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Gender equality, disability and social inclusion in Pacific blue economies

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

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ABOUT CLEAN

The Climate, Environment, and Nature (CLEAN) Helpdesk is a tailored query helpdesk that offers support on climate, environment and nature mainstreaming as well as support on Paris Alignment and nature proofing compliance.

The CLEAN Helpdesk aims to support the United Kingdom government's delivery of meaningful contributions to build resilience to current and future climate impacts, halt and reverse global nature loss, and halve global emissions.

COVER PHOTO:

Woman canoeing at Langa Lagoon, Solomon islands. Photo by Benedek.

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Guide to the report

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the economic and human development context of the Pacific small island developing states (PSIDS) region.

Chapter 2 looks at social inequities in the region, wellbeing and the precarity of work for specific affected groups living on coasts and working in the blue economy: women, children, people living with disabilities, LGBTQI+ including third gender people, and others. Poverty, especially rural poverty, including its multidimensional aspects such as health and education, is a defining factor in understanding development dynamics for these vulnerable groups and is discussed in this chapter in some detail. The chapter also looks at how programming can address the inequities and precarities of the social groups mentioned.

Chapter 3 explores labour in the different sectors of the blue economy and strategies for the protection and development of workers in the most climate-exposed and vulnerable natural resource-based sectors. For the purposes of this report, the blue economy refers to economic activities in coastal and marine areas of Pacific small island developing states (SIDS).

Chapter 4 describes which groups of workers in the blue economy sub-sectors are most at risk of immediate harms from interpersonal violence and labour abuses. The chapter builds on information presented in earlier chapters on society-wide vulnerabilities (such as among women and children), to identify discrete groups of workers at highest risk of exploitative or abusive situations in blue economy sectors, and how to spot and seek help for these issues, as appropriate, in a blue economies programming context.

Chapter 5 provides short, good-practice case studies from the Pacific region, and Chapter 6 concludes the report with key findings and recommendations.

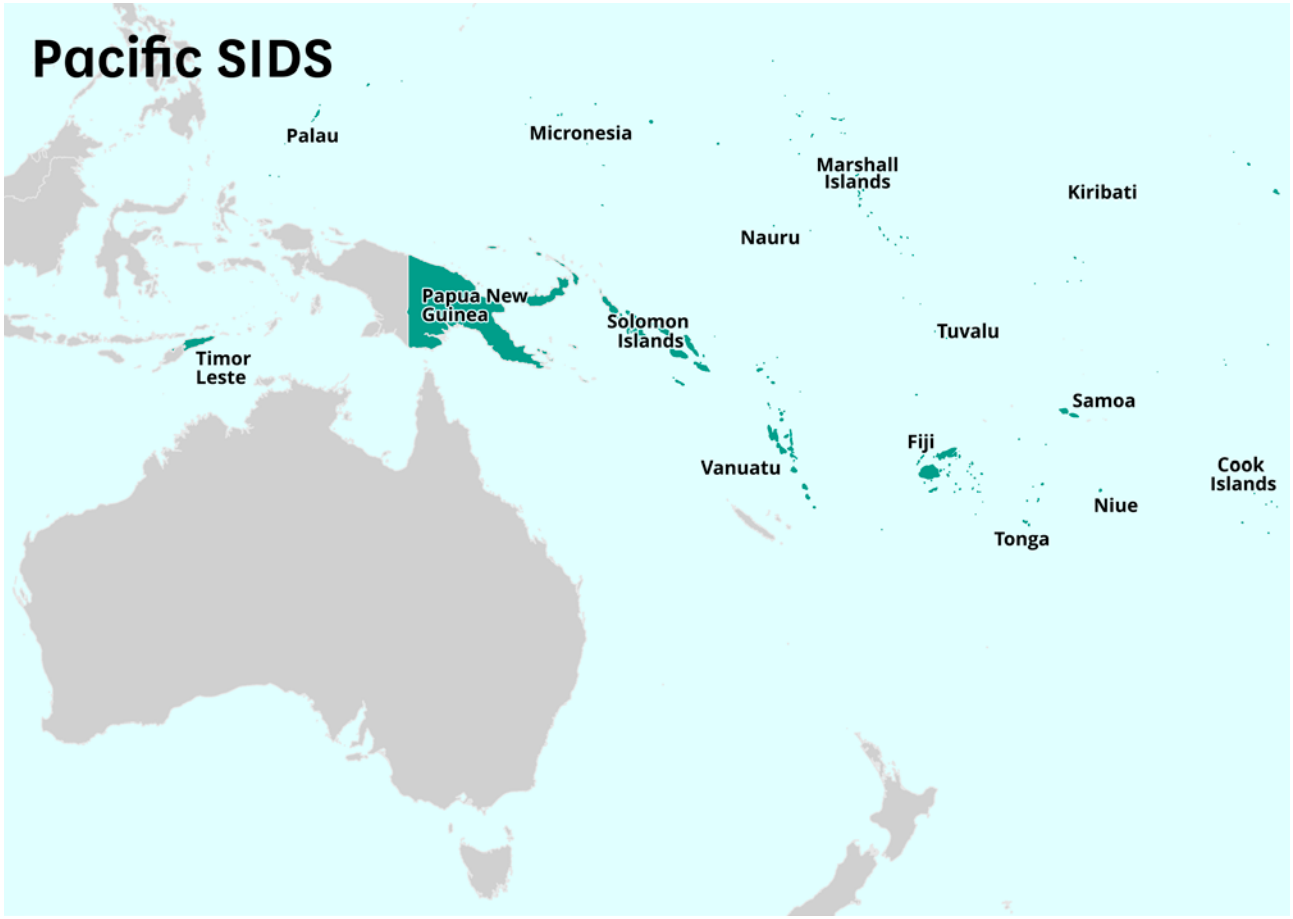
List of figures/tables/boxes

Acronyms

FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GEDSI	Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMO	International Maritime Organization
IOM	International Organization on Migration
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex and other gender identities and sexual orientations
MMM	MMM (Mangoro Market Meri, a Papuan mangrove restoration initiative)
ODA	Official Development Assistance
ODI	The research institute formerly known as Overseas Development Institute and now rebranded as ODI Global
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PLWD	People Living with Disability
SEAH	Sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SPC	Founded originally in 1947 as The South Pacific Commission, and still known by its old acronym 'SPC', this regional organisation is now called 'The Pacific Community' (www.spc.int)
SPREP	Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Program
TNC	The Nature Conservancy
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Geographic scope of the report

This report covers the small island developing states (SIDS) of the Pacific, specifically the sovereign island states shown in the map below.



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In Oceania, this comprises the island groups of Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia.

Melanesia

- Fiji
- Papua New Guinea
- Solomon Islands
- Vanuatu

Micronesia

- Federated States of Micronesia
- Kiribati
- Marshall Islands
- Nauru
- Palau

Polynesia

- Cook Islands
- Niue
- Samoa
- Tonga
- Tuvalu

It also includes, in the Timor Sea, the country of Timor-Leste, which forms part of the island of Timor, shared with Indonesia (West Timor province). Timor-Leste gained independence from Indonesia in 2002.

All of the above countries are ODA-eligible, with the exception of the Cook Islands, which graduated from ODA eligibility in 2020 (IMF, 2020).

There are other island territories across the Pacific that are 'overseas collectivities' of France (such as Tahiti, Wallis and Futuna, New Caledonia), New Zealand (Tokelau), American Samoa (USA), and others. These are excluded from the analysis.

Welcome gate at Christo Rei Beach, Dili, Timor Leste. Adobe Stock.

1 Introduction

Purpose of the report

This report aims to provide guidance for sustainable blue economy programming in the PSIDS region including Timor-Leste.[1]

The report focuses especially on gender equality, social inclusion and safeguarding issues, and the way in which these are, in many cases, entwined with climate and environmental degradation. The report:

- provides an overview of key structural inequalities relevant to the sustainable blue economy and its development in the Pacific;
- explores opportunities for addressing social inequities, reducing risks and empowering marginalised groups as part of sustainable blue economy investments; and
- highlights vital considerations for safeguarding and avoidance of harm.

The economic context

Small island developing states in the Pacific region (PSIDS) have social and economic structural features that create risks and challenges for development. These intersect with and are often compounded by the impacts of climate and environmental hazards.

The economies of the region are heavily orientated toward the 'blue economy' sectors of beach-based tourism and fisheries – particularly in the atoll nations. The SIDS with somewhat larger territories and volcanic soils have relatively more important agriculture and forestry sectors, as in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Fiji.

1 Timor-Leste is classified as being in the 'Southeast Asia' region by the United Nations and World Bank, in regional development statistics, but for the purposes of this report, we have included it with other SIDS in the Pacific island region, as explained on the previous page.

Many PSIDS have high levels of income inequality. Although the available data has not been recently updated, it shows that Papua New Guinea (last reported in 2009) and the Federated States of Micronesia (2013) have very high income inequality, as indicated by Gini index[2] values over 40. Tuvalu (2010), Solomon Islands (2012) and Samoa (2013) all have high income inequality with Gini values in the high 30s.

In other PSIDS, however, income is far more equally distributed in the population, as indicated by Gini equality values under 30 for Kiribati (2019), Tonga (2021) and Timor-Leste (2014) (Gini index from World Bank, u.d).

The PSIDS are characterised by high dependency on foreign assistance and also relatively high levels of remittances. The inflows of official development assistance (ODA) as a proportion of Gross National Income (2022 figures) range from exceeding high in Tuvalu (80%), Tonga (54%), Marshall Islands (48%), and Federated States of Micronesia (32%), to lower but still significant inflows,in Timor-Leste (7%), with only Papua New Guinea (2%) having relatively lower dependency on ODA.[3]

Remittances[4] are important to several PSIDS: Tonga and Samoa, at remittance inflows of 41% and 28% of Gross Domestic Product respectively, stand out as being in the top five remittance-dependent economies in the world, as a proportion of Gross National Income, based on 2023 data (IOM, u.d.). Rates in the Marshall Islands (12%), Vanuatu (12%) and Timor-Leste (10%) are also very high by international standards. High remittance rates are linked to high, ongoing rates of outmigration from PSIDS over some years; for example,two of every five Marshallese live in the United States.

People also migrate among island countries and territories in the Pacific, and from other world regions to PSIDS, including from such major Asian countries as India and Indonesia to Fiji and Papua New Guinea. This means that in-migration is a significant contributor to population increase in some states, as reported by the International Organization on Migration in 2025 (IOM, u.d.).[5] Behind the remittance statistics lies a dynamic demographic picture.

The structural constraints on SIDS, including their high debt burdens, lack of economic diversification, and high reliance on global supply chains for critical food and equipment, permeate and deeply affect their efforts to develop their economies more sustainably and with resilience in mind (United Nations, 1992; Bishop et al., 2024).

The human development context

Poverty may be measured in multiple ways, purely economic terms, or in more complex, multidimensional ways. Regardless of the measurement method, PSIDS have high levels of poverty, but development gains and development deficits vary considerably from one country to another and between urban and rural areas. This section reviews this data.

2 Where income inequality is measured by the Gini index: The Gini index measures the extent to which the distribution of income or consumption among individuals or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly equal distribution. A Gini index of 0 represents perfect equality, while an index of 100 implies perfect inequality. The World Bank classifies countries with a Gini index over 40 as highly unequal

3 Based on 2022 source data from World Bank (accessed 2025). **https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/DT.ODA.ODAT.GN.ZS?view=chart**

4 Remittances refer to money earned abroad and sent back ('remitted') to family or friends in the home country.

5 Data from the International Organization for Migration, Migration Data Portal (accessed 2025, references 2023 figures). **https://migrationdataportal.org/internationaldata**

If measured by the national poverty line – a measure of how much of people's income is required to purchase a typical basket of goods for essential living – 30% of Fijians, 24% of Tongans, 22% of Kiribati and Samoans, 16% of Vanuatuans, and 7% of Marshallese are in poverty. These are national averages; rates are considerably higher in rural than in urban areas in these countries (ADB, 2024; Key Indicators for the Asia-Pacific, 2024: 110). By this same measure, poverty is also high in Solomon Islands, where 13% of the population live below the national poverty line, concentrated in rural areas – although the latest data reported was long ago, in 2013 (ibid). Data is also exceptionally lacking for Papua New Guinea, where official statistics reported to the United Nations are from 2009. These showed that at the time, 40% of the population were living below the *international* poverty line of $2.15 per day (i.e. a global rather than national indicator) (ADB, 2024).

However, it is also important to go beyond income, economic assets and economic development alone to understand people's wellbeing across multiple dimensions such as their health, knowledge and access to essential development services. For this reason, the Sustainable Development Goal Target 1.2 (Indicator 1.2.2.) uses a global multidimensional poverty index to measure poverty across 10 indicators in three dimensions:

- health (nutrition, child mortality);
- education (years of schooling, school attendance); and
- 'standard of living' dimensions (a composite of indicators for access to cooking fuel, sanitation, drinking water, electricity, housing and assets) (Alkire et al., 2024).

Profiles of multidimensional poverty are quite country-specific and hard to generalise for the region. In Timor-Leste, half the population (47%, 2016) is living in multidimensional poverty by this measure. In this sense, they lack access to core aspects of development necessary to have a dignified life and to thrive; although, fortunately, rates of multidimensional poverty are falling quickly in the country (down from 70% in 2009) (UNDP and OPHI, 2024).

In both Tonga and Tuvalu, educational and health deficits play a comparatively large role in multidimensional poverty, as measured by the Multidimensional Poverty Index described above. In Fiji and Kiribati, a combination of poor health and poor standards of living contribute the largest share of multidimensional poverty. In Papua New Guinea, standard of living' dimension (referring to access to cooking fuel, sanitation, drinking water, electricity, housing and assets) contributes the larger part to the multidimensional poverty score (60%).

Furthermore, although they may not register as being 'multidimensionally poor' now, the proportion of people in SIDS who are vulnerable to falling into multidimensional poverty is higher than in non-SIDS countries. That is because SIDS are disproportionately exposed and vulnerable to external shocks, including climate shocks, which have been shown to push people into poverty (Panwar et al. 2024).

'The cumulative impacts of climate shocks, which are frequent in SIDS, lead to a deterioration in standards of living, limiting people's ability to endure future shocks and trapping them in cycles of poverty. A total of 20.7 million people are poor or vulnerable to falling into poverty in the 22 SIDS for which data is available. This represents one third of the population.'

(Panwar et al, 2024: 1).

Social protection can address development deficits, improve people's wellbeing and help them out of poverty. Social protection can include the provision of healthcare, disability work injury payments, pensions, cash transfers to low-income households, and maternity/parental pay. It can be provided by contributory or non-contributory schemes and can be designed to be triggered by shocks or offered routinely over the course of life events such as unemployment, injury, parenthood, and retirement.

Levels of social protection provided formally by governments to residents are highly variable in the region (ADB, 2024; Key Indicators for the Asia-Pacific, 2024: 111). They range from 100% coverage of the population with some type of formal social protection in the Cook Islands to 5% coverage in Tuvalu. There is also diversity across PSIDS in the degree to which state social protection is targeted to the poorest people (as measured by the national poverty line).

Beyond formal state systems, strong extended family networks and kinship bonds in Pacific island countries mean that people benefit from informal, culturally shaped social safety nets. Thus people's overall wellbeing is a complex web of many factors. This landscape of human development provides the essential context for understanding labour trends and working practices in the region, including people's ability to secure safe, healthy, sustainable ways of living and working.

Food security, including nutrition, as a key priority for Pacific governments

Health and nutrition deficits show up in different ways across the Pacific islands. In the west of the Pacific region, rates of malnutrition are alarmingly high, with malnutrition defined as lack of sufficient, nourishing food throughout the year, including for infants. By this definition, malnutrition rates stand at 28% of the population for PNG, 19% for Solomon Islands and 16% for Timor-Leste (2022 data in ADB, 2024: 112).

WorldFish found that in Solomon Islands, only 5.8% of women achieved minimum dietary diversity, meaning that most women have diets inadequate in micronutrients. WorldFish also found that 33% of children aged two to five years exhibited stunted growth (FAO, 2017). Timor-Leste has the third highest global rate of childhood stunting (greater than 50%, attributed to protein and micronutrient deficiencies); improved access to fish could make a significant difference (FAO, 2017).

Meanwhile, in the smaller PSIDS to the east of the region (Polynesia), 'official' rates of malnutrition – based on insufficient calories – are far lower but obesity rates are a serious public health concern. In these islands, traditionally, diets were healthy and nutritious, based on fish, leafy greens (normally grown in kitchen gardens) and tubers. However, these have been significantly supplanted by ultra-processed foods. The trend is less marked to date in the western islands of the region (Melanesia).

Rates of fish consumption are declining overall in the Pacific SIDS region and especially among urban residents (O'Meara et al., 2023). Although to some extent urban dwellers are substituting fresh seafood with canned fish (canned fish being more convenient), this is not a 'like for like' substitution in terms of nutrition. The shift reduces the diversity of fish and other aquatic species consumed, and so decreases the diversity of micronutrients in the diet. Development agencies suggest consuming a wide variety fish and aquatic foods would deliver more lean protein in Pacific diets, along with much-needed micronutrients in a form that are easily absorbed by the human body (FAO, 2023; O'Meara et al., 2023). In 2025, the top 10 highest rates of obesity in the world are all found in Pacific island nations or overseas territories. Arranged from highest to lowest, these are: American Samoa, Tonga, Nauru, Tokelau, Cook Islands, Niue, Tuvalu, Samoa, French Polynesia, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). Several Pacific states are in the next 10 most obese, including Marshall Islands and Kiribati (2024–25 data in World Obesity Database, u.d.).

Changing cultural tastes in diet are the driver of this phenomenon, with recent trends in environmental degradation exacerbating the trend. For example, excessive phosphate mining in Nauru in the 20th century caused widespread degradation and a reduction in gardening activity (Government of Nauru, 2022). Climate variability in the form of the El Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO) historically has an effect on marine and coastal conditions and consequently fisheries and aquaculture productivity. However, anthropogenic climate change, combined with fisheries management practices, now affect the distribution and abundance of fish and invertebrates (e.g. shellfish), and is projected to have further, potentially profound, impacts over the rest of the century.

Sustainable development interventions in the Pacific may benefit from addressing the context of poor nutrition in the region. Coupled with high levels of food export in all the small island nations in the region, food security in its different manifestations is a concern. Pacific island governments' Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) – their national climate plans – and National Adaptation Plans universally cite sovereign food security as a priority.

Some of the food security work underway in PSIDS focuses on small-scale agriculture and agroforestry for local food production. This is promising for islands with fertile volcanic soils, but has less potential on very small islands with poor, sandy and low-nutrient soils and limited freshwater, such as Kiribati, Nauru, Niue and the Marshall Islands. Emerging work at the regional level conducted by the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) examines the movement of fish species under various climate change scenarios and the implications for both local and national food security. This data is also relevant for projecting the capture of larger lucrative species, such as the various species of tuna, which tend to be destined for export markets and are seen as generators of foreign exchange (Key Informant Interviews, KII). The impacts of climate change on Pacific fisheries are further explored in Chapter 3.

Cultural values are core to people's wellbeing and are linked to coastal-marine environments

Indigenous Pacific islanders deeply value their diverse cultural traditions, which are intrinsically tied to the coastal-marine environments that dominate their small land and huge ocean territories.

The framing of development programming around 'blue economies' with its emphasis on economic activity is a conceptual framing that is familiar to global development and financial institutions. However, if a purely economic lens is imposed on engagement with Indigenous Pacific island people and societies, it may entirely miss the cultural significance of the coastal-marine environment to people's identity and wellbeing.

The relocation of communities from low-lying coastal areas in response to the inundation associated with sea-level rise, for example, is an exceptionally sensitive issue in the region (Key Informant Interviews; McNamara and Des Combes, 2015). This is not because of the economic issues implicated in relocation per se, but because of communities' multifaceted cultural connections to ancestral territories.

This includes the importance of burial sites to extended families, and the way that key environmental features (such as trees, lagoons, rock formations, etc) and environmental assets (e.g. certain wild species) are linked to oral storytelling traditions and to handicraft products such as shell-based personal adornments associated with beauty, belonging and social status.

'Migration and displacement erode family and kinship networks, while the changing natural resource base means that customary subsistence farming and fishing are less viable. Oral traditions (such as songs and dances) and local knowledge (such as the use of flora and fauna as weather indicators) may not be passed down, making it more difficult for future generations to adopt Pacific ways of living' (Steadman et al., 2022: 10).

Non-economic losses may have a disproportionate impact on certain groups, such as women, because of social norms that mean one social group is more intrinsically reliant on a natural resource than another. For example, a UNFCCC technical report on non-economic losses highlights how Vanuatuan women 'rely on the coral, sea grass and mangrove ecosystems for their livelihoods, and for spiritual, customary and social protection purposes' (UNFCCC, 2024: 15).

In summary, climate-induced displacement and/or the fast-encroaching impacts of climate change and environmental degradation may sever communities' links between the natural environment, and their culture, identity and sense of belonging. These risks and losses are of profound significance to people of the region: the cultural assets and values described do not generally fit into conventional economic development models. Development programme managers from outside the target communities and countries should be highly attentive and led by community sensibilities.

McNamara et al. (2021) found that in the context of Pacific Small Island States, people affected by non-economic losses strongly value education and training that helps them anticipate and reduce the risk of losses and adapt to them. This includes training in community-led coastal and marine resource protection, which imparts a sense of agency rather than passive victimhood (McNamara et al., 2021; UNFCCC, 2024: 21).

In this regard, Vanuatu's proactive approach to embedding assessment of non-economic loss and damage into its climate and development policies and strategies is seen as a model for other PSIDS and countries to follow (UNFCCC, 2024).

The climate and environmental context

Data collection and monitoring over time is a challenge for understanding environmental trends over the vast and diverse Pacific island region. A helpful picture of status and trends for multiple indicators of environmental health is provided by the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme. Its *State of Environment and Conservation in the Pacific Islands* (SPREP, 2020) found:

- Coastal-marine environmental quality as measured by wetlands, mangrove and seagrass cover is given 'fair' status and a deteriorating trend, on the basis of threats from construction and hard coastal development.
- Live coral cover as a measure of marine ecosystem health is evaluated as 'poor to fair' status and a deteriorating trend in the region, although with inadequate data sampling and poor data confidence. The principal threats to live coral are given as climate change and disaster (natural hazard) events.
- Commercial pelagic species are tracked carefully, with tuna species as a proxy, because of their importance for economies and food security. They are evaluated as being in 'good' status with a 'stable' condition. There is more nuance behind this headline figure, as discussed later in this report.
- By contrast, inshore fish mass is assessed as 'poor to fair' status with a mixed trend and poor data availability.
- Marine plastic pollution as measured by the percentage of plastic in waste audits, including beach clean-ups, is assessed as 'fair to poor' status with a 'mixed' trend. Plastic recycling is not financially viable at small island scales, which provides a challenge; however, Pacific island countries are increasingly turning to banning single use plastics.
- Lagoon water quality in coastal environments, using faecal bacteria as a proxy for contamination, finds 'poor to fair' status and a mixed trend.
- Alien and invasive species (whether marine, coastal or terrestrial) pose a grave threat to biodiversity in Pacific islands. Measures of invasive species under management or eradicated are in 'poor to fair' status with a mixed trend, and the indicator for priority sites with invasive species managed in 'poor' status and 'deteriorating', highlighting the need for more investment in these areas.
- Marine ecosystem protection is a political priority for Pacific leaders and the status is measured by the percentage of a country's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) under protection. Marine Protected Area coverage is found to be 'fair to good' with an 'improving' trend; and Pacific island nations are beginning to assess the effectiveness of their protected area management, too.

Climate change is an urgent preoccupation for Pacific leaders. Scientists have observed increases in temperature of 0.18°C per decade (over the period 1961–2011) in the tropical western Pacific (Gutiérrez, 2021). There is scientific uncertainty as to how this warming trend interacts with the natural cycles of El Niño–Southern Oscillation that lead to periods of warmer or cooler than average temperatures in association with El Niño and La Niña events respectively (ibid).

International efforts to halt global warming are off track, meaning that a range of temperature projections and climate change impacts is possible this century. Furthermore, projections for changes in rainfall vary from one part of the Pacific region to another.

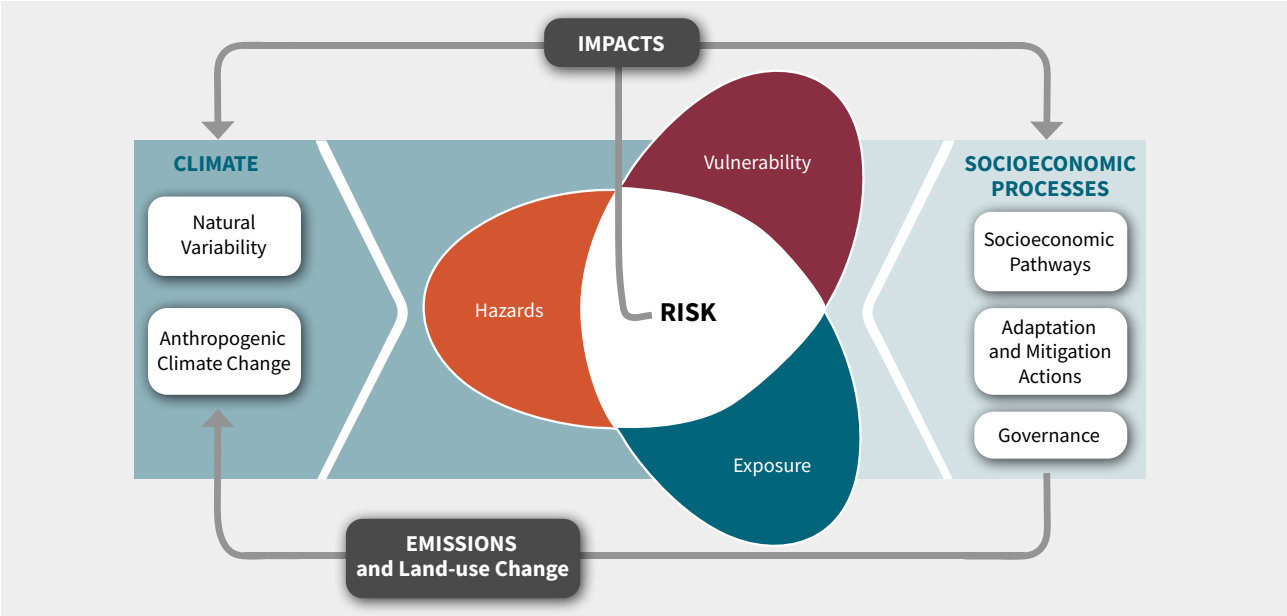
The IPCC (Gutiérrez, 2021) reports that the southern subtropical and eastern Pacific Ocean will see reductions in rainfall this century. Meanwhile, parts of the Western Pacific are projected to experience increased rainfall, and the equatorial Pacific islands (which includes many of the SIDS discussed in this report) could even see significant increases in rainfall of up to 55% under a mid-high warming scenario by end-century, relative to 1986–2005 (Gutiérrez, 2021). Specific climate outlooks for individual Pacific Island countries are published by the Regional Climate Consortium for Asia and the Pacific (RCCAP, 2021).

Sea level rise presents an existential threat to atoll nations in the Pacific region, such as Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, and Tuvalu, whose leaders are considering long term emigration scenarios for their people. Localities in other PSIDS are also affected by severe coastal erosion and saltwater inundation: with climate-related internal relocations attempted or underway in the Solomon Islands and Fiji, for example.

When it comes to climate resilience, SPREP developed a regional Climate Preparedness Scorecard, which provides some glimmers of hope in an otherwise sobering picture (SPREP, 2020). Although the region is under critical threat of rising sea levels and increasing land and ocean temxaperatures, at least, SPREP's indicators of funding for climate change adaptation in the region, including ecosystem-based adaptation, show an upward trend.

Development plans and programmes in Pacific SIDS must identify the specific elements of **exposure** and **vulnerability** faced by different social and economic groups, as well as the changing intensity and frequency of climate and environmental **hazards**, so that interventions adequately address the root causes of **risk** (see Figure 1). Risk-informed development assures a more sustainable and adaptive development pathway.

Figure 1: AR5 summary for policy makers



Source: IPCC (2014) AR5 Summary for Policy Makers

Methodology

The methodology for this review was to structure the report in three parts following the standard process adopted by ODI Global for rapid evidence reviews (Hagen-Zanker and Mallett, 2013). It began with a keyword search on Google Scholar.

The initial keyword search strings were: Gender equality AND Pacific; Women's rights AND Pacific; Women's economic empowerment AND Pacific; Regional gender policy AND Pacific; Violence against children AND Pacific; Labour abuse AND Pacific; Human trafficking AND Pacific; Child rights AND Pacific. We set the parameters to capture all academic articles, book chapters and PhD theses and to focus on the past 20 years; we then pivoted to prioritise documents from the past decade where possible, but noted that many of the most relevant results were 10–20 years old.

From this, we pursued a snowball method, a process that 'involves actively seeking advice on relevant publications in a particular field, or on a particular topic from key experts – which will then be reviewed – and subsequently looking at the reference lists of those publications' (Hagen-Zanker and Mallett, 2013: 10). We interviewed or consulted informally in person and by email with a small number of Pacific experts working in gender and social inclusion (see Acknowledgments for named individuals). We also took in specific suggestions and recommendations made by expert reviewers on two earlier drafts of this paper. The paper was significantly informed by the Wilton Park event and related papers on Children in a Changing Climate (2024), which had significant representation from Pacific youth, feminist and Indigenous People's organisations; however, the materials from that event were shared under Chatham House rules and the authors cannot cite specific speakers and contributors directly.

Further, the authors drew on their own collective 10+ years of working with actors in the Pacific region and following up key reference documents, policy documents and grey literature to which they had access. This incorporated, within the limited timeframe available, 'relevant material [that] is often located outside the orthodox peer review channels (that is, academic databases, journals). Failing to incorporate a way of retrieving this material into the search strategy means you are unlikely to capture all available research – in particular, research referred to as grey literature, such as working papers, concept notes, donor reports, policy documents and briefings' (Hagen-Zanker and Mallett, 2013: 11).

Samoan woman harvesting coconuts. Image by Simon from Pixabay

2 Social inequalities make some people more vulnerable

Governance (policies, regulations, economic incentives), operations and management, and social behaviours can reduce the exposure and vulnerability of different groups of people to climate and environmental hazards. Governance, operations and management can also *increase* people's vulnerability if it is 'blind' to gender and social inequities. For this reason, blue economy programmes must address GEDSI adequately in **situational analysis, programme design, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and learning**. Without doing so, development programmes risk deepening inequities, 'maladapting' to climate and environmental change, and causing harm.

Key questions addressed in this chapter include:

- What data is available in the Pacific region that may be used for gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) analysis for sustainable blue economy development, and what are the data gaps?
- What are specific risks to the multidimensional development and wellbeing of specific groups of people in the blue economy, including women, children, people living with disabilities, and LGBTQI+ people?
- How should programme managers use existing guidance to address GEDSI in all stages of the programme cycle and increase resilience for all groups of people?
- Who are the key stakeholders to engage on GEDSI and why? What work is already being done to address poverty and vulnerability and empower groups?
- What are the key issues in terms of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH) risks in PSIDS, flagged through GEDSI analysis?
- Who are the key stakeholders to engage on SEAH and why?
- What data is available in the PSIDS region that may be used to understand SEAH?

Box 1: Key concepts in gender equality, disability and social inclusion

Gender equality, disability and social inclusion comprises three closely related and equally important concepts:

- **Gender equality** aims to remove the unequal power relations between different gender identities in the pursuit of equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities for all.
- **Disability inclusion** is the process of ensuring the meaningful participation in society of persons with disabilities in all their diversity and ensuring the promotion and mainstreaming of their rights.
- **Social inclusion** is the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups participate in society, improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged on the basis of their identity.

All new UK International Climate Finance (ICF) programmes must be 'GEDSI empowering' at a minimum. They should consider the inclusion and empowerment of people with disabilities in their design and delivery. Detailed guidance is available in the ICF Guidance Note for Delivery Partners.

Source: UK International Climate Finance Guidance Note for Delivery Partners: Integration of Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (May 2025) **https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-international-climate-finance-icf-gender-equality-disability-and-social-inclusion-guidance**

Poverty: A foremost driver of vulnerability to climate and environmental shocks in the Pacific

Poverty is a foremost driver of vulnerability to climate and environmental shocks in the region. While it is the case that some islands are inherently more exposed to hazards than others, some groups of people are more socially and economically vulnerable than others. For example, central Pacific SIDS such as Vanuatu and Fiji are in the cyclone belt and highly exposed to tropical storms, but certain groups of people are *particularly exposed and vulnerable*, such as communities living in precarious housing very close to coastlines or on flood plains, or workers working offshore.

Discriminatory social norms create further vulnerabilities for certain groups of people during and after environment-related events. For instance, if communities are evacuated to storm shelters, women and girls and/or identifiably LGBTQI+ people are likely to be at higher risk of SEAH if safeguards are missing. People living with disability may be less able to access early warning systems and less able to access support to evacuate. People's physiological characteristics in some cases make them more vulnerable to hazards; for example, the elderly, pregnant women, and unborn babies and small infants are particularly at risk of health complications from heatwaves.

Economic poverty and discriminatory social norms may reduce people's resilience and impede their recovery from disasters (Bangalore et al., 2017). For example, low-income households with few economic assets and an inability to secure insurance are more likely to be left destitute if their dwellings and livelihood assets, such as boats, are destroyed. As discussed earlier, state social protection systems have poor and fragmented coverage in this region, apart from in Timor-Leste, and social protection systems tend to register 'heads of household'; this in most cases defaults to a man. There is inadequate state funding or international finance for disaster preparedness or transformational adaptation of a scale that would adapt to current high levels of risk (Key Informant Interviews). Poverty is also a driver of exploitative and abusive labour relations in the tourism and fisheries industries throughout the Pacific, a topic taken up in more detail in Chapter 4. Where people have less economic security and control or 'agency' over their lives, their overall wellbeing is affected, and they have fewer options to respond to the impacts of climate and environmental shocks.

Gender inequality: A pressing concern for the Pacific region

Inequality between men and women is an issue of significant concern to women and feminist leaders in the region. Gender relations, being a 'social construct', are intrinsically shaped by evolving, dynamic cultural factors and any understanding of female–male relations must be understood and interpreted through a distinct local, national and regional lens, and not through a Western lens. The following section reviews key considerations, concerns and recommendations from women's advocates in the Pacific region. The first and most important thing to stress about integrating gender into programming is that it must be led by national or regional specialists who are highly attuned to the dynamic cultural context.

Furthermore, gender identities are construed very differently in many areas of the Pacific than in the West, and a binary female/male approach to development issues is not culturally appropriate. Box 2 focuses explicitly on gender identity and nomenclature, with Western terms such as 'transgender', 'intersex' and 'non binary' understood and referred to differently in the Pacific. The next section looks separately at considerations for people with diverse expressions of gender and sexual orientation in PSIDS.

Box 2: Diverse gender expression and terminology in Pacific culture

Binary definitions of women and girls, boys and men are becoming outdated across the world, as diverse forms of gender-fluid and non-binary gender expression become more accepted and supported in many countries and contexts.

In fact, in Pacific culture, fluid gender identities have a centuries-long history and strong presence in contemporary society. Although in 'Western' and 'Westernised' societies such as the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, the term LGBTQI+ (and variations thereof), standing for 'lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and other identities' is in common use, this terminology is incompatible with the Pacific cultural context. Although we do use the Western term LGBTQI+ in this report, which is primarily aimed at Western readers, it is important to realise that the acronym and concept behind it are seen as a foreign construct in Pacific islands. An alternative, Pacific culturally rooted 'rainbow terminology' has been developed in the region and is more compatible.

'MVPFAFF+ is an acronym developed by Phylesha Brown-Acton to encompass the diverse gender and sexuality expressions and roles across Pacific cultures. The acronym stands for mahu, vakasalewa, palopa, fa'afafine, akavai'ne, fakaleiti (leiti), fakafifine, and more. Their meanings are best understood within their cultural context and may mean something different to each person. The following terms do not have a Western equivalent, but are loosely translated to mean 'in the manner of a woman':

- Fa'afafine (Samoa)
- Mahu (Tahiti/Hawaii)
- Vaka se lewa lewa (Fiji)
- Palopa (Papua New Guinea)
- Akava'ine (Cook Islands)
- Fakaleiti/leiti (Tonga)
- Fakafifine (Niue)
- Pinapinaaine/Binapinaaine (Tuvalu and Kiribati)
- Rae rae (Tahiti)
- Haka huahine (Tokelau)
- These terms are loosely translated to mean 'in the manner of a man':
- Fa'atama/Fa'afatama, 'Rogers' (Samoa)
- Māhūkāne (Hawai'i)
- Binabinamane (Kiribati)'

Source: Rainbow terminology by InsideOUT Kōaro (Web Page). Updated April 2023. **https://insideout.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/InsideOUT-rainbow-terminology-2023.pdf**

A great diversity of cultures and gender norms

It is a myth that there is one 'Pacific culture' or that there are overarching similarities across islands. PSIDS may have a tendency to 'act regionally' and, when in international forums, to celebrate the importance of their Indigenous cultures. However, this should not be misconstrued as uniformity. In reality, Pacific cultures are highly diverse, especially with regard to the status of women and their role and influence in decision-making. The Pacific Community's gender team,

which works to mainstream gender in development and support women's leadership,[6] describes this diversity as follows:

> *'In some Pacific island countries, women hold high socio-cultural standing linked to family status or matrilineal cultural structures. They are a minority in the Pacific, which is a highly diverse region where not all women experience cultural privilege. In many cultures in the region, women have limited opportunities and low social status'*
>
> *(SPC, 2023: 3).*

Specific political-cultural characteristics shape women's rights and their development progress from one island state and ethnic group to another. In Tonga, traditional authorities and practices have excluded women from land and natural resource tenure, which national women's and youth movements consider to be an obstacle to sustainable development (Key Informant Interview). Tonga differs in many ways from its neighbours, being a constitutional monarchy and the only Pacific territory that was not colonised by foreign powers. Almost all land is owned by the monarchy. A 1875 law, never updated, explicitly bars women from inheriting the ownership or use rights of land (Government of Tonga, 2019: 3–4; Talanoa, 2024).

In Tuvalu, traditional governance and cultural systems 'create challenges to the advancement of women and gender equality because of their focus on the rights of groups over the rights of individuals. Hierarchical social systems also disadvantage particular groups of women in relation to others and social norms that reinforce disadvantages are strong in rural communities' (Siegele, Key Informant Interview).

In Vanuatu – specifically in western Santo island – the Santo Sunset Environmental Network documents how community women are joining forces across villages to empower each other to take leadership roles in locally led climate change adaptation (CDKN and GCA, 2023: Chapter 6). Culturally, it is unusual for young women to be allowed to leave their community for a training or learning event. Local chiefs and traditional authorities have placed their trust in the Santo Sunset Environmental Network, which has enabled a new level of communication and coordination among women and girls and their more active roles as environmental defenders.

Key regional trends for gender (in)equality

Notwithstanding PSIDS' cultural richness and diversity, risks and needs assessments typically reveal a complex web of interconnected issues that constrain women's participation in and equitable benefit from development initiatives in the Pacific region. In overview, this range of development gaps and gender-specific risks may be summarised as:

6 The Pacific Community – formerly called the South Pacific Commission – has 27 member countries and territories. **https://www.spc.int/our-members/** The proactive efforts of the Pacific Community to support women's leadership, described here, refer to activities in the 22 small island countries and territories; the other five members are developed countries that provide investment – Australia, New Zealand, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

- challenges relating to personal safety and protection issues, and, in connection with this, limits on women's mobility;
- sexual and gender-based violence, including a surge in such incidents during extreme environmental and climate events, such as the aftermath of cyclones such as Cyclone Winston in 2015;
- deficits in meeting women's sanitation needs, sexual and reproductive rights;
- restricted income-generation capabilities (Government of Fiji, 2018) and lack of recognition of women's contributions to food and nutritional security and economic development;
- constraints on women's land and natural resources tenure in many Pacific contexts (Key Informants); and
- the absence of women from political/collective decision-making at all levels.

Among key indicators of women's and girls' wellbeing are adolescent birth rates, which are extremely high in some PSIDS (Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Marshall Islands) and very high in others (Cook Islands, Kiribati, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste). This correlates with low levels of access to modern healthcare services by the people of PSIDS and Timor-Leste – at only about half the population of all these island states (less for PNG, where there is only 30% access); and by extension, lack of access to modern contraceptive methods (ADB, 2024: 118).

Concerning women in public leadership roles, there is a distinct difference between Timor-Leste, where women's leadership is relatively high by international standards, and the PSIDS islands of Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia, where women's occupation of managerial roles and their proportion of seats in national parliaments is small.

Table 1: Overview of women's participation in political and economic leadership

Country	Percentage of women in national parliamentary seats	Percentage of women in managerial positions
Timor-Leste	29%	40%
Fiji	9%	11%
Kiribati	4%	7%
Marshall Islands	3%	6%
PNG	1%	2%
Vanuatu	4%	2%
Pacific Islands as a whole (excludes Timor-Leste)	2.5%	7%

A different index, the Gender Inequality Index (GII), measures reproductive health, political empowerment and labour market participation. Few Pacific island states are managing to report for these statistics, meaning that the picture is highly fragmented. That said, some key points emerge, reinforcing earlier observations:

- Vanuatu is ranked lowest (146th out of 146 surveyed) in the world for women's political leadership by the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Index (2024). Fiji is ranked 140th out of 146.

- Levels of informal employment are high, although they are not markedly different for women than for men, but are instead a workforce-wide phenomenon. Informality brings its own risks and vulnerabilities, as discussed in Chapter 3.
- Surprisingly, given the above picture, there is a 1:1 parity for Vanuatuan women and men in technical and professional work (WEF, 2024), meaning that it is possible to find gender balance among professional development programme staff. Furthermore, women are the national leaders of some PSIDS, namely, President Hilda Cathy Heine of Marshall Islands and Fiame Naomi Mata'afa, Prime Minister of Samoa, showing that women can make it to the very top. However, any such semblance of equality should not be taken as representative of gender equality in the population at large, and particularly not in the low-paid and informal workforce and in rural areas.
- Key informants also explained that some women are propelled to higher-status political and professional positions because they come from higher-status families to begin with. In many Pacific cultures, holding high family status comes with very significant responsibility to look after the welfare of one's kinsfolk – a distinction that is not captured by international statistics on social equality.
- Women's work is vastly under-recognised in official statistics. It is well known that women are economically active in farming and fishing, craft making and market trading (Key Informant Interviews), as well as in unpaid care of dependents, but their 'labour force participation rate' is low. In Fiji, for instance, only half of women are counted as being economically active (WEF, 2024).

Irrespective of inherited social status, many Pacific women from diverse backgrounds are choosing to shift from traditional domestic roles and informal sector employment to workplaces and decision-making positions previously dominated by men (SPC, 2023). This includes development programmes to nurture women's formal employment as entrepreneurs, including in export sectors, to train women to become technicians and businesspeople in such expanding, climate-smart industries as solar power. Women are also increasing their participation in such vocations as police and the military (SPC, 2023:3).

Another hot topic for discussion in the region is the payment of bride price. Shell money and cultural artefacts were used traditionally in parts of the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and Tuvalu for paying the 'bride price' from a groom's to a bride's family upon marriage, although this practice is beginning to be replaced by the exchange of cash and modern goods. This, in turn, has opened new debates about women's status and empowerment in Pacific society, with differing views on whether or not bride price payments, in artefacts or cash, make women seem 'owned' by their husbands and more vulnerable to control (SPC, 2023: 6-7). The payment of bride price is still widespread in Timor-Leste as well, and its payment is considered a factor in trapping women in difficult, even harmful, marriages (Almeide e Silva 2021).

In conclusion, the Pacific offers a highly complex cultural landscape, which requires the utmost sensitivity to navigate in operational-programmatic terms. Programmatic guidance for further resources and partnerships is provided in the boxes below.

Key sources of data on gender equality in the Pacific

The Pacific Gender Statistics Dashboard, hosted by the Pacific Community, is a key source of information. It offers a comprehensive overview of gender-related indicators and metrics in the region. **Gender Dashboard – Pacific Data Hub (https://stats.pacificdata.org/)**.

The Dashboard provides the most up-to-date reporting from PSIDS' governments about their attainment of key Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) targets, such as the indicators under SDG: Gender equality.

Toksave **https://www.toksavepacificgender.net/** is a portal providing access to gender research from across the Pacific region.

Key sources of guidance for GEDSI through the programme cycle

Programme interventions in the blue economies of PSIDS must be based on thorough situation analyses, bespoke to each project and its locations. These should assess the specific forms of capabilities and vulnerabilities available to the different groups of people working and living there.

It is vital to employ local and national GEDSI experts to guide this assessment and project-specific recommendations and design elements, in order to embed appropriate, ambitious GEDSI objectives and performance indicators into programming. That said, programme managers should also ensure that GEDSI awareness is fully mainstreamed in their teams' ethic and working approach.

Programmes funded by UK Official Development Assistance (ODA) and climate finance are expected to follow the *How to Guidance Note on Gender Equality and Social Inclusion* developed by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (2023).

Further useful guidance is provided by the Checklist for Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion Across Economic Development Programmes (2025). **https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/checklist-for-gender-equality-disability-and-social-inclusion-gedsi-across-fcdo-programmes**

Guidance materials framed by donors and using a Western world view, cannot be directly transposed to a PSIDS operating context: that is why it is important to work with local and national counterparts and to be led by their sensitivity to PSIDS contexts. A useful primer to orientate programme managers and teams on this journey is: '**Myths about gender equality in the Pacific**' by Pacific Women Lead (SPC, 2023).

Violence against women

The Pacific region has the highest reported rates of gender-based violence in the world. Gender-based violence (GBV) includes physical violence and rape as well as psychologically coercive and controlling behaviours. Globally, gender-based violence has been dubbed a silent pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021).

The Pacific region's rates of gender-based violence are described in Figure 2 and Table 2. These figures should be understood in the context that GBV is known to be widely underreported:

- The lifetime prevalence of physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence among ever-married/partnered women aged 15–49 years. This was highest in the world for the 'Least Developed Countries', at 37% (UI 33%–42%), and in the three subregions of Oceania: Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia.
- The prevalence of this type of violence among ever-married/partnered women in the past 12 months. In the world, these figures were also reported to be highest among the 'Least Developed Countries (22%, UI 19%–26%) and in the three subregions of Oceania: Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia (WHO, 2021: XIII).

It should also be noted that gender-based violence and intimate partner violence have largely overlapping criteria but somewhat different technical definitions. From a conceptual and programme safeguarding perspective, gender-based violence should be understood as a form of harm and abuse that may be suffered by men as well as women. Men who are identifiably LGBTQI+ and men perceived to be more feminine may be more at risk of violence than other men. This is particularly the case in hyper-masculinised working and living environments, such as some offshore work environments, including shipping. It can be particularly traumatic and marginalising for male sufferers of sexual violence if their experiences are not recognised or validated. Intimate partner violence is a sub-category of gender-based violence (GBV), because GBV may be meted out by family members, community members and/or strangers, not only by intimate partners. In official statistics as presented below, the focus is on the subset of GBV that is intimate partner violence, and focuses only on violence suffered by women. There are two indicators which come from the World Health Organistion (WHO, 2021) that are used to measure GBV:

The literature and Key Informant Interviews both identify that cultural norms permit or turn a blind eye to violence against women, both at a baseline level and in flare-ups of GBV that are a default behaviour in times of stress and conflict.

For example, UNIFEM Pacific (2010) documents the prevalence of GBV in Papua New Guinea in connection with 'magic and sorcery' beliefs and rituals. Rape and sexual violence are used as 'a weapon of revenge in family and community conflicts' - practices that surge when external shocks occur, such as population displacements.

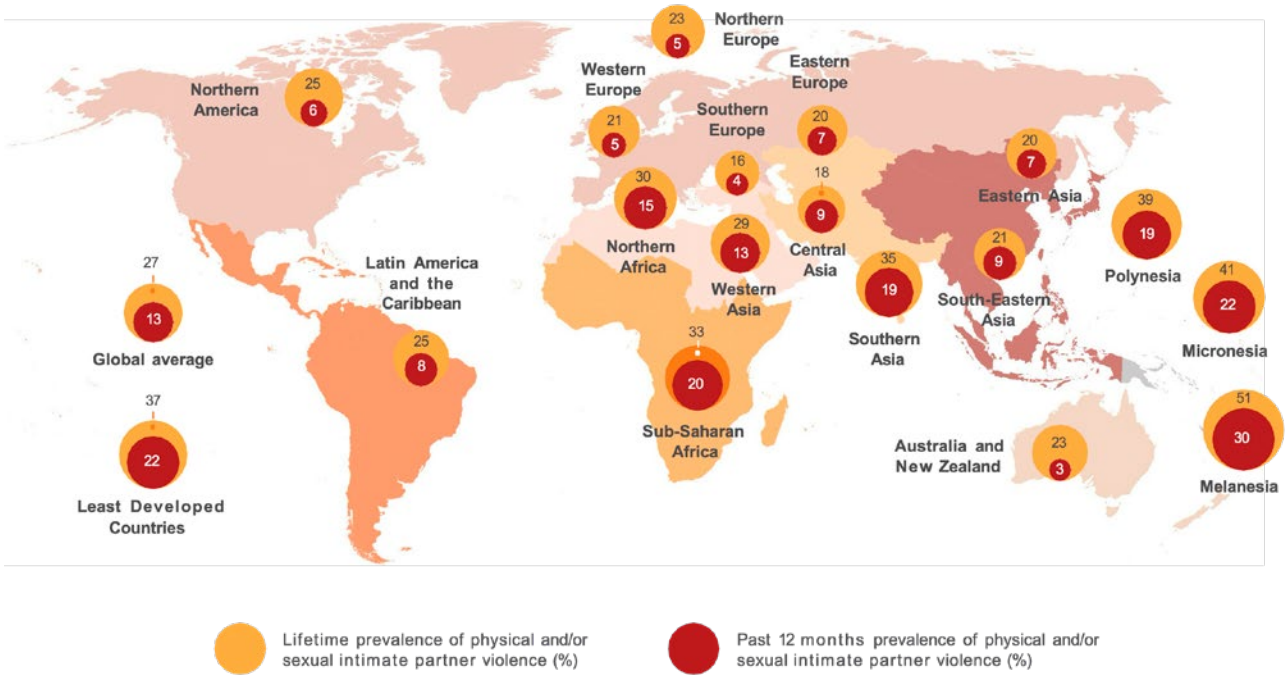
It is further noted that cultural norms across PSIDS may restrict expectations about women's participation in collective activities, including decision-making forums outside the home (except for women who inherit high-ranking authority such as chieftaincies in their traditional cultures). "Culture is so important to us as Pacific Islanders; even if we ask women to participate, the culture may tell her 'no'," said one interviewee from a PSIDS government department. Such norms prevent women from representing their needs and concerns in development processes.

As a consequence, efforts to stamp out gender-based violence and to improve gender equality must be fronted by gender equality champions who are from the region – and, if possible, from the country or locality concerned. Otherwise, any efforts seen as 'imposition' of norms and practices from the outside may trigger a backlash (UNICEF 2017). And again, the diversity of cultures across this extraordinary region must be emphasised: while the discussion here flags issues of possible concern, tailored analyses and responses are required for every context.

The high reported levels of GBV in the Pacific have attracted a concerted, multi-year, multi-agency effort to tackle it. Priorities for those engaged in this work are recognising the extent of the violence. Naming it and calling out its unacceptability are necessary to affect a deep shift in attitudes and behavioural norms:

> *"While domestic violence is often seen as a private matter in almost all Pacific Island countries, it is a specific crime punishable by law and needs the collective action of everyone (family, community, government) to end it."*
>
> *(SPC 2023: 5).*

Figure 2: Lifetime prevalence of intimate partner violence by region



Source: WHO, 2021: XIII

Country prevalence estimates of lifetime and past 12 months physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence (IPV) among ever married/partnered women aged 15–49 years, 2018

Table 2: Intimate partner violence in Pacific SIDS

Country	Lifetime IPV estimate (%)	Past 12 months IPV estimate (%)
Melanesia		
Fiji	52%	23%
Papua New Guinea	51%	31%
Solomon Islands	50%	28%
Vanuatu	47%	29%
Micronesia		
Federated States of Micronesia	35%	21%
Kiribati	53%	25%
Marshall Islands	38%	19%
Nauru	43%	20%
Palau	31%	14%
Polynesia		
Cook Islands	33%	14%
Samoa	40%	18%
Tonga	37%	17%
Tuvalu	39%	20%
For comparative purposes		
Global average	27%	13%

Lifetime data from WHO (2021), Annex 6. **Statistical Annex.pdf https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/products/worldswomen/annex_tables/Table6Ato6E.pdf**
From the Violence Against Women Prevalence Estimates by WHO (2018) **Violence Against Women Prevalence Estimates https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240022256**
This data may also be viewed on Pacific Gender Dashboard **https://stats.pacificdata.org/**

Although Timor-Leste is not included in these reported statistics, older data shows a similar, sobering profile. Gender inequalities in development and GBV are pronounced in the country–according to the UN Spotlight Initiative: "The 2009–2010 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) shows that more than a third (38%) of women in Timor-Leste have experienced physical violence during their adult lives. Other studies show that 59% of women aged 15-49 have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence at least once in their lives" (Almeida e Silva, 2021: 9).

Climate hazards as amplifiers of gender inequality and gender-based violence

In PSIDS, there is a growing evidence base of how climate hazards (in general) have generated discriminatory social responses that disproportionately affect women and children. A study by McLeod et al. (2018) captured women's testimony that droughts in their islands are associated with a peak in gender-based violence and violence against children, for the following reasons:

- The scarcity of water for household use including in cooking, laundry and cleaning provokes anger and aggression among husbands and male family members.
- Girls have to walk further to access water for households, making them more exposed and vulnerable to sexual and physical harassment (evidence from Chuuk in FSM and the Marshall Islands, cited in McLeod et al., 2018).

Furthermore, droughts can reduce water availability to the extent that plumbing cannot work in schools and schools have to shut. This has deleterious effects on children, in real time and with regard to lasting effects over their life cycle (ibid).

Best practice approaches to combatting gender-based violence

Sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH) is defined by the Common Approach to SEAH (CAPSEAH) as: 'three unacceptable abuses that are rooted in power imbalances and often linked to inequality, notably gender inequality. Victim-survivors of SEAH usually have less power or are more marginalised than the perpetrators for various reasons. Women and girls are most often affected. The individual terms are commonly defined as:

- **Sexual Exploitation (SE):** Any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power or trust for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another. For example, coercing individuals into engaging in sexual activities in exchange for aid, services, employment opportunities, or other benefits.
- **Sexual Abuse (SA):** Actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions. This includes sexual assault, rape, molestation, and other forms of non-consensual sexual activity.

Best practice approaches to combatting gender-based violence (continued)

- **Sexual Harassment (SH):** A range of unacceptable and unwelcome behaviours and practices of a sexual nature that may include, but are not limited to, sexual suggestions or demands, requests for 'sexual favours', sexual, verbal or physical conduct, or gestures that are or might reasonably be perceived as offensive or humiliating. This includes jokes, comments or messages of a sexual nature; suggestive looks, staring or leering; and the display or circulation of pornographic material. It is sometimes used to describe behaviour in a work environment but can also occur in communities and public spaces' (www.capseah.org).

Norm shifting is possible through ongoing campaigning and deliberative dialogue. In the words of one key informant, gender-based violence needs to be named and brought out of the shadows. While sustainable blue economy programme managers may not consider it within their remit to provide material support measures to affected women, nevertheless, development programmes can create an environment that begins to influence norms toward psychological and physical respect of all persons. For example, development programmes can signpost to support services and normalise conversations about women's human rights, even if they are not providing direct protection services themselves.

At project level, the involvement of women's groups from the locality or SIDS in question is imperative to navigate the cultural context of GBV. Local women's groups and gender champions are best placed to define strategies to seek to eliminate GBV without provoking a backlash. This is particularly important given the cultural embeddedness of behaviours and the deep affinity for traditional and Indigenous cultures among Pacific Islanders.

Resources and partner organisations on ending gender-based violence

The Pacific Community's Social Development Division has several relevant teams whose work, datasets and publications pertain directly to this agenda:

RRRT is the Human Rights Programme of the Pacific Community that works to provide technical assistance and training to the 22 Pacific island member countries and territories of the Community, to increase the observance of international human rights standards. **https://pacificdata.org/data/organization/about/spc-rrrt**

The RRRT, together with Pacific Women Lead Team **https://pacificdata.org/data/organization/pacific-women-lead** have created a range of resources that frame gender equality and the imperative to stamp out gender-based violence. They take care to embed the recognition and enforcement of women's human rights in the context of Pacific cultures' dynamism and values. Thus, their resources and advice are particularly helpful in 'making the case' for gender equality and freedom from violence.

Resources and partner organisations on ending gender-based violence (continued)

Other leading national and regional organisations that provide useful resources and could be sources of advice and partnership are:

- The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC) **https://www.fijiwomen.com/**
- Vanuatu Women's Centre **https://www.vanuatuwomenscentre.org/**
- Family and Sexual Violence Action Committee, Papua New Guinea **https://inapng.com/about-fsvac/**

Initatives for gender equality in the region

There are several well-established organisations and networks at the local and regional level in the Pacific region, dedicated to combatting violence and addressing the security, quality of life and multidimensional development of women and children. Such initiatives have been effective in empowering women leaders from the region and attracting international funding for bringing local concerns into national and global forums, including the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) annual meetings (Key Informant Interviews).

This ecosystem of Pacific gender actors, evidence and action means that there are multiple touch-points for new development programmes. These can act as sources of information and potential partnerships (see boxes on pages 23–24, below).

Pacific women's networks have also achieved much in reflecting on the empowerment of women and girls through climate action. One study surveyed Pacific women leaders in nature conservation, environment and development in seven islands of the region (McLeod et al., 2018) to ascertain their views on how best to tackle gender inequality. The islands concerned were the Marshall Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, and others from the Federated States of Micronesia – Yap, Kosrae, Chuuk, and Pohnpei. From this study, women leaders identified the following priorities to support climate change adaptation:

- 'increased recognition for the importance of **traditional knowledge**;
- greater support for local women's groups, including strategic planning and training to access climate **finance** mechanisms; and
- climate policies that consider alternative metrics for women's empowerment and inclusion, formalise women's **land rights**, and provide land for climate refugees' (McLeod et al., 2018: 1).

An overall conclusion is that governmental commitments to uphold the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) can be leveraged to incorporate more gender-responsive and women-empowering approaches through and across all forms of climate action.

Violence against children

There is a significant overlap between gender-based violence and violence against children, because much child abuse is sexual in nature and targeted at girls (UNIFEM Pacific, 2010: ii). In Fiji specifically:

> 'Many incidents of sexual violence involve young girls: one study found that 30% of female rape victims were 11–15 years. Children who are billeted with their extended family are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse, e.g. children from outer islands sent to live in urban centres to complete secondary education. Sexual exploitation of children exists in Fiji, including prostitution, sex tourism and pornography' (UNIFEM Pacific 2010: 3).

- Similar trends are experienced in neighbouring Pacific states. Sufferers of GBV are likely to know the perpetrator – it could be a father, step-father or member of the extended family. A culture of shame and silence around 'speaking up' on abuse prevails (Key Informant Interviews), which non-governmental and civil society organisations and UN agencies in the region are working hard to counter (UNICEF, 2017; Save the Children, 2015: 32).

Key sources of guidance for children's development and protection through the programme cycle

UNICEF has a well-established regional presence and is dedicated to promoting the enforcement of the International Convention of the Rights of the Child, a convention that has been ratified by all countries in the region. UNICEF has been active in the Pacific for 50 years and has a fully fledged multi-country office in Suva in Fiji, and country offices in Vanuatu, Kiribati, Samoa, the Federated States of Micronesia, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea. Its regional headquarters are in Manila. UNICEF's Pacific programming is clustered in the following areas: health and nutrition; child safeguarding and protection; education; water, sanitation and hygiene including access to menstrual hygiene; early childhood development; social policy; and gender equality and adolescent development and participation: **https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/what-we-do**

Save the Children Australia has programmes in several PSIDS that aim to address the causes of school drop-out, low achievement and vulnerability to poverty and trafficking among children, and to address cultural practices of violence against children. These include programmes and expert national personnel in Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu. **https://www.savethechildren.org.au/our-work/our-programs/international/transforming-lives-in-the-pacific**

Guide to good programming: Child safety

The existence of laws to explicitly prevent violent disciplinary actions, forced child marriage and child labour are highly variable across the Pacific islands, and enforcement is weak. However, all countries have now ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which covers these freedoms and rights in their totality.

Guide to good programming: Child safety (continued)

Child protection services might be available in urban areas. Overall, child protection and safeguarding services and awareness thereof are sparse in the region, but especially so in rural areas. Services offered by non-governmental organisations may also be more accessible and useful than those offered by government entities, but again, the situation will be country- and location-specific. Where these services exist, development programmes can liaise with them in cases of suspected harm, and/or explore opportunities to raise awareness of and signpost toward support services.

In adult and whole-community settings, there may be a role for nudging adult participants toward more child-protective social norms. Just as there are opportunities for blue economy programmes to embrace gender-equitable values and norms and champion these in the workplace and in public engagement, the same is true for child protection. Blue economy programmes have the distinct potential to champion responsible and child-protective behaviours.

People with diverse gender identities, sexual orientations and expressions

Attitudes to LGBTQI+ people are extremely diverse across Oceania. The term LGBTQI+ is controversial in this region because it is understood to marginalise and 'other' forms of Pacific gender identity that are not recognised in the West (Woolf, 2024). The term LGBTQI+ is used advisedly in this section of the report because this report is intended for use by Western readers. The term does not necessarily translate into Pacific context. Box 2 on Page 12 explains further.

'Terminology can be confusing and everchanging. [We] adopt the phrasing of "people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions" (SOGIE) in preference to 'LGBTQIA+ people.' The LGBTQIA+ abbreviation is rooted in certain understandings and assumptions of SOGIE that do not always have the same meaning or value for specific cultural groups in the Pacific, such as the vakaselewalewa in Fiji, leitis and fakatangata in Tonga, or fa'afafine and fa'atama in Samoa. Although the '+' is used to acknowledge 'others', it reinforces within the acronym that identities stemming from the global north are more important and that specific cultural identities in the global south are indistinguishable from or less important than the LGBTQIA identities. In other words, it 'others' specific people with identities from the global south. For many, this is another form of colonisation – of the irreparable destruction of specific cultural identities and practices'

(Woolf, 2024; Edge Effect, a human rights NGO working in the Pacific region and globally).

Criminalisation and discriminatory behaviours

There is great diversity in the legal status and social acceptance of people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions in the Pacific. This means it is imperative for programme managers to research the specific laws, statutes and social attitudes in the countries where they operate. It is simply not possible to generalise for the region as a whole.

In some Pacific islands that are associated communities or territories of France or the United States, such as French Caledonia, Guam and the northern Marianas Islands, the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are progressive and same sex marriage is allowed.

By contrast, in several sovereign PSIDS, homosexual acts between men are criminalised; namely, in Kiribati, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, PNG and Solomon Islands. Although these laws are generally not enforced, social responses to lesbian, gay and bisexual relationships may be hostile.

Even when laws are accepting of a wide range of gender and sexual orientation and expression, as in Fiji, social attitudes and behaviours may be hostile or even violent and require vigilance (Woolf, 2024). Fiji is a particularly interesting example because a 2010 law decriminalised consensual homosexual activity, and the 2013 Constitution enshrines protection from discrimination on the grounds of sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression (Miller, 2023). That said, gay people in Fiji still face discrimination in social settings, especially in rural areas. Discrimination is likely to extend into the online environment and may take the form of cyberbullying.

Transgender people attract derision and even violence from society, becoming isolated from family and social networks. This makes them more vulnerable to societal disruption and external shocks, as happened after Tropical Cyclone Winston in Fiji in 2015. This has led to targeted consultative work by humanitarian agencies to understand how these groups may be offered better support services to reduce risk, including in post-disaster welfare and development (Gender in Humanitarian Action Pacific Working Group, 2017).

While the perpetrators of hostility or even violence against gay and transgender people claim that people's orientation is a product of insidious Western influence in traditional societies, this is a mis-framing of issues. There is evidence that colonial attitudes, laws and crackdown practices, particularly during the period of British colonial rule, introduced anti-gay and anti-transgender legislation and denied the forms of sexual and gender identity that prevailed in many societies (UNIFEM Pacific, 2010; Humanity Dignity Trust, 2024).

Civil society organisations and networks and advisory services for the PSIDS are cited in the boxes below.

Guide to good programming for people of diverse gender and sexual experessions

It is imperative for blue economy programme managers to know the legal status and social attitudes toward people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, for the territories in which they are working, given the great diversity in contexts. There could be repercussions for staff and contractors who move from one jurisdiction to another if they are unaware of specific laws and attitudes.

Be guided by local experts and reference to local and national organisations (or sub-regional specialists, if that is all that is available) in references to and support for people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions. This is critical to ensure that blue economy programmes neither perpetuate harmful stereotypes nor inadvertently cause a harmful backlash.

Key sources of guidance for international LGBTQI+ travellers

The Asher-Lyric Website undertakes ongoing analysis on which countries are safe and friendly for LGBTQI+ travellers, based on an index, covering same-sex marriage laws, protection against discrimination, propaganda/morality laws and other criteria. This could be a valuable resource for expatriate/foreign staff and contractors involved in development programmes in the Pacific who are unfamiliar with local and national laws, customs, attitudes and behaviours. **https://www.asherfergusson.com/lgbtq-travel-safety/**

Other helpful websites with country-specific information are:

- The country overview section and digital research library of Outright International: **https://outrightinternational.org/our-work/country-overviews**
- FCDO travel advice for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender travellers: **https://www.gov.uk/guidance/lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-foreign-travel-advice**
- Health, safety and personal security advice for LGBTQI+ travellers: **https://patient.info/news-and-features/lgbtq-travel-how-to-stay-safe**

People living with disabilities

The incidence of disability is thought to be increasing in the PSIDS region as a consequence of an ageing population and rises in non-communicable diseases (PIF-S, 2015). A research project on climate change and disability in Kiribati, Solomon Islands, and Tuvalu in the early 2020s found that 'climate change is amplifying the risks and exclusion that persons with disabilities already experience in their daily lives. Additionally, climate change is introducing new risks and creating new barriers' (PDF, 2022: 6). These include the struggles associated with securing livelihoods and food security for people with disability in the face of climate-related disruption.

The Pacific Disability Forum has also documented how disasters, including climate-related disasters, amplify gender-based violence, and the various challenges associated with accessing reproductive and sexual health services for women living with disability (PDF, u.d., see **https://pacificdisability.org/resources/** Gender tab; see also PDF and UN Women, 2025).

Sparse data on the prevalence of disability is a major challenge in the region, however. During the decade 2015–2025, only four of 12 Sendai Framework Monitor reports from Pacific Island Countries addressed disability data and most of these said that adequate data was not available (PDF and UN Women, 2025).

There is a good legal and political foundation for action to accommodate the needs of people living with disabilities and support their equal rights among Pacific Island countries. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) is a landmark international treaty aimed at promoting and protecting the rights and dignity of individuals with disabilities. Fifteen Pacific states have ratified this Convention and PSIDS governments are politically attuned and committed to its ambitions.

The Convention is intended to ensure that people with disabilities enjoy all the human rights and freedoms of others. It emphasises the importance of people living with disabilities (PLWD) being active participants in society; it outlines the rights of equality, non-discrimination, accessibility and participation in decision-making; and it defines concepts such as 'reasonable accommodation' of disabilities in everyday life. States that ratify the Convention are expected to submit regular reports to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, describing how they are implementing its provisions.

The Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was established for 2016–2025 by the regions' governments (Pacific Island Forum Secretariat 2015) and promotes uptake of the disability rights Convention. The Pacific Framework is an essential touchpoint for blue economy programming in the region.

Subsequently, *The Pacific Disability Inclusive Resilience Development Strategy 2025–2035* (PDF and UN Women, 2025) was developed to embed disability inclusion and equity into climate and disaster resilience efforts across the Pacific. The strategy was launched in March 2025 and focuses on ensuring that people with disabilities, particularly women and girls, are not left behind in disaster risk reduction and climate action (see Box 3). These laws and strategies provide an excellent basis for disability inclusion.

The Pacific Disability Forum, an important regional network of 71 civil society organisations and NGOs in the region, highlights that the main challenge is mainstreaming and implementing these commitments into development practice. Further, in Timor-Leste, the Spotlight Initiative has emphasised that extensive measures are needed to develop fair, transparent justice systems and make them more accessible to women and girls with disabilities who suffer from violence (Almeide e Silva, 2021).

Guide to good programming for disability inclusion

The Pacific Disability Inclusive Resilience Development Strategy 2025–2035 (PDF and UN Women, 2025) highlights 'must do' steps for disability inclusive programming in the region:

- **Accessibility:** Ensure that all disaster risk reduction and climate change measures are accessible to persons with disabilities, including information, infrastructure, and services.
- **Participation:** Actively involve persons with disabilities in decision-making processes, planning, implementation, and monitoring of disaster risk reduction and climate change initiatives.
- **Capacity building:** Provide training and support to enhance the capacity of persons with disabilities, their organisations, and relevant stakeholders to participate effectively in disaster risk reduction and climate change efforts.
- **Data collection:** Collect disaggregated data on disability to inform evidence-based policies and programmes and to monitor the impact of disaster risk reduction and climate change interventions on persons with disabilities.
- **Coordination**: Foster coordination and collaboration among government agencies, humanitarian organisations, civil society, and persons with disabilities' organisations to ensure a coherent and inclusive approach to disaster risk reduction and climate change. (PDF and UN Women, 2025: 12).

Spending on 'accommodations' for people with disabilities was estimated at only 0.15% of GDP for countries in the region in 2018 (PDF, 2018). The Pacific Disability Forum notes that most spending on measures to improve PLWD's participation in work and society is from foreign assistance, and they urge governments to better mainstream disability rights into development expenditure (PDF, 2018).

Blue economy programmes could play an important role in normalising the inclusion of PLWD as full participants and leaders in the blue economy, collecting relevant data and investing in the 'reasonable accommodation' of disabilities in working operations and procedures.

Informal workers

The Pacific islands are characterised by high levels of informality in the workforce, meaning that workers lack formal contracts and workplace protections. Workers in the primary productive sectors – agriculture, fishing and forestry – are especially likely to work on an informal basis as 'own account' labour for themselves or family or as cash-based day labour for others. The outdoor nature of primary production, explored in greater detail in Chapter 3, means that production systems are highly exposed to the effects of environmental degradation and climate change, as are the workers in those sectors.

Worker vulnerability happens through two routes:

- **Direct exposure and vulnerability to climate and environmental degradation** in occupational health and safety terms, through workers' exposure to intensive heat and other hazards. Those that work outdoors in areas that are most affected by climate are more exposed to natural hazards than others, as are those who have less ability to protect themselves (e.g. fishers or famers working without necessary safety equipment, or who need to travel further for their livelihoods). Such people's greater exposure may be exacerbated by poverty.
- **Indirect exposure to climate and environmental degradation** through declines in production, e.g. lower fisheries, agriculture or forestry outputs, and the implications of sectoral failure for workers' income, access to food, fibre and water, etc., and knock-on effects on their ability to access healthcare, education, and other services. Although 'indirect', these effects can unfold quite precipitously over days or weeks, with long-term harms to workers and their dependents. Because informal workers lack employment benefits and protections such as sick pay, disability benefits and pensions, they are highly economically vulnerable to shocks. These can include climate or natural hazards (e.g. storms, droughts, earthquakes, volcanoes, etc), macroeconomic price shocks, public health shocks or other shocks that affect the productivity of their work.

Beyond the primary productive sectors, informal work is also pervasive in other economic sectors that depend on a healthy natural environment, including fisheries value chains (processing, trading, etc.) and service sectors (tourism and hospitality), as detailed in Chapter 3.

Informal workers are more susceptible to exploitation than employees with formal contracts, as they lack clear recourse to justice. On this basis, informal workers are also more likely to be at risk of safeguarding issues, as discussed in Chapter 4.

By its very nature, informality is hard to measure, but the latest estimates indicate that around 60% of Fiji's labour force and 80% of Solomon Islands' labour force may be working informally; and women are generally more likely than men to be working informally, although both women and men are highly implicated (ILO, 2017). In Vanuatu, the share of women workers who work informally is 73.8%; for men, it is 71.2%. There is a role for governments and development partners to support and encourage the training of informal workers to enter formal labour markets, and to incentivise enterprises to create more secure, formal jobs.

Men padding a traditional Lakatoi, Papua New Guinea. Image by Sally Wilson from Pixabay

3 Exposure and vulnerability of workers in specific sectors

All blue economy sectors face some environmental and climate risks, but some sub-sectors and the workers in them are more acutely exposed and vulnerable than others. The key research question addressed in this chapter is:

- How are those disadvantaged social groups most dependent on marine and coastal ecosystem goods and services at risk from environmental degradation?

The chapter looks first at recent trends in environmental degradation and then highlights key future projections that are likely to further affect these vulnerable groups. The focus is primarily on workers in blue economy sectors, but in many cases, the discussion has implications for coastal-dwelling communities more broadly.

The geographic location of the countries assessed in this report is the tropics, the western and central Pacific Ocean, and the Timor Sea, which means that de facto the islands (including their marine and coastal economic sectors) are exposed to climate change trends, with deep implications for residents, especially for outdoor workers. Foremost among the direct risks for workers is heat, as discussed below.

Outdoor workers

Rising average temperatures in the Pacific region and the potential for more intense and frequent heatwaves will put outdoor workers at particular risk of harm. Not only are outdoor workers highly exposed to heat (Singh et al., 2019), they can be involved in physically strenuous work, as is the case with fisheries and outdoor aspects of the tourism industry, such as running dive boats, etc.

In Fiji, climate models show 'significant increases in the annual probability of heatwave under all emissions pathways' (World Bank, 2021) although the data is too coarse to pinpoint hotspots over Fiji's land area. In Timor-Leste, the main island and its two minor islands face significant temperature rises during the day and night in the decades ahead (World Bank, 2025). The number of hot days with maximum temperatures over 30°C is projected to increase significantly, with highest risk in the coastal areas and cities toward the east of the territory (World Bank, 2025).

Of particular note, the wet-bulb temperature – an index of humid heat – will increase concurrently. At the turn of the century, no location in Timor-Leste had more than 20 days exceeding a heat index of 35°C (a combination of temperature and humidity, 'feels like' criteria) – a threshold considered particularly dangerous for health. However, by 2075, 70–100% of locations are expected to exceed this threshold.

To some extent, development programmes can take the increasing dry and wet-bulb temperature increases into account regarding outdoor workers' activity patterns over the course of the day and night. It is to be noted, however, that hot nights will also increase in frequency.

Fisheries and related value chains

Warming sea surface temperatures, including increasing incidence of marine heatwaves, already appear to be impacting the distribution and abundance of fish species and health of coral reefs in the Pacific, and will have further impacts this century.

In the Southeast Asia region including Timor-Leste, the average sea surface temperature ranged from 27.7°C to 29.7°C from 1995–2014. These temperatures are projected to increase by 0.5°C in the near term to 2040, by around 1.0°C by the mid-century period (2041–2060), and by 2.2°C by the end of the century, relative to the 1995–2014 period, which was already warmer than during pre-industrial times (World Bank, 2025).

Fish are 'on the move' as seas surface temperatures increase as a result of climate change (Key Informant Interviews). In addition, there are also major changes to spawning grounds/fish nurseries that will affect the abundance of various species. These include the degradation of critical mangrove habitats and the 'coastal squeeze' phenomenon, which reduces the intertidal area in which new mangroves can regenerate or be propagated (Key Informant Interviews). This is taking place against a backdrop of species harvest that is already at the limits of, or beyond, sustainable levels. As long ago as 2010, a comprehensive regional assessment across 63 locations in the Pacific region flagged that finfish fishing pressure was 'extremely high' and 'at sustainability thresholds (Pinca et al., 2010: 121), while pressure on invertebrates such as giant clams and Buche-de-Mer was already unsustainable (ibid: 122). These trends emphasise the urgent need for economic diversification.

The main categories of marine fishing in the Pacific Island region are:

- 'Offshore fishing. This is undertaken mainly by large, industrial-scale fishing vessels owned by large corporations. Approximately 1,100 of these vessels operate in the exclusive economic zones (EEZs) of Pacific Island countries, mainly using purse-seine and longline gear to catch tuna.
- Coastal fishing. This can be divided into three categories: (1) small-scale commercial fisheries (also referred to as "artisanal"), which can be further subdivided into those supplying domestic markets, and those producing export commodities; (2) subsistence fisheries, which support rural economies and are extremely important to the nutrition and food security of communities in the region; and (3) industrial-scale shrimp fisheries, which in the region occur only in Papua New Guinea.' (Gillett and Tauati, 2018: iv).

In respect of the first, offshore fishing, and the commercially lucrative offshore tuna fisheries, significant modelling work has been undertaken by scientists in collaboration with regional

institutions and governments to understand the implications of climate change for tuna fisheries. This is of pressing concern because the sale of licences for tuna catch makes a critical contribution to government revenues in this region. Kiribati obtains over 70% of its non-aid government revenue from tuna licences. Tuna access fees provide around 40% of Tuvalu's annual government revenue – up to $US 50 million in a 'good' year (Waide, 2025).

Numerous studies predict that tuna species are expected to move with climate change from the Western toward the Central-Eastern Pacific and that this will reduce tuna catch for some PSIDS (SPREP, 2022; CLS Group, 2020). The Pacific Community finds, in respect of these oceanic or long-distance fisheries, that, 'An eastward shift in distribution of tuna would have mixed implications. Contributions from tuna to government revenue and GDP should eventually increase for Pacific Island Countries and Territories in the central and eastern Pacific, and decline for those in the west, as tuna move progressively east' (SPC, 2017/a). It should also be noted that studies on tuna movement and its economic implications are characterised by quite a bit of uncertainty (Key Informant Interviews.)

The negative effects of climate change on coastal fisheries (fishing that occurs close to shore) has further, possibly more immediate, implications for PSIDS populations, in that as even more people's direct livelihoods and food security are affected. Warming waters, ocean acidification and deoxygenation, compounded by poor management practices and land-based pollution running off into coastal waters, has set Pacific coastal fisheries on a path of reduced productivity for diverse fish and invertebrate species. This includes bottom-dwelling (demersal) fish species and shellfish (crustaceans, molluscs and echinoderms). A gap is projected between the availability of these species and human dietary requirements (SPC, 2017/b; Johnson et al., 2018).

'In many Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs), rapid population growth already means that the catches of fish and shellfish from coral reefs and other coastal habitats will not be able to supply the 35 kg of fish per person per year recommended for good nutrition. Projected decreases in production of bottom-dwelling fish and shellfish will increase the gap between the quantities of fish and shellfish available and the amount required for food security. The number of livelihoods that can be supported by bottom-dwelling fish and shellfish is also likely to decrease"

(The Pacific Community, 2017; SPC 2017/B: 2).

As well as diversification of the sector and better regulation of catches to sustainable levels, another way forward for the fisheries sector in PSIDS is to recognise the deep links between Indigenous culture and small-scale artisanal fishing, and to implement the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines; FAO et al., 2023: XXXIV).[7]

7 Although neither the FAO nor other UN bodies currently publish formally on the status of which countries have adopted or are implementing the voluntary guidelines, the news and resources page at https://www.fao.org/voluntary-guidelines-small-scale-fisheries/resources/en provides updates on national and regional initiatives.

The contributions of small-scale fishers to food security and economic development have been conventionally under-counted and under-acknowledged in policy in the Pacific region. The *Illuminating Hidden Harvests (IHH)* study, an international endeavour, helped to redress the data deficit by showing the importance of small-scale artisanal fisheries to food security in PSIDS. The IHH study was carried out in support of the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for SSF.

The study found that the per-capita catch in small-scale fisheries in the PSIDS region is very high by global standards; it is the highest level of any region, at 52.6 kg/person/year (Oceania); by contrast, the per-capita catch is 3.4 kg/person/year in Europe (FAO et al., 2023). It is difficult to assess trends in small-scale fishing by Pacific households over time, as comparable data tends not to exist from one year to the next. To the extent that the comparable data does exist, it suggests that small-scale catches are beginning to decline slowly over time. This declining trend is partly a product of environmental pressures on seafood stocks favoured in coastal and near-shore waters by artisanal fishers, and a factor of the previously discussed trends (Chapter 1) towards urbanisation and the consumption of more highly processed and conserved foodstuffs such as canned fish (Roscher et al., 2023).

Larger-scale commercial fisheries, such as for tuna species and marlin, are the subject of far more consistent and systematic monitoring efforts. These data show that catches have steadily risen over the five decades from the 1970s to the present for the Western and Central Pacific region as a whole, with some 'plateauing' of catches in the most recent 5-10 years (Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, 2024).[8]

Effective practice for the management of environmental pressures on coastal-marine ecosystems and key fish and invertebrate resources include:

- maintaining networks of fisherfolk and craftspeople in the region to strengthen local capabilities, innovation and local and indigenous knowledge for sustainable fisheries management, and
- creating a unified voice to call for policy responses to protect and support their sectors.

Gender roles and their implications for economic activities and development benefits are complex in the PSIDS region. It is common practice to study the socioeconomic implications of climate risks and adaptation options using the household as the unit of analysis, but this misses many important, socially grounded nuances. Women's status and economic command of household resources varies considerably within households and extended family groups across diverse PSIDS cultures and social classes, as discussed in Chapter 2. There are highly gender-differentiated norms and customs regarding who governs, who harvests and who allocates and/or derives benefit from which coastal species and resources.

Some general observations are possible, but local validation and analysis is essential. Men tend to dominate fishing that takes place from fishing boats and also, particularly, offshore fisheries with high cash value such as tuna fishing fleets (Barclay et al., 2019). Coastal fishing from boats and for cash sale, i.e. artisanal in form, is also male dominated. Women do fish and sometimes use boats artisanally, but also fish by hand from the shore, with their catch often consumed directly by their families (Barclay et al., 2019). The number of women in fishing (including gleaning from the seabed or reefs on foot and inter-tidally) is unknown owing to lack of data collection. Meanwhile, processing activities for tuna and other fish, including smoking, salting,

8 See the summary charts on pp. 146–147 in the *Trends in tuna catch by area, species and gear* (WCPC, 2024).

drying and cooking, are conventionally dominated by women. Only detailed, localised gender analyses led by local or national gender experts can illuminate the practices in each place and generate tailored interventions that are gender-responsive.

The management of coastal environments is inextricably linked to cultural heritage in the Pacific islands. This extends to the wide use of shells in Pacific culture. Seashells are often used for personal adornment, expressing identity, solidarity, belonging and cultural preference, and are associated with ceremonial occasions. Women and girls typically acquire the high skill of crafting adornments, whether these are for direct family use or for sale. These traditional practices are under threat from climate change insofar as:

- cyclones may destroy or wash away shells – as happened in Niue (Newport et al., 2024)
- heat and drought may damage pandanus trees and leaves used as the traditional fibres for weaving adornments – as in Marshall Islands (Nagaoka and Kelen, 2025) and also reported in Kiribati (Newport et al., 2024)
- sea level rise may change the traditional gathering grounds for shells – as it has in the Marshall Islands (Nagaoka and Kelen, 2025).

Nevertheless, islanders innovate and endeavour to adapt the natural resources that remain at hand to create crafts and cultural artefacts as best they can (Nagaoka and Kelen, 2025).

Tourism

As noted in chapter 1, PSIDS economies are not structurally diverse, and are highly dependent on foreign aid and remittances from abroad. However, one source of economic growth in the near term is tourism (see Table 3). Integral to the proposition is the integrity of a well-oiled tourism infrastructure, including multi-modal transport and accommodation (cruise liners, hotels, airports, ports, roads, taxis and others), tour guides and operators, restaurants, souvenir sellers, etc., and suppliers linked to the hospitality industry including food, energy providers, artisan craftspeople and others.

Table 3: Dominant economic sectors of selected PSIDS

Country	Dominant economic sectors
Fiji	Fiji's economy is predominantly service-based (71.5% in 2017) with a notably high dependence on tourism. It receives significant remittance income from workers abroad (World Bank, 2021).
Cook Islands	The Cook Islands depend on tourism, especially from New Zealand and Australia, and increasingly from Europe (International Monetary Fund, 2020).
Niue	Tourism accounts for an estimated 28% of Niue's gross domestic product (GDP), employing over 40% of the country's workers (PSDI, 2021). Tourism has been the main driver of economic growth (ADB, 2021). Agriculture and fisheries also contribute, but a large part of GDP comes from financing from New Zealand and remittances.
Samoa	The sectors of agriculture, fisheries and tourism are of particular importance to the economy of Samoa (Government of Samoa, u.d.)

Country	Dominant economic sectors
Tonga	The economy is dominated by the services sector (50% of GDP of which the majority is intourism), with the primary sectors of agriculture and fisheries making the next greatest share (30%) (Government of Tonga, 2023).

Tourism is heavily beach and reef orientated. Over the next one to six decades, tourism assets on the coastlines and nearshore marine Pacific island environments are at high risk of climate-related damage. For example:

> 'Sea-level rise will have a range of impacts on Fiji's islands, including potential inundation, coastal erosion, and saline intrusion. The risks of storm surges and king tides may also be exacerbated. Fiji has significant assets and infrastructure with high exposure to climate-related damage. Degradation of key natural resources is inevitable, coral reefs and associated fisheries are under significant threat, with declines in soil and water quality likely. The various projected impacts of climate change are likely to affect Fiji's poor, marginalised, and remote communities most significantly' (World Bank, 2021: 2).

The climate change threat to coral reefs is of particular concern. Coral reefs are vital to tourism, both because their beauty is an eco-tourism asset that sells boat and dive tours, and because the health of coral reefs has a bearing on the geomorphology of nearby beaches and coasts.

Pacific governments are already alarmed by the potential harms of climate change to coral reefs – coral reef ecosystems are at very high risk of damage, even at 1.5 degrees of global warming, from ocean acidification and marine heatwaves, and even to some extent from very severe storms (although tropical storms are projected to decrease over the western Pacific as a result of climate change).

For Timor-Leste, situated at the far western edge of the geographic area covered in this report, increased frequency of extreme rainfall is projected under different climate scenarios this century (World Bank, 2025). This creates a different type of risk for the country's nascent tourism development, and the potential for more landslides and terrestrial erosion is high (World Bank, 2025). The implications are society-wide, but in coastal-marine terms, there is a risk of increased run-off into coastal-marine ecosystems, with disruptive impacts, including on ecosystem integrity and localised biodiversity. In addition, the expected heavy rain, flooding and landslides pose the risk of disruption to infrastructure such as roads and storage facilities. There may be risks to the mobility of workers, requiring contingency planning.

These emergent climate risks and climate risk projections to Pacific tourism will affect the viability of diverse tourism developments, their value chains, and the large proportion of Pacific island workers employed formally and informally within them.

In the disaster context, workers' relative vulnerability to extreme events depends largely on the formality (or conversely, informality) of their work and the social safety nets they have in place. Social protection such as paid leave to cover sickness or disability may be provided by private employers but not to informal workers, who constitute the bulk of the Pacific workforce, as discussed earlier. Any official social protection systems are also less likely to include women, who are more likely to be in part-time waged work and otherwise engaged as domestic carers.

In the long term, economic diversification informed by long-term climate risk profiles will be a vital strategy. It will be imperative to develop and implement 'just transition' strategies for workers and dependents of all ages, genders, skill and education levels – rural and urban – involved in tourism and its value chains. This means:

- anticipating how green jobs and climate-resilient production and consumption patterns could evolve in the sector in the decades ahead in response to climate change, and capitalising on opportunities for resilience and greenhouse gas emissions avoidance; and
- creating climate-smart education, vocational training and professional development that strengthens the capacity of workers, entrepreneurs and government agencies, including investors and employers, to navigate these challenges and possibilities, all in the context of advancing 'decent work for all'.

Guide to good programming: Resource-dependent sectors, present and future			
Temporal thinking		**Partnership thinking**	
Actions to take now for near- to medium-term benefit of marginalised groups in context of current impacts of climate and environmental degradation and aggravating social factors	Action to take now to generate medium-to-long term options for marginalised groups	Actions requiring transboundary and interjurisdictional cooperation	Actions requiring partnerships among govt. and non-govt. (civil society, business) actors
Questions to ask in programming context			
Am I empowering marginalised groups/ improving people's wellbeing now?	Am I helping build the adaptive capacity of people and systems to future climate change and avoiding lock-in to pathways that could become maladaptive?	Am I mobilising transboundary/ international partnerships and cooperation to address climate, environment and development issues of an interjurisdictional nature?	Am I making best use of indigenous, local knowledge and the specific needs of diverse groups to strengthen project design, improve prospects for sustainable project outcomes and avoid maladaptation?
Source: Authors			

Traditional thatched houses in Auki, the provincial capital of Malaita Province, Solomon Islands.

4 Safeguarding at-risk groups in blue economy sectors

This chapter highlights potential and actual harms against the person in the blue economy working environment, such as unsafe working practices and human trafficking (including forced labour). While these issues are by no means the preserve of blue economy sub-sectors and coastal-marine environments, the often isolating nature of offshore working environments and/or islands and coastal locations with poor transport infrastructure creates conditions under which workers are especially vulnerable to labour abuses. They also make it more difficult for such workers to escape or seek redress.

This chapter flags key risks for programme managers to look out for in various blue economy sub-sectors. It includes self-assessment tools and guidelines that can be readily applied to different sectors, including offshore industries.

The chapter addresses the following questions:

- What are the key issues with regard to labour abuse risks in PSIDS, flagged through GEDSI analysis?
- Who are the key stakeholders to engage on labour abuse and why?
- What data available in the PSIDS region can be used for understanding labour abuse?

Safeguarding risks in near-shore fishing and fisheries value chains

Occupational health and safety and general safeguarding risks are covered in this section, with a focus on coastal fisheries and onshore processing and marketing. This is followed by a discussion of the risks of more serious practices, classified as 'human trafficking', which relate to long-distance fishing fleets and shipping, although not exclusively so.

Free diving

Labour abuses and unsafe practices are widespread in industries requiring free diving in offshore environments; for example, in the collection of seafood delicacies of high market value such as sea cucumbers and giant clams. Key vulnerabilities are created by:

- **Lack of investment in training and equipment, lack of safety provisions:** Insufficient investment in dive training and the provision of proper diving equipment has had severe consequences, including the death or permanent illness of hundreds of divers because of issues such as the inadequate quality of compressed air (Yea and Stringer, 2023). In Fiji, divers are often forced to rent equipment from third party suppliers who are not properly regulated and who fail to meet safety standards (Yea and Stringer, 2023: 5).
- **Competition among divers, driving riskier practices:** There is increasing demand for products such as Beche-de-Mer, a popular delicacy in Chinese and other Asian cuisines, which are hand-harvested underwater. Prices are high for harvested products, and this has attracted more competition among divers. Apart from the obvious strain on biodiversity and ecosystems from unfettered harvesting, this dynamic drives risky behaviour among divers. Fiji and other PSIDS governments lack the capacity to enforce safety at sea and basic safety measures are absent. Divers expose themselves to increasing risk of harm, owing to rising competition for seafood. Pakoa et al. (2013) describe the dangerous competition between free divers using underwater breathing apparatus (UBA) in Fiji, which had resulted in at least two diver deaths by 2013. As sea cucumber stocks decline, divers are forced to take greater risks, diving deeper and facing more hazardous conditions. The use of UBA was banned by the Government of Fiji in 2016.
- **Pressure from middlemen:** Middlemen and exporters often lend gear and capital to UBA fishers, creating a cycle of exploitation. Divers must harvest enough products, as failure to do so results in the gear being withdrawn and passed to another fisher. This arrangement pushes divers into engaging in more dangerous, high-risk seafood harvesting practices.

  It also puts them in a cycle of debt. If fishers rent equipment and do not make enough catch to make enough money to repay the rental cost, they become trapped in an exploitative work situation.

SEAH in near-shore fisheries

Women sometimes work on boats, although they make up a very small proportion of workers at sea. The conditions on board boats are largely hostile: characterised by hyper-masculinised culture which “often fosters discrimination and harassment” (SPC, 2025; 15). Furthermore, living at such close quarters in a mixed-sex environment and with limited toilet and hygiene facilities may be less appealing, and women seeking these roles may even face sanctions by other women for contravening social norms (ibid). Considerably more effort on women-targeted health and safety, and communications and engagements around social norms would all be needed to create safer working conditions for Pacific women at sea.

Fish processing and marketing

Several studies, including Otumawu-Apreku et al. (2024), have highlighted human rights abuses in the fish processing sector internationally. However, much of this research is not specific to the Pacific Islands, where large-scale commercial fish processing facilities targeting export markets are relatively limited.

Countries such as Papua New Guinea, Fiji, and Solomon Islands are actively seeking to climb the fisheries value chain by developing commercial fish processing facilities.

A new research report by the Pacific Community on GBV in Pacific fisheries (SPC, 2025) highlights that, where fish processing facilities do exist already in PSIDS, sexual harrassment of women is widespread: “female workers in these facilities (located in Fiji, PNG and Solomon Islands) often experience adverse conditions, such as inadequate workplace standards, insufficient compensation and vulnerability to GBV, including harassment. Many of these challenges are compounded by gender and cultural norms that discourage women from reporting abuse coupled with weak enforcement of labour rights, leaving many women without adequate recourse” (SPC, 2025, vii).

SEAH issues in fisheries value chains are also highlighted in marketing: although noting that the fish processing facilities are principally tuna canneries associated with the industrial, offshore fishing value chains, whereas the SEAH risks to women in selling fish are more associated with the small-scale coastal fisheries products. In fish and seafood markets, including informal venues such as boat landing areas, women are often exposed to risks of sexual harassment and abuse from fishermen, customers, male (and female) vendors, and market officials. Poor infrastructure maintenance in such contexts, such as poor lighting, can exacerbate SEAH risks. Women are seldom in a position to make decisions on how to improve facilities and regulations to make them more women-friendly, as market governance is typically male-dominated (SPC, 2025).

Human trafficking

An overarching concept relevant to the worst extremes of labour abuse in the region is human trafficking, which has the following official definition by the United Nations:

> *Human Trafficking is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of people through force, fraud or deception, with the aim of exploiting them for profit. Men, women and children of all ages and from all backgrounds can become victims of this crime, which occurs in every region of the world. The traffickers often use violence or fraudulent employment agencies and fake promises of education and job opportunities to trick and coerce their victims*
>
> *(UN Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Trafficking in Persons).*

Forced labour and trafficking for labour exploitation is increasingly recognised across the region, particularly among migrants and in the fishing and construction sectors, although 'significant gaps in understanding and relatively low awareness remain' (Walk Free, 2020). These phenomena are linked to displacement arising from disasters (including from natural phenomena such as volcanoes, earthquakes and tsunamis) and from human-driven hazards such as climate change. Across the region, forced labour tends to occur in sectors with known risks, characterised by low-skilled work and a high proportion of migrant workers, including hospitality and tourism, construction, fishing, and domestic work (ibid).

Workers who come from desperately poor backgrounds such as coastal villages and areas with poor human development levels are likely to lack literacy and numeracy (including a common language with employers) that could raise awareness of their rights and assist them to obtain help when needed. They enter situations in which they are physically isolated, out of communication with family and friends and – in the case of tourist islands or resorts and offshore work – physically lacking in means of escape.

Women and children

There is significant evidence of women and child exploitation for sex in Solomon Islands fishing industry, with concentrations of harmful behaviour around logging and fishing camps. This includes reports of child prostitution in fishing communities. Girls (under 18) are reportedly taken to Asian fishing boats and paid in fish, which they sell in the local market, sometimes referred to as 'sex for fish' (see SPC, 2025, for further discussion). In some cases, a parent is implicated in negotiating the arrangements. In other cases, girls and young women are trafficked by workers in the sector to become cooks and cleaners. Once in these isolated positions on boats, they are highly vulnerable to sexual harassment and exploitation (UNODC 2023: 16). A study of trafficking dynamics in Solomon Islands, based on extensive interviews and focus group discussions across provinces, confirmed that children may go to logging and fishing camps to engage in micro enterprise activities such as selling cooked food. They may also go there seeking small jobs from foreign and local workers who pay them cash, alcohol or goods in exchange for running errands.

'In extreme cases, children (particularly girls) seeking livelihood opportunities near logging/fishing sites may engage in transactional sex, often while working as house girls and often through the negotiations of solair. Solairs are intermediaries who arrange local girls for foreign logging or fishing workers … the procurement of girls may be carried out in response to personal requests from individual foreign workers or a request from local managers or supervisors at the company. Demand for girls, particularly in housekeeping jobs, is strong too'

(Save the Children, 2015).

UNODC (2023: 21) notes that in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), 'there are few suspected cases of trafficking in persons each year, many of which appear to be connected to trafficking of local women and girls for sexual exploitation in the vicinity of commercial fishing industry.' Anecdotal information is obtained from interviews but the prevalence cannot be ascertained. One report **(ECPAT, 2016)** notes that there were cases of young girls forced into prostitution with both foreign and transient domestic workers in Kiribati, where foreign vessels are licensed to fish, and the Marshall Islands, which attracts overseas contract workers and seafarers. Further evidence of sex trafficking, by PSIDS country, is provided in the new report *Gender-based violence in fisheries* by The Pacific Community (SPC, 2025).

When human rights concerns in tourism are discussed, the focus is predominantly on the commercial sexual exploitation of children. Organisations such as UN ESCAP (2009), ECPAT (2016), and the Mindero Foundation (Walk Free) have highlighted this issue, with the latter specifically identifying Fiji, FSM, Tonga, Palau, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu as the primary hotspots for such exploitation. These reports indicate that sexual exploitation is a persistent problem in the tourism sector across these islands.

Children are especially vulnerable to trafficking when they:

- **leave school early**, putting them at higher risk because of their limited educational attainment and reduced employment options;
- **live near ports or in coastal areas**, where fishing vessels frequently dock, putting them at risk of being lured onto boats under exploitative conditions (Yea and Stringer, 2023); or
- **are from communities with few economic alternatives**. Populations residing far from urban centres, with few alternative livelihoods, are especially vulnerable. This is supported by findings from Pinca et al. (2010).

Studies have documented a complex pattern of conditions and behaviours that deprive children of their rights and lead to increasingly exploitative situations. Children may first be forced into child marriages or into informal adoption practices. Informal adoption, especially, is widespread in the region. Once in these circumstances, children are particularly vulnerable to trafficking (Save the Children, 2015; Doel-Mackaway, 2023).

There are problems with SEAH reporting across the region. In Pacific cultures where speaking negatively about elders is frowned upon, victims are typically unwilling to self-identify. This is exacerbated by the fact that parents and close relatives are usually complicit in the commercial sexual exploitation of children. A 2020 report by Walk Free describes how young girls are taken aboard ships for weeks at a time to work as cleaners or cooks, and are subjected to sexual exploitation there. Sometimes families have full knowledge of the risks and actively facilitate the placements via middlemen, to clear debts or boost household income.

Initiatives are needed to lift Pacific islanders out of poverty, one of the root causes of their flight into unsafe work and/or their trafficking or facilitation of children into illegal and abusive labour. Economic empowerment and opportunity, and encouragement of education, needs to be coupled with a comprehensive legal–regulatory response and shift in attitudes. The Walk Free study of trafficking across the Pacific region calls for:

> *'[c]oordinated action from governments, civil society, business leaders, development partners, faith leaders, and community leaders and chiefs. It also makes a number of recommendations including culturally specific awareness raising campaigns to improve understanding and help identification of victims, training for police and prosecutors and the development of support services'*
>
> *(Walk Free, 2020).*

IUU fishing

Illegal, unreported, unregulated (IUU) fishing is present in the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of PSIDS countries and by definition, fishers involved, are working largely 'invisibly', outwith official monitoring systems. From a social perspective, IUU fishing has been highly correlated with labour abuses, worldwide; as fish catches decline, operators are pressed to maintain their profit margins, and may underpay workers in an effort to maintain profits.

A significant amount of investigative journalism and research has been undertaken on abusive conditions for workers in Thailand-registered distant water fishing fleets, some of which are operating in the EEZs of PSIDS. For example, Derrick et al. (2017) found that '[t]otal reconstructed catch from Thailand's marine fisheries in the Indian and Western Pacific Oceans is almost three times higher than the data reported by Thailand to FAO for 1950–2014'. This study also found that 'Thailand is currently under considerable pressure to assert stronger control over its fishing fleets in order to address rampant illegal fishing and serious accusations of labour abuses occurring on its vessels'.

Otumawu-Apreku et al. (2024) highlight the gravity of the situation, describing human rights abuses in the Pacific Islands' fishing industry as 'alarming'. They and Tickler et al. (2018) stress that research has predominantly focused on sustainability and environmental protection, with insufficient attention paid to human rights issues in the sector.

Offshore fishing in the region, and its value chains, is characterised by:

- **Lack of data collection:** Fisheries statistics are often aggregated within the broader agricultural sector, making it difficult to determine the number of fishers accurately (Yea and Stringer, 2023). Furthermore, inadequate resources are directed towards data collection and research on human rights abuses in the fisheries sector in the Pacific Islands.

- **Gender data gaps:** Gender-disaggregated data is scarce, limiting insights into the number of women working in fisheries value chains and hindering the development of gender-responsive policies (Michalena, 2020).
- **Limited monitoring:** Fishing vessels operate far from shore, beyond the direct oversight of regulatory authorities.
- **Flags of convenience:** Ships often register under countries with relaxed regulatory standards, making it easier to evade enforcement and accountability.
- **Reluctance to report:** Even when poor working conditions are observed, they are often not reported because of fear of retaliation or a lack of trust in enforcement mechanisms.

The lack of data and transparency has significant implications for effectively addressing corruption and protecting human rights in the Pacific fisheries industry. Despite widespread concerns about human rights abuses in the Pacific Islands fisheries sector, clear evidence remains elusive, and much of the information is based on hearsay. A presentation at a fisheries conference, reported by the Fiji Sun, highlighted this uncertainty. The presenter noted:

> *There has been no report of fishing vessels' poor crew conditions in the Pacific, which is rather amazing when you recognise that the Pacific is the largest tuna fishery in the world … but we can't assume that the entire vessel captain and everyone else on the vessels, are perfect gentlemen … I'm sure that most people here who are working in fisheries actually have seen much more poor conditions of the crews but have failed to report it.'*

UNODC (2023: 9) states that trafficking in persons within, into and out of the Pacific area is suspected, but that too little is known about the crime, with the result that possible victims may be going unseen. The difficulty in obtaining concrete evidence is partly due to the nature of forced labour itself, which is inherently challenging to detect. Some documented instances in Pacific Island countries and Territories include:

- A Fijian crewman was killed aboard a Taiwanese fishing vessel registered in Vanuatu while in Panama;
- The United States Customs and Border Protection penalised a Taiwanese ship for using child labour in seafood production;
- An observer on a fishing vessel died of traumatic brain injury under suspicious circumstances (*The Guardian*, 2020).

Legal frameworks to address human rights abuses

Several legal instruments exist to combat abuses at regional level:

- **Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPF):** The WCPFC, a multilateral body that sets fishing rules applicable to Pacific Islands, included several labour reforms in its December 2024 annual meeting. The meeting developed Crew Labour Standards that include,

among other things, updated reporting requirements for allegations of mistreatment of crew, and clarifications on protocols for how these are to be reported. The meeting also established binding rules to address long-standing issues, such as fair wages and access to medical care. New regulations will take effect in 2028.

- **Harmonised terms and conditions for fisheries access:** These regulations establish standardised labour standards for fishing crew across Pacific Island countries, ensuring that fishing vessels operating in these waters adhere to basic worker protection measures.
- **Crewing Minimum Terms and Conditions of Access for Fishing Vessels (MTCs):** These provisions outline specific requirements for the employment of crew members on all fishing vessels licensed to operate in the waters of Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) member countries. These include minimum wage requirements, working conditions, and safety measures.

Internationally, the following global standards are relevant, but are only partly adopted and/or applied. Where they are enacted, they may provide legal levers to stop abuses and prosecute perpetrators. Only a handful, for example, are signatories to the:

- **International Labour Organization Convention C188:** This global standard addresses working conditions in the fishing industry, including measures to prevent forced labour and protect the rights of fishers. It sets minimum standards on wages, rest periods, and safety measures, among others. However, many Pacific Island countries, including Solomon Islands, have not yet ratified this agreement, limiting its impact in the region.
- **Cape Town Agreement 2012:** The Cape Town Agreement is expected to boost safety standards for more than 64,000 fishing vessels worldwide. Only the Cook Islands have ratified the Agreement.
- **Palermo Protocol against Human Trafficking:** This Protocol provides a comprehensive definition of human trafficking that covers all the illegal practices detailed in this chapter. It obligates state parties to prevent human trafficking, protect human trafficking victims, and prosecute human traffickers; however, it has not been widely ratified and or translated into national law in the Pacific region. Therefore, the potential to mobilise law enforcement varies by country.

The Pacific region is regarded as lagging behind others in its adoption of international conventions to protect workers (Walk Free, 2020). Currently, gaps in ratification and enforcement reduce their ability to address human rights abuses in Pacific fisheries. Several factors contribute to this situation:

- **Resource constraints:** Many Pacific Island nations lack the financial and technical capacity to effectively enforce international labour standards, even if they were to ratify them.
- **Limited international implementation:** The failure of larger, influential countries to ratify these treaties reduces the incentive for Pacific nations to commit, as they may view such commitment as a low priority without global alignment.
- **Weak enforcement of local laws:** Even where local labour regulations exist, they are often not strictly enforced. For instance, Chinese fishing vessels operating in Pacific waters may not be monitored for labour practices as a result of the significant economic investments made by China in countries like Fiji. This economic influence can lead to regulatory leniency or even active avoidance of enforcing labour standards.

It should be noted that 'shipping' as a general blue economy sectoral category is not detailed here, owing to the lack of data. However, the legal leverage points discussed here, and the safeguarding guidance provided for programme managers, are highly applicable and may be tailored to the shipping sector.

Key sources of guidance: Safeguarding offshore and onshore fisheries workers in the Pacific islands

Regional Organisations

- **Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA):** The FFA acknowledges the presence of human rights abuses in the region's fisheries, including forced labour. Although they are actively working to address the issue, they admit to struggling with understanding the full scale of the problem (**Maefiti, 2021**).
- **Pacific Community:** This regional organisation has also highlighted the prevalence of human rights violations in the Pacific fisheries sector (**Pareti, 2023**).

International Environmental Organisations

- **World Wildlife Fund for Nature:** WWF has reported human rights abuses in Pacific fisheries, extending beyond forced labour to include trafficking in persons, drugs, weapons, and money laundering (**WWF, 2022**).
- **International Labour Organization (ILO):** The ILO's 2023 report drew attention to severe human rights violations in the fisheries sector, noting that 'recent in-depth studies have described and analysed severe cases of forced labour and human trafficking … aboard vessels, where fishers, many of whom are migrant workers, are subjected to extreme forms of abuse (**ILO, 2023: V**).
- **United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC):** The UNODC data reported that in Fiji, 22 victims were trafficked throughout the tourism industry in hotels or brought to fishing vessels and exploited offshore out of the view of authorities (**UNODC, 2023**).

Think Tanks

- **Business and Human Rights Resource Centre:** Reports of severe human rights abuses, including forced labour, slavery, human trafficking, and child labour, are widespread in the Pacific. The report describes these abuses as largely hidden, with only a few stories surfacing, but when they do, they often reveal severe exploitation, such as migrant workers being bought, sold as unpaid slaves, and even thrown overboard if they complain or are injured.

Guide to good programming: Safeguarding at-risk workers

Safeguarding against sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment

CAPSEAH: The Common Approach to Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment is a UK-funded safeguarding hub that has developed extensive practical support materials and guidance for programme directors and managers. It draws from multiple sources of existing guidance such as United Nations agencies and discusses how to align good practice with challenging elements in local contexts (in any region, not just the Pacific). **https://capseah.safeguardingsupporthub.org/**

In addition to CAPSEAH, which lists key documents and standards, programme managers are encouraged to use:

- FCDO Due diligence: Safeguarding for external partners, **https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dfid-enhanced-due-diligence-safeguarding-for-external-partners**
- IASC Guidelines, Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, 2019, **https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-guidelines-on-inclusion-of-persons-with-disabilities-in-humanitarian-action-2019**
- IASC Six Core Principles Relating to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, **https://psea.interagencystandingcommittee.org/update/iasc-six-core-principles**
- The Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS): Nine commitments to people affected by crises, **https://www.corehumanitarianstandard.org/the-standard**

To mainstream safeguarding within organisations, the **Safeguarding Support and Resource Hub** (**https://safeguardingsupporthub.org**) has free and accessible tip sheets, explainer notes, and guides on thematic areas of safeguarding, including a self-assessment tool and other practical materials (videos webinars, etc). The resources are suitable for use by organisations of all sizes to deliver quality safeguarding arrangements. The tools can be used to self-assess safeguarding within a wide range of sectors including offshore sectors.

Blue economy programme managers should be aware of trafficking in the region and how to spot and report it. Articles 9–13 of the UN Trafficking Protocol address mandatory prevention measures, in particular, mass media information campaigns, close cooperation with NGOs, and the creation of social and economic incentives. This suggests that blue economy programmes could play an active role in raising awareness of the spectrum of activities withing human trafficking, how to spot trafficking, and how to report it to law enforcement agencies. To do so would be fulfilling a public service and helping Pacific states fulfil their obligations and international compliance requirements under the Protocol.

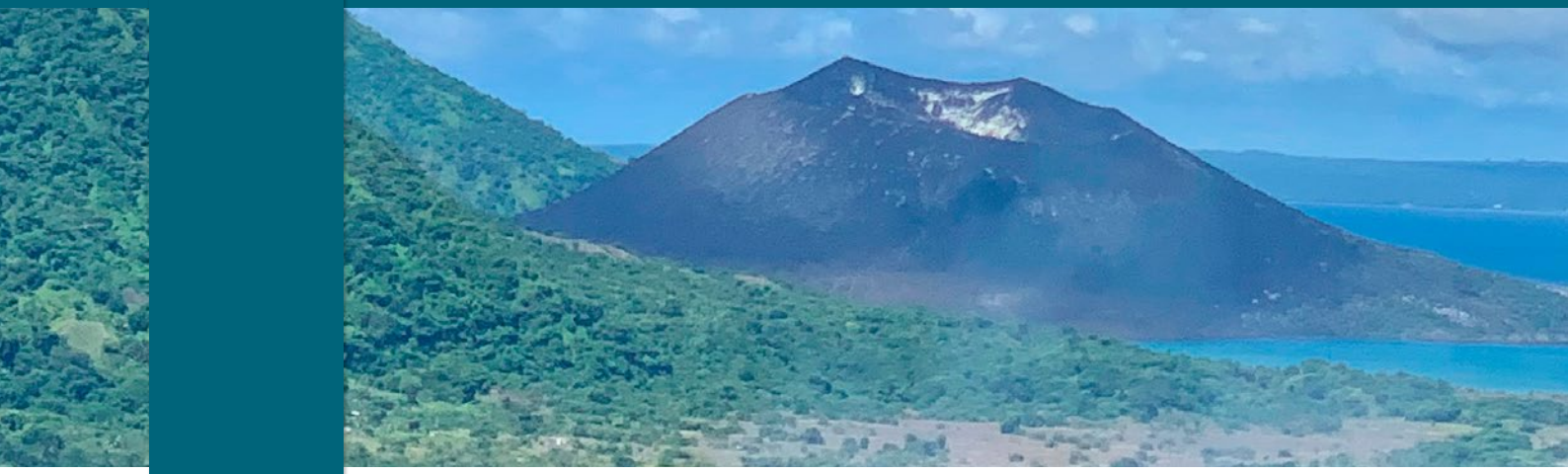
Guide to good programming: Social responsibility in the seafood sector

Conservation International has produced the 'Best Seafood Practices tool', which is a step-wise tool to guide management of specific human rights risks in the seafood sector. It is applicable to all forms of marine fisheries (including coastal) and their value chains in PSIDS. The tool guides managers on how to check for and avoid or eliminate any labour abuses. It also contains guidance on how to generate social and economic benefit from the seafood industry.

The tool supports programme managers to adopt:

- **The Responsible Fishing Vessel Standard**
  The Responsible Fishing Vessel Standard provides assurances of decent working conditions and operational best practices aboard fishing vessels. It was the first vessel standard to be recognised by the Sustainable Supply Chain Initiative for at-sea operations.
- **The Seafood Processing Standard**
  The Seafood Processing Standard is the only seafood-specific processing plant standard in the world and was created in alignment with the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) and Sustainable Supply Chain Initiative (SSCI) requirements. It covers compliance with international law and best practice for the elimination of forced, trafficked and prison labour, child labour, and discrimination and harassment, and explicitly supports freedom of association and collective bargaining for seafood workers. It has been translated into multiple languages including Thai and Japanese.

Key to the Seafood Processing Standard is compliance through traceability. Traceability in the seafood industry is undertaken primarily to demonstrate to end-consumers where their products originate. However, traceability also plays a key role in pinpointing and enabling the elimination of any human rights abuses in the value chain (Best Seafood Practices, u.d.; CBI Netherlands, 2023). **https://bspcertification.org/Standards.**



Papua New Guinea coast. Image by Jules from Pixabay

5 Case studies of good practice

Case study 1: Women-led sustainable mangrove management in Papua New Guinea

Melanesia, Papua New Guinea, Tufi. Indigenous men and women with a paddle in a canoe, 2014. Shutterstock

A longstanding, women-led initiative in Papua New Guinea is capturing profile as a leading good practice in livelihood diversification, women's empowerment and the promotion of gender equality in the country and wider region. It promotes a 'nature based solution' to conserve and restore swathes of mangrove forest on the country's coastline, recognising that the delivery of multidimensional development goods and services to the local population depends on the integrity of the ecosystem. Ensuring this integrity demands careful institutional and policy measures (Everlyne Mel interview, June 2025).

Papua New Guinea has some of the most biodiverse and intact mangroves in the world (The Nature Conservancy, TNC, u.d./a). As in other regions, mangroves provide a wealth of ecosystem services that benefit society locally: They contribute to dissipating wave energy, reducing wave height and so reducing disaster risk, and they provide critical habitat for species that are valued by local communities such as fish and crabs, which are eaten and sold for income.

Mangroves benefit other high-value ecosystems as well; for example, they trap sediment from land runoff, which prevents silts from smothering coral reefs and seagrass (TNC, u.d./b). They are of importance to the global climate because of their sheer effectiveness in storing carbon, both above and below ground (Miria, Kiele and Joel, 2022). Individual trees reach up to 10 metres in height (Miria et al., 2022). The annual economic value of the mangroves in Papua New Guinea's National Capital District – based on the basket of products and ecosystem services they provide – has been estimated at USD $200,000 to USD $900,000 per hectare (Miria et al., 2022).

Population growth and the clearance of mangrove forests for coastal settlements and businesses has degraded mangrove ecosystems on PNG's coastline, with implications for the myriad of ecosystem services the forests provide, with sea-level rise providing a further threat. This is especially the case in the contiguous expanse of some 575 ha. of mangrove forest that stretches along the shoreline and its numerous inlets in the national capital district, the coastline near Port Moresby (Miria et al, 2022).

Against this ecological backdrop, women are the primary subsistence users of mangroves. Gender inequality and violence in PNG prevents women from feeling safe or fulfilling their potential. Eighty percent of men have physically or sexually assaulted their partner in their lifetime, severely affecting women's health and wellbeing and their ability to undertake their work effectively (Griffith Asia Institute, 2019). Only 18% of girls are enrolled in secondary school, and 40% of children are stunted from lack of protein and micronutrients, which affects their ability to study well (ibid).

Barbara Masiki-Liri, TNC's Country Director, described how her team decided to spearhead a change, when they tried to engage communities on nature conservation, and few women came:

'Often we go to the communities, to run workshops and trainings, and many of the participants there are men. And so we ask, where are the women? And they say, "Oh, they are in the mangroves looking for dinner." We want to be able to empower women and bring them to the table to talk about conservation, as they are the users of the resources!

'Many women are involved in mangrove conservation [too] but when they come home, the men say: "Where is the food on the table, where is the money …?" One of the problems that we have is that there is no economic incentive for mangrove conservation. That is one of the things we really want to focus on. Our big idea is to continue to do conservation, but connect it to the economic benefits.'

Barbara Masike-Liri, Country Director, The Nature Conservancy, Address to Griffith Asia Institute (Video, 2019, from 12:00).

Mangoro Market Meri (Mangoro Market Women, or MMM) was born when a group of Papuan women convened at the 'Nature's Leading Women' event in Brisbane in 2017 to develop and pitch a 'Big Idea' to nature conservation investors. The Papuan women articulated their vision as one of women's economic empowerment, situated within the framework of a healthy, vibrant mangrove ecosystem. They specifically wanted to create economic incentives for conservation and generate more income for women. To do so, they focused on four main pillars:

- Linking women to markets for mangrove products such as mud crabs, shellfish, fish and prawns, all of which can be sustainably harvested;
- Blue Carbon initiatives to create long term, revenue-generating solutions for mangroves and women;
- Promoting eco-tourism;
- Promoting public awareness of the importance of mangroves (Griffith Asia Institute, 2019).

MMM started in two provinces and aspires to expand to all of PNG. Women's leadership and control of the initiative is paramount; MMM even declined funding when they have felt that the women did not yet fully understand or were not in full control of the governance structures and financial procedures required (Griffith Asia Institute, 2019). The Government of Papua New Guinea has been very supportive and has worked on creating enabling policies such as the Blue Carbon Policy Road Map that is currently being finalised (MACBLUE, 2025).

MMM's focus on public awareness illustrates how organisations are partnering to achieve conservation and social wellbeing objectives in PNG. As part of the Bootless Bay Marine Protected Area adjacent to the capital Port Moresby, an evangelical church, the Bautama Seventh Day Adventist church, and MMM/ The Nature Conservancy, joined forces to create a three-kilometre long Bautama Mangrove Boardwalk. This boardwalk is intended to put residents and visitors in close touch with nature, and to raise appreciation of the mangroves and of women's leadership:

'The Bautama Mangrove Boardwalk will become an iconic feature, attracting both residents and tourists and, most importantly, this project represents the first phase of a comprehensive plan to establish Bautama as a green zone, estate and learning hub … The Nature Conservancy became a partner in developing the boardwalk component of the greater Bautama Concept Plan, through the Mangoro Market Meri Program, enhancing its objective of establishing a nature hub to raise awareness on the importance of mangroves, and the vital roles women play in coastal these ecosystems' (NBC, 2024).

As part of the partnership agreement, women's leadership roles are cemented through the MMM programme's involvement, and the church will have rights to communicate religious messages on site.

Case study 2: Male allyship to change discriminatory attitudes and behaviours

Multihulled traditional sailing boat of Papua New Guinea. Image by Sally Wilson from Pixabay (paradise)

One of the most potent ways to change harmful norms around gender-based violence is male allyship with women and peer-to-peer awareness-raising. Although GBV is a society-wide phenomenon and male allyship is only a partial solution, it is nevertheless of high relevance in blue economy programming.

The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre together with the UN Women Multi-Country Office for the Pacific employ male feminists to engage men on attitude and behaviour change. They have developed a set of principles and guidelines over some years, entitled: *The Warwick Principles: Best practices for engaging men and boys in preventing violence against women and girls in the Pacific.*

The principles are: 1) Be accountable to the women's movement in the Pacific; 2) Do no harm; 3) Be grounded in a human-rights based approach; 4) Be evidenced-based and evidence-building; 5) Be inclusive and intersectional; 6) Be gender transformative; and 7) Be informed by context (FWCC, u.d.)

The principles are a culmination of a series of regional consultations and meetings held from 2016 to 2019.

The principles are applied via the Pacific Women's Network, which has 129 organisational members in 13 countries across the Pacific and is rooted in the principles of feminism, women's human rights, gender equality and the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls.

In 2002, the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC) developed the Male Advocacy for Women's Human Rights and Against Violence Against Women programme (known as the Male Advocacy programme) which is 'designed to work with men in questioning and reflecting on their own individual behaviours on gender inequality and violence against women, before they could support efforts to address violence against women and girls.'

The Male Advocacy programme is now active in Tonga, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea (PNG) and the Cook Islands, as well as Fiji.

Women manufacture shell money, Auki, Solomon Islands.

6 Conclusion

The key messages for Pacific small island developing states and Timor-Leste (Southeast Asia) may be summarised as the following:

Development context, issues and opportunities

Gender based violence is the focus of consolidated multi-stakeholder efforts in the region.

The Pacific islands in Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia have among the highest rates of gender-based violence documented in the world. Timor-Leste has similarly, unacceptably high levels. Multiple organisations and networks across civil society and United Nations Pacific are well established and wholly dedicated to combatting GBV in all its forms. It is not possible to discern whether these committed efforts are reducing the incidence of GBV. Data collection is difficult for this issue and carries a wide margin of error. Furthermore, data for the same consistent indicators of GBV incidence are not available over a time series, and so trend data is lacking. Collecting data and understanding the extent of the problem itself continues to be a high priority in the region.

National-level gender equality statistics do not capture considerable differences in women's empowerment among families and communities.

In this region, gender relations are highly unequal on the whole, and particularly in rural areas. Some women enjoy higher status as a result of living in more matriarchal societies, being members of high-status families or holding the status of chieftains or traditional rulers themselves. In some professional settings, there may be an appearance of gender equality. However, these exceptions should not be taken as representative of gender equality overall, because women's status, access to development services and comparative wellbeing may vary considerably across social classes and communities.

Sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions take diverse forms that are quite different from Western perspectives and must be approached respectfully.

Pacific cultures recognise a range of gender identities and behaviours that do not have equivalents in Western cultures. In most cases, it is inappropriate to use binary male/female gender identities, given the profusion of third gender/non-binary and gender-fluid ways of being in the region. Also, using terminology such as LGBTQI+ and other Western/Global North formulations may be ill received. This report signposts to excellent Pacific regional sources of guidance to navigate these issues sensitively, in terms of both terminology and management practice; the term 'people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions' may be more suitable.

Poverty is pervasive in the PSIDS region and is a risk factor for individuals to fall into abusive and exploitative working conditions.

High levels of poverty, especially in coastal villages with economic deprivation and low levels of human development, make people vulnerable to recruitment into exploitative work in blue economy sectors, and make it harder for them to escape. In extremis, poverty pushes some families in some PSIDS to make 'informal adoption' arrangements for children with extended family members or introduce children to recruiters for domestic work, which later, once the child has left home, makes them more vulnerable to labour and/or sexual exploitation. There is significant evidence of human trafficking in the region, particularly of young women and girls, either directly for prostitution or sexual abuse, or for domestic work that increases the risk that they will be physically and/or sexually abused. There is evidence of 'sex for fish' (in Solomon Islands, among others). There are also numerous documented cases of human trafficking of men and boys on long-distance fishing fleets operating in the region.

Tackling poverty and offering livelihood diversification and education across age groups is critical as a way of addressing the root causes, especially in economically deprived rural and coastal areas. Blue economy programmes also have a role to play in amplifying the excellent culturally grounded communications campaigns by national and regional NGOs and UN agencies, to shift norms around SEAH. This means naming the risks and abuses, knowing when to recognise them, and signposting to sources of help and support for sufferers of abuse, where possible.

There is patchy ratification and enactment of both regional and international laws to protect workers, migrants and residents from exploitation and abuse. This means that recourse to law enforcement and legal redress is of course, also variable. Again, through messaging around 'zero tolerance' for human trafficking and articulating how to recognise the signs of trafficking and other abuses, blue economy programmes can contribute to 'norm shifts' in the region. Ultimately it is hoped that such messaging will form one of many strands that edge the region toward the recognition and provision of full human rights for all.

Women's empowerment and male allyship improve lives across multiple dimensions

Organised initiatives by women, and for women, to improve their economic empowerment and enhance their leadership in the management of natural resources are yielding benefits for poverty alleviation, biodiversity and ecosystem health, and mitigation of and adaptation to climate change – as illustrated by the inspiring case study of the Mangoro Market Women, among many others.

Purpose-led ventures such as this, driven by economic and environmental imperatives, can have very important and less tangible, positive spillover effects, such as increasing women's control over their lives and their status in households and communities.

While many Pacific women are standing up and leading on gender equality and an end to discrimination and violence against women and children, social norms also requires men's and boy's allyship. A second case study in this volume has documented how far-reaching gender equality initiatives led with and for men and boys have taken root in the region.

Environmental trends and opportunities

Human development pressures such as construction, run-off and over-fishing, together with environmental pressures such as ocean warming create pressure on the viability of pressure on the viability of coastal and small-scale artisanal fisheries. These fisheries are of great cultural significance to Pacific islanders and which have contributed to food security in the past. Environmental pressures may be considered a 'push' factor that drives people away from small-scale fishing, noting that small-scale fishing normally forms part of a package of subsistence and income-generating activities rather than being necessarily a full time vocation.

The complex of pressures on fisheries resources combines with the 'pull' factor of people's interest in urban lifestyles, which orientates them to consume more canned and highly processed long-life and convenience foods rather than fresh foods. Changing norms are also pulling people toward more diverse professional lifestyles and careers and away from primary production such as fisheries. This web of factors – pressure on coastal fisheries including artisenal small-scale fishing, and lower interest in fishing as a livelihood choice – may explain declines in catches from small-scale fisheries in recent years. However, comparable year-on-year data is hard to find and there is a pressing need for more data and analysis to validate this emergent picture.

There are linkages between these trends and the declining diversity and nutritional values of Pacific Island diets.

By contrast, the catch sizes of the large commercial species, such as tuna, have been well measured over the past five decades and have steadily increased until they reached something of a plateau in the past decade. The future of fishing is difficult to discern. Much research is currently underway on the threat of climate change to tuna fisheries within PSIDS' EEZs and the implications for government revenue from selling tuna licences.

Running parallel with work undertaken to sustain economic activities and to address the needs of particularly vulnerable social and socioeconomic groups in PSIDS, there needs to be a strong awareness of the cultural significance of the coastal-marine environment to people's identity and wellbeing. Loss of biodiversity has implications that extend beyond the economic. This means that efforts to maintain coastal environments and preserve marine species are valuable, yielding benefits that may not always be quantifiable in economic terms, and that are nevertheless foundational to cultural, spiritual and relational wellbeing.

Best practice for gender equality, disability and social inclusion in blue economy programming

This report has highlighted the importance of thorough GEDSI analyses at the inception of any project or programme, to establish the differential vulnerabilities and risks experienced by different groups of people. These analyses should be undertaken by local or national GEDSI experts with detailed contextual knowledge and social-cultural grounding.

It is also vital to carry out options assessments that thoroughly examine the risks of action for different groups and to establish risk mitigation measures for each potential action. These should be done well before options are selected and planning and implementing takes place.

This report has flagged that there are a number of groups in Pacific societies that are, to various degrees, economically, politically or socially marginalised, or a combination of all. These include but are not limited to women, children, informal workers and migrant labourers, particularly in sectors such as fishing and tourism and in rural coastal communities more generally.

Reports by disability advocates in the region stress the particular need to increase support for women and girls living with disabilities. Women and girls with disabilities need targeted measures to enable them to access health, education and economic opportunity on an equitable basis and fulfil their fullest potential.

People with diverse gender identities and sexual orientation, known in Western societies as LGBTQI+ but known by other names locally in Pacific island cultures, are vulnerable to hostile treatment and merit bespoke outreach and engagement strategies. This includes in the context of climate shocks, when they may be particularly at risk of exclusion from critical services.

Programme managers should be attuned to the specific forms of discrimination and development challenge faced by these groups, which cut across blue economy development and for which specific tailored activities are required. For all of these groups, many activities may be undertaken that are sensitive or responsive to their challenges (GEDSI sensitive/responsive). However, to effect a more transformative approach to inequality, work on social norm shifts is required and can be hardwired into programming. The key action steps toward a more transformative approach include:

- **Identify, enforce and comply with people's rights** through programme operations at minimum (e.g. gender equality legislation).
- **Partner with national and local organisations that champion people's rights and support them in publicly recognising people's legal rights and/or celebrating them openly,** to increase the social recognition and value of these rights, especially when there is resistance to the implementation of rights. For example, talk openly and often about the need to achieve gender equality and how to make this happen. However, it is equally important that external actors in this region do not to push too hard to impose their viewpoints, as this stance commonly provokes a backlash, undermining the very rights and values that actors intend to advance. Partnering with and giving the lead to regionally, nationally and locally-based organisations for the promotion of equality and rights is imperative to understanding and supporting the advancement of rights.

- **Give teams political leadership on GEDSI issues by appointing a senior manager**(s) to take accountability and ensure that an accessible leader(s) is on call to discuss equity and inclusion issues. Ensure that they are guided by local counterparts who are expert in local GEDSI dynamics.
- **Give sustainable blue economy programme teams the tools to recognise and correct their own discriminatory behaviours,** even if they are non-intentional, and to promote equity in their life and work, e.g. through awareness-raising campaign and training. This could include partnering with and building on 'male allyship' initiatives for gender equality that already exist in the Pacific region.
- **Ensure that GEDSI in not merely a tick box exercise** during the inception phases of programmes or projects. It is important that risks, risk mitigation measures and empowerment pathways for specific groups that are identified at GEDSI assessment and options selection stage are adequately addressed and integrated through planning and implementation, and through monitoring, evaluation and learning systems. FCDO and other sources of guidance cited in this report provide stepwise support on how to do this.

On safeguarding, specifically:

- **Blue economy programmes may inadvertently put vulnerable groups at greater risk of harm if safeguarding procedures are not hardwired into programme operations**. **Tools are available to centre safeguarding in every programme.** The Common Approach to Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (CAPSEAH) offers very robust and detailed guidance on setting up safeguarding systems for organisations and programmes. This can be applied to a wide variety of sub-sectors and contexts.
- **Programmes can signpost to appropriate (external) sources of help and support for sufferers of interpersonal violence**, even if programmes themselves are not mandated as service providers to reduce violence against the person. The potential for linking and signposting to service providers is somewhat limited in the Pacific islands, owing to under-investment in these services and incomplete laws on the part of many governments. However, this report provides references to some of the leading agencies and non-governmental organisations working on human rights and freedom from violence. They can act as the first ports of call for information and advice.

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