Ramayan Mandali, where they meet and discuss their issues. However, it is a less formalized decision making system in comparison to the *iTaukei* system. Muslims in the communities do not have a religious group. They have a general religious organization known as the Fiji Muslim League, which is based in the town.

Although LGBTQI+ advocacy groups were not visible in the communities visited, this does not imply their absence, highlighting the need for continued engagement with marginalized and less visible groups. All groups require targeted engagement as part of the project. This theme was raised by a few individuals from both ethnic groups.

GBV and SEAH considerations

The Ba Women's Crisis Centre[18] is a branch of the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, which was established in 1992 following concern at the huge increase in violent assaults against women in Ba and surrounding areas. It provides counselling and support services, community education and advocacy and information services to women in the province. Services it provides includes free and confidential, non-judgmental crisis, counselling for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse and sexual harassment. It also provides legal advice, and accompanies clients or referral of clients to court, police stations, hospitals and other agencies upon request. The counselling services in Tavua are offered twice a month.

Impacts of climate change and anthropogenic activities on communities

Black sand mining projects in Ba Province have the potential to cause significant damage to marine ecosystems and the surrounding land areas. In turn, this damage could have devastating impacts on the livelihoods and resilience of local communities (Jubilee, 2021).

Human activities (including deforestation, commercial farming and logging) and climate change have had an impact on communities over the past years. High rainfall has caused flooding, affecting gardens and at times farmers could not access their gardens. They have experienced low crop production due to weather changes. Low production has affected most families because they could no longer sell the surplus at the market to make income for their daily needs.

[18] https://www.fijiwomen.com/about/our-organisation/ba-womens-crisis-centre/

Climate change is also having a great impact on the lives of women. Women as home managers and carers could not finance or buy necessities in the homes as usual and cannot finance family members to access the essential services (Avtar et al., 2021). iTaukei women from the Ba Province also expressed their concerns on soil and coastal erosion to the members of the *Soqosoqo Vakamarama iTaukei ni Yasana ko Ba* (SSViT Ba). The women from the province are working together to seek assistance from government and non-government organizations to help combat the impacts of climate change. Members of the SSViT Ba together with the officials from the Ministry of Forestry received funding from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Women's Fund Fiji (WWF) to plant lemon trees along the riverbank in Yavusania Village to combat soil erosion. SSViT Ba has also been collaborating with the government to conduct technical assessments within the villages including nursery setups for communities, providing technical guidance, and investigating reforestation and sustainable agricultural initiatives (Fiji Global News, 2024).

Ra Province

Demographics

Ra Province in the Western Division is on Viti Levu, Fiji's largest island. With a land area of 1,341 square kilometers, it had a population of 30,432 recorded in the 2017 census. The main urban centre is at Vaileka, commonly known as Rakiraki Town. The province has 20 districts: Naroko, Tokaimalo, Saivou, Nailuva, Nalaba, Rakiraki, Raviravi, Navolau, Nakorotubu, Bureiwai, Kavula, Bureivanua, Nakuilava, Mataso, Navitilevu, Lawaki, Nasau, Nalawa, Nababa and Naiyalayala; and has four main tribal boundaries of the *Vanua* known as the Vanua Rakiraki, Saivou, Nakorotubu and Nailawa which are all administered by the Ra Provincial Council. There are 93 *iTaukei* villages (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2018; SPC, 2016).

Livelihoods

Located in one of Fiji's main sugarcane farming towns, Ra Province comprises a mix of *iTaukei* and Indo-Fijian and cane farmers, NGOs and business operators. Industrial, commercial, agricultural and settlement expansion have changed the land use of Ra Province, along with overharvesting of coastal resources (SPC, 2016). Environmental management initiatives commenced in Nakorotubu District (Ra Province) in 2006 through the LMMA network (which includes the Wildlife Conservation Society and BirdLife International) and local NGO NatureFiji-MareqetiViti. Further support was provided through the RESCUE project, including sustainable development, conservation, climate change and ecosystem restoration, and the creation of an Integrated Coastal Management Plan for Ra Province (SPC, 2016).

In terms of resource use, farming, fishing and livestock rearing are the main livelihood activities in the province. Subsistence fishing is an important aspect of the socioeconomics of many village communities. In 1992, the estimated catch from the province's subsistence fishery was 16,400 metric tons but University of the South Pacific Institute of Applied Science (2012) study put it at 3,515 metric tons. The reduction of fish catches despite increasing population and use of more efficient fishing gears can only be explained by the reduction of fish stock. The harvest of undersize catches is widespread. Due to increasing scarcity of fish catch (IAS, 2012), the reliance on the natural marine environment for traditional subsistence sometimes comes in conflict with commercial fishery and at times, with industries and tourism (SPC, 2016).

The livelihood activities for women in the province varies depending on the location and the availability of resources and its accessibility. Generally, common activities that Ra women engage in as part of their daily activities include fishing, weaving mat from pandanus leaves, leasing money, tourism, retailing, gardening, sugarcane farming, selling of cooked foods and others (SPC, 2016). In Rewasa village (Naroko district), women initially engage in village projects, but their involvement often declines once projects begin generating income. Their involvement declined because they got

crowded out by the men, and slowly excluded from decision-making, and because the men preferred to be the ones to manage income. However, Rewasa's women's group, led by proactive women in their late thirties, shows potential for advancement. In Vitawa village (Rakiraki district), where many men are employed elsewhere, women have expressed interest in running their own income-generating initiatives, citing better management compared to men, as seen with their successful aquaculture project now overseen by a female treasurer. Indo-Fijian women, though not directly represented in consultations, play vital roles in household management, fish grading, and small-scale enterprises like selling pot plants while their spouses are fishing. This highlights the significant yet often unrecognized contributions of women across both iTaukei and Indo-Fijian communities.

The Ra Naari Parishad (RNP), a rural women's membership organisation which is based in Rakiraki was established in 1989 to provide a safe space for Indo-Fijian women to address the social, financial and political issues faced by them. This NGO empowered rural women in Ra to enhance their skills and income development opportunities by improving water and sanitation services, providing leadership training, promoting disaster preparedness, and building connections with other women-led networks. The RNP received a grant from the Fiji Women's Fund to support the implementation of bee farms as well as to provide training in beekeeping to women and men (RNP, 2018). Moreover, in November 2020, 23 *iTaukei* women from the Ra Province participated in a three-day empowering workshop on floriculture through the Women in Agriculture Program organised by the Ministry of Agriculture. This workshop was intended to develop the knowledge and skills of women to generate income to support the livelihoods of their families and to promote the contribution of women in the rural sector (Ministry of Agriculture, 2019).

Division of labour within the community and family is mostly influenced by cultural norms; however, this has changed over time due to urban migration, formal employment, death of family members, or intermarriage and the practices of economic empowerment of women (Fleming et al., 2019). Family members leaving the villages and homes are men. Women are then forced to take up the responsibilities of the men by doing both roles. This affects women, increasing the care burden of women leading to other challenges (Fleming et al., 2019).

Governance and Participation in Decision-Making

Governance in *iTaukei* communities of Ra Province is led by the Ra Provincial Council. Participants in a roundtable with the Provincial Council confirmed that they are aware of relevant laws and conduct community awareness in collaboration with government ministries and NGOs. The *Roko Tui*'s office facilitates decision-making, ensuring equal representation and participation while adhering to traditional (*Vanua*) protocols. The province follows an integrated rural development framework, coordinating efforts across ministries and non-government stakeholders. This year's *Bose ni Yasana* (provincial meeting) resolved to assign a monitoring committee to every project in the province. The Provincial Council sees the Provincial Conservation Officer as key to supporting this initiative and is seeking funds for operational costs to implement the resolution, ensuring sustainability and impact of project activities. Decisions made at the community level are based on the collective views of the committee members. Women are part of the committee, and can present their views and the challenges to the village committee. This also applies to the family setting, but it varies depending on the presence of the individual with the decision-making power (Fleming et al., 2019).

GBV and SEAH Considerations

The Rakiraki Women's Crisis Centre opened in 2011 after many years of planning for services in the Ra Province. The drive for a Crisis Centre in Ra began in the early 2000s after a group of women received training on gender, violence against women and human rights, and another training was held for male advocates for women's human rights. These women recognized the need for a Crisis Centre

in the province and after further planning and meetings, a group including the government's women's interest officer at the time and other interested women formed a collective and requested the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre to establish a branch to address violence against women, girls and children (FWCC 2024). It provides counselling and support services, community education and advocacy and information services to women in the province. Services it provides includes free and confidential, non-judgmental crisis, counselling for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse and sexual harassment. It also provides legal advice, and accompanies clients or referral of clients to court, police stations, hospitals and other agencies upon request.

Macuata Province

Demographics

Macuata Province in the Northern Division is on the second largest island in Fiji, Vanua Levu. This province has a land area of 2,004 square kilometers. According to the Fiji Census Report 2017, Macuata Province has a population of 65,983 people or 8.9% of Fiji's total population of 837,271 (51% male and 49% female), making it the fourth largest province in Fiji. The province's population is approximately 8.9% lower than a decade ago, continuing a trend that was first observed during the inter-censual period of 1996 and 2007. This decline is due to various factors including the non-renewal of agricultural leases and rural-urban drift, particularly among young people who move to urban centres to further education or to look for work.

The province has 114 villages spread over 12 districts: Cikobia, Dogotuki, Labasa, Macuata, Mali, Dreketi, Namuka, Udu, Seaqaqa, Nadogo, Wailevu and Sasa; the district boundaries haven't changed since 1956. As of 2007, Indo-Fijians constituted most of the population at 42,550 people, while the *iTaukei* numbered 28,197. This made Macuata one of two predominantly Indo-Fijian provinces, the other being Ba Province. The majority of the province's population (75%) lives in Labasa district, which contains the town of Labasa. There are two urban areas: Labasa and Seaqaqa. More than a quarter of Macuata's population (27,949 in 2007) lives in the town of Labasa (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2018). Labasa town is the main town in Vanua Levu which is the centre for all commercial and business activities, government agencies, amenities, and facilities (Macuata Provincial Council, 2017).

Livelihoods

Land tenure is freehold and on lease from *iTaukei* landowners. Sugarcane farmers hold agriculture leases from *iTaukei* owning clans for their cane farms. They live on plots of leased land and most farms are shared between two or more brothers and their families. Sugarcane and rice are grown on larger plots and vegetable gardens are usually located on smaller plots closer to home, giving easy access to food. When shared farm income is insufficient to support two or more households, farmers work on other farms as labourers. Women own livestock including chickens, goats, cows and bullocks either alone or together with their husbands or in some cases, extended family members.

The *Turaga ni Koro* in Raviravi stated '*men just do land preparation, and the women transplant and look after the backyard garden*' (ADRA, CARE, & UN Women, 2019, p.41). Similarly, men in Vunivutu stated, 'wives take the lead in planting vegetables and women stated that planting and selling of vegetables is done by women. However, these roles can vary, and one woman reported that her husband undertakes all work related to the vegetable garden, planning and making all decisions about what, where and when to plant. One woman noted that her husband does the harvesting, but many women also harvest sugarcane (ADRA, CARE, & UN Women, 2019). Some households in Vunivutu also own ducks and these are consumed by the family as well as sold. In Vunivutu, chickens and goats are consumed by the family and in some cases sold – always live. As one woman pointed out, owning livestock allows people to save money as they do not have to buy meat which is expensive. Although women are largely responsible for food preparation, cooking and food choices, men showed considerable interest in healthy eating and stated that they lack detailed information about nutrition. As a man in Raviravi noted '*the biggest issue or challenge related to food and nutrition for this community is the lack of awareness of the nutritious value of the food we are eating. We thought*

eating fish every day is healthy, and we don't know whether our food and meals are balanced so we need a workshop and awareness to tackle all these challenges.' Similarly, a woman in Vunivutu stated 'the biggest issue is we don't know the right food to eat to be healthy.' (ADRA, CARE, & UN Women, 2019).

Fishing is an important source of food for the family, a means of livelihood, but also a pleasurable activity for women and men. Many women in Raviravi fish regularly and have considerable freedom to go out with whom and when they wish. They often go out to fish with groups of men and women from the village or head out together with other women to catch octopus and collect oysters and other seafood to sell in the market. They also do in-shore fishing, regularly collecting mud crabs, clams, seashells, sea grapes and other seafood to feed themselves and their families. Data from the National Nutrition Survey notes that 86.8% of households used most of the fish catch for home use. Women in the focus group said they decide themselves whether to go fishing and if they head out during the day they do the cooking, wash clothes, clean the house and then clean up their surroundings afterward (ADRA, CARE, & UN Women 2019, p.42).

Men and women in both communities stated that taking their agricultural produce and seafood to the market was a challenge. Women in Raviravi stated that it costs $60 each way to hire a carrier to take their produce to Seaqaqa and $200 for a return trip to the Labasa market adding, '*our problem here is the road access. It is difficult for us to take our produce to market as it is quite expensive to travel or hire a carrier to get to the market to sell our produce.*' Given the travel costs women in both communities generally preferred to sell from their home if it was possible (ADRA, CARE, & UN Women 2019, p.46).

In 2019, a workshop on Rocket Stove Initiatives funded by UNDP was organised in communities within the Macuata Province by marine conservation and C3 Fiji. The aim of this workshop was to reduce the challenges faced by women in terms of spending hours gathering firewood. The other benefits included reduction in deforestation and emissions of poisonous gases. Since small twigs and drift-wood could be used to light up the rocket stoves, women were able to save a lot of time in food preparation (Lui, 2019).

Governance and Participation in Decision-Making

Women in Ra face similar marginalization in decision making. Although Indo Fijian women were not directly represented among the informants, it was observed that they play crucial roles in their households while their spouses are away fishing. Observations and conversations in the margins revealed that Indo-Fijian women are actively involved in household management, grading fish, and small-scale ventures such as selling pot plants.

On gender equality and women's rights, women's groups are active and there is a sense of fair participation in decision making processes in the community. These gatherings occur at least once a month, allowing individuals to present and seek approval for projects they are involved in or planning, as exemplified by the recent Jobs for Nature 2.0 (JFN2) initiative introduced by the Macuata Provincial Council, facilitated by the Conservation Officer. This demonstrates a bottom-up approach where community members, including women and youth, have a direct voice in shaping their local development and conservation efforts. Both *iTaukei* and Indo-Fijian female key informants interviewed during consultations reported instances of women's views not being incorporated or being excluded from community development projects, which then are unsuccessful until women take on management roles, indicating a tendency for patriarchal mindsets in which men refuse or do not seek assistance from women. Despite this, *iTaukei* women possess invaluable traditional knowledge about their customary fishing grounds (*qoliqoli*) and the surrounding environment. Across all communities, women in the province can offer valuable insights to the WWF and ensure successful implementation of land-based businesses to generate income. This would help to reduce pressure on marine resources.

Shared decision-making appears to be more prevalent in Raviravi where men stated that decisions in the home are usually made jointly by husbands and wives (ADRA, CARE, & UN Women 2019, p.53). As one woman noted, 'the men mostly hold leadership roles. I don't think women have even been in any decision-making role ever in this community.' Various factors influence women's ability to participate in public discussions and decision-making. Reasons given for their lack of attendance at meetings include '*we very busy with housework, looking after everything*', '*it's difficult for women to participate because they are too busy, have too much to do' and 'men have more time*.' They also highlighted the long distance to travel to get to meetings - which presumably is the same for men. Lack of experience and limited self-confidence also play a role as 'many women would not feel comfortable saying anything at meetings because they are too shy' (ADRA, CARE, & UN Women, 2019, p.57). Women also said that they would need permission from their husbands to attend a meeting and m*ight be interested to listen, but not necessarily speak; saying if offered the opportunity 'we could maybe go and listen if they came but it's never happened*.' They added that they would be less keen to go to a meeting if it did not seem relevant, for example a visit by a government official, but added that they would try their best to attend if it was held by ADRA because 'we want to learn something.' Ideal times for women to attend community meetings and activities are between 10 am – 12 pm after they have finished all the early morning work since they are also busy in the afternoon and do gardening and cooking in the evening. They noted that even if they were free, they would not go at night. Physical impairments coupled with stigma and negative attitudes of others can further hinder the participation of both men and women in public discussions and decision-making forums (ADRA, CARE, & UN Women, 2019, p.57).

Women and men with disabilities said they do not attend community meetings and usually receive information from family members. As one woman who is physically impaired noted, 'I don't go to the temple, I don't go anywhere but just stay at home' adding that she gets information occasionally from the Health Department who come once a month to give medicine for her and her epileptic daughter (ADRA, CARE, & UN Women, 2019). Men in Raviravi noted that people with disabilities can face physical challenges to attend village meetings, as well as discrimination stating, 'they might feel their inputs are not considered and most times taken as jokes.' An elderly man with a disability stated that he stays home, does not attend any village meetings or participate in any community activities 'because of his disability' stating 'only people who do the work talk so I just better stay home.' He does not make any contributions to any decision-making whatsoever but added that he is happy with everything and 'goes around the village to talk, laugh and joke around' and is well cared for by his relatives. As a result, people with disabilities would be the last to receive information. Caregivers of people with disabilities and very young children face an additional hurdle to be able to participate in meetings and activities (ADRA, CARE, & UN Women, 2019, p.57).

A 1998 study in Macuata Province reported that women were usually part of information dissemination during village meetings and if the village headman consults individual households, then women are part of the discussion. Women said that it is the duty of all those who attend the meeting to inform members of the community who were not present and added that youth are also included. One woman noted that she only listens to the radio sometimes and while she added '*we share information here' other women stated that 'information tends to be relayed to men more than women and highlighted that information is often shared and discussed during kava sessions and normally only men are in attendance*.' Men noted that people with disabilities would be the last to receive information (ADRA, CARE & UN Women, 2019).

GBV and SEAH considerations

The Labasa Women's Crisis Centre[19] is a branch of the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre located in Macuata Province. It was established in 1995 to provide counselling and support services, community education

[19] http://www.fijiwomen.com/about/our-organisation/labasa-womens-crisis-centre/

and advocacy and information services to assist women. It provides counselling and support services, community education and advocacy and information services to women in the province. Services it provides includes free and confidential, non-judgmental crisis, counselling for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse and sexual harassment. It also provides legal advice, and accompanies clients or referral of clients to court, police stations, hospitals and other agencies upon request.

As raised by both *iTaukei* and Indo-Fijian informants, patriarchal mindsets persist, and gender-based violence, while being increasingly reported, remains something largely addressed privately within family units or communities. A key informant based in Labasa who is a member of the LGBTQI+ community and works in civil society stated that advocacy groups like House of Colors exist for the LGBTQI+ community but remain outside provincial and communal decision making structures. There is a network of LGBTQI+ community members who reside in informal settlements in the Labasa area, some of whom engage in sex work. They too are vulnerable to the increased levels of flooding affecting these settlements but are less likely to seek or receive assistance due to the stigma they face. Such LGBTQI+ groups meet informally to share concerns and mobilize for resource sharing, interacting with outsiders only via trusted intermediaries.

Relating to children's rights, the Ministry of Education official has noted that government officials are cautious about the impact on communities, with efforts underway to address a report of a child left unsupervised after both parents undertook labor mobility program opportunities abroad. With government-led approaches in schools making efforts to be child-focused, the informant notes that *iTaukei* communities have reached out for support in building an enabling environment at the family level through workshops for parents and guardians. Instances of child labor as part of the seasonal sugarcane harvesting have also abated after regulations were introduced and enforced. There are occasions of parents requesting if students can stay home to help their parents with farming before returning to school the following year, but this is discouraged by school officials and becoming less supported as a norm in *iTaukei* communal settings.

Lastly, during discussions in *iTaukei* communities, it was highlighted that some individuals may engage in discriminatory behavior towards persons with disabilities, using derogatory language and disregarding their feelings.

Bua Province

Demographics

Bua Province located in the west of the northern island of Vanua Levu, is one of three northern provinces, and has a land area of 1,378 square kilometers (Pearson et al., 2019). Its population at the 2017 census was 15,466 scattered over 50 villages and 9 districts: Bua, Navakasiga, Lekutu, Wainunu, Solevu, Nadi, Vuya, Dama, and Kubulau. Bua Province is home to extensive mangrove communities that have been relatively untouched by large-scale development (Pearson et al., 2020).

Livelihoods

In 2019, participatory research was conducted by the University of Queensland into local perspectives of men and women on the use, benefit and value of mangrove ecosystems across six rural villages within the Bua Province, using a series of semi-structured household interviews, coupled with participant observation. These findings provide insights into how gender roles influence the ways people value and interact with local ecosystems. Throughout interviews and participant observation, it was clear that collecting mud crabs and other resources from mangrove communities was a common socialising activity for women as they would often go out in groups to find mud crabs and spend time together looking for them. The research indicates that mangrove ecosystems have contributed to building social cohesion within local communities. The researchers concluded that the inclusion and

empowerment of *iTaukei* women should be a priority in mangrove management interventions, due to their gender-specific knowledge, values and needs (Pearson et al., 2019).

In 2020 a PhD thesis from the University of Queensland included a chapter on gender-specific perspectives of mangrove ecosystem services from Bua Province. Subsistence was found to be one of the main contributors of mangroves to human health and wellbeing, with 79% of and 86% of landowners identifying subsistence as a key benefit obtained from mangrove ecosystems. Traditional medicine was frequently mentioned as another valuable use of mangroves. About 38% of women and 29% of men identified medicine as a benefit derived from mangroves. Women were more likely to identify both tangible and intangible cultural benefits associated with mangroves, particularly in terms of traditional artwork and other uses of mangrove dye.

In February 2024, through the GSR project field trip by WWF in partnership with University of Queensland, focused group discussions were conducted in selected communities in Bua. The findings support the earlier GEDSI desk reviews and research done by various organisations, institutions and individuals in the Bua Province. Similar to other provinces, women and men in communities in Bua Province have different roles as it is defined by their cultural norms. Women along the coastal villages play important roles as defined by their culture. They collect seaweeds, crabs, fish in shallow waters, prepare meals and serve food both at home and in special gatherings, look after the children, do laundry, do gardening especially planting taro and yam and other activities as expected. Men engage in jobs that need more physical strength. These roles include, but are not limited to, building houses, fishing in the deep sea, making decisions in homes and communities as fathers, husbands, brothers or as community leaders.

The gendered roles have changed in some homes due to the absence of the man or the women. In homes where the father or mother have passed away, the roles are played by only one person. Other reasons for changing roles include, community members leaving the village in search of jobs in the city, to attend tertiary institutions, urban migration or other reasons. Women engage in different income generating activities. In a family, often men catch the fish and women help them sell the fish. Their catches are sold in the local markets, however there is competition at the fish markets, the supply is high, and the demand is low. To sell their catch quickly, they give their catch to the retailer who sells the fish and pays them after the sales. The income that is generated depends on how quickly the retailer sells the fish. The inconsistency in income does cause frustration and affects the overall family expense. For example, a pregnant mother missed her visit to the clinic because she does not have the transport fare as the family did not sell fish during the week. However, opportunities also exist, there is a possibility of selling the fish in the international fish market. The challenge remains in getting the trading licence, some families and communities cannot afford to buy the licence to trade internationally. Apart from fish, women sell cooked food, sea grapes, crabs, cassava, taro, and vegetables in the local markets. They were interested in building their capacities in life skills training to increase production and identify markets and sell out their products quickly.

While group discussions were generally positive, a female informant from Bua village cautioned that although women have representation through the women's committee, their voices are often not heard. She noted that women sometimes need to be especially vocal, risking unpopularity, to raise concerns. Despite this, she acknowledged that leadership within the *Bose va Koro* is generally supportive of suggestions from both the *Yaubula* and women's committees, though others in the community frequently resist these decisions. A male *iTaukei* informant, also from Bua village, added that ultimate authority over *qoliqoli* (fishing ground) matters rests with the *Tui Bua* (the provincial chief) and the *Bose Vanua*. Male *iTaukei* focus group participants in Bua village also confirmed that all new projects are first raised with the *Tui Bua* before he calls the *Bose Vanua* and later the *Bose va Koro* to deliberate. Once decisions are made at the *Bose Vanua*, they are conveyed to villages through the *Bose va Koro*, which in Bua village is also led by the *Tui Bua*. Implementation of directives then becomes the responsibility of the relevant village committees.

Women of both *iTaukei* and Indo-Fijian communities conveyed the various ways they valued participation in community decision- making. For *iTaukei* women informants and focus group participants, this was through membership in village committees or through the SSVM and even as a *Marama ni Vanua* (female chief). They were also forthcoming about existing constraints in a male-dominated society, in which some felt they had to advocate harder for themselves to be heard, and while there was general satisfaction at the level of inclusion, they attributed the failure of certain village livelihood projects to the exclusion of women from these efforts. Also, if at times high-level support for women's leadership was present, members of the broader community would defy those decisions. Furthermore, while there is an advocacy group for LGBTQI+ in Macuata Province, there is no such representation in Bua and this suggests that these marginalized communities have fewer avenues for inclusion.

Governance and Participation in Decision-Making

Regarding gender equality and women's rights, it was clear from the consultations that women possess valuable knowledge, especially in traditional natural resource management. Many women feel empowered to assume leadership roles, including leading village committees and representing Indo-Fijian women in District Advisory Councils (DACs). Some even hold significant customary roles, with one example of a woman serving as chief. Despite having the space to speak in village meetings, *iTaukei* women reported needing to push harder to be heard. They cited a recent instance where their concerns about youth drug use were dismissed by male elders, who advised them to take the issue to the police rather than taking proactive action themselves. A female Indo-Fijian informant, serving as a DAC in Bua, stated she is one of four females amongst 11 DACs across the province, responsible for a total of 150 people in 34 households. While she herself is a wife, mother and business owner, she shared that it was hard to exercise her leadership role as a woman with men being uncomfortable with women in leadership and the general perception that women are less capable than men. Many of the women consulted however, felt they are not fully involved in decision-making processes. This varies in different villages depending on the systems and leadership models they have in place.

A female Indo-Fijian informant from the Namau settlement had only a general understanding of laws and regulations but highlighted land tenure and ownership as a significant concern. She described the dual land ownership system, where iTaukei live on customary land and Indo-Fijians on freehold or leased land. Most Indo-Fijian families hold residential leases, with only a few (she knew of only two in her area) holding agricultural leases. This creates challenges in terms of land use options and limits their ability to engage in farming to reduce dependence on fishing. She pointed out that iTaukei communities have different perspectives on land use and development compared to Indo-Fijians, with iTaukei placing a high value on culture and using more time-consuming processes for land access.

There was no mention of disability inclusion or LGBTQI+ community members from any key informants interviewed in Bua Province, suggesting these groups lack prominence or visibility within the communities. On a positive note, stakeholders consistently emphasized the importance of maintaining a sustained consultation process throughout the project, with a focus on inclusivity.

GBV and SEAH Considerations

There is currently no crisis centre in Bua Province, with the closest one in Labasa (Macuata Province, see details above). A female Indo-Fijian informant confirmed that domestic violence remains prevalent, though most cases are resolved informally within households and rarely reported to social welfare or the police. This suggests a reluctance to openly discuss domestic violence and indicates that formal reporting lags behind actual occurrences. When the subject of gender- based violence was raised, it was widely deemed to be something that was sometimes reported to police but largely dealt with privately within households or communities.

Child protection concerns were raised by a women's group, which saw potential for solar power to support children's education. In Nabouwalu, a village child protection committee ensures children are indoors by 5 p.m., demonstrating that child welfare is prioritized in some communities. However, this also reflects that childcare is still predominantly viewed as a women's responsibility, rather than a shared obligation among parents and guardians.

Conclusion

Fijian women's subsistence and reproductive activities rely heavily on the abundance, biodiversity and health of natural resources and ecosystem services. Structural gender inequalities embedded in Fiji's patriarchal cultural and social norms manifest in asymmetrical power relations that limit women's access to and control of these resources as well as their ability to make and influence decisions about resource management. This results in great risks, burdens and impact for Fijian women as natural disasters strike and as climate change occurs. Women's vulnerability is differentiated by their intersectional identities based on among other things, age, dis/ability, cultural background, socio economic status, sexual orientation and gender identity and geographic location.[20]

The GEDSI Assessment provides a clear background on the context and the situation relating to gender issues in the project area (covering local and national and regional). The Assessment includes an analysis of the legal framework, laws, policies and institutional practices on gender equality, women's and youth empowerment, disability inclusion, sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH) and other related fields. This ensures that a positive enabling environment to promote and support gender (GEDSI) mainstreaming is integrated in the design phase of the project.

Based on the literature review and secondary data with additional provincial data drawn from the Stakeholder Analysis - the key findings from the review has contributed to the design of the GEDSI specific actions in the GEDSI Action Plan (GAP). The specific GEDSI actions in the GAP are based on the knowledge and cultural context from the GEDSI Assessment.

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