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Progressing gender equality in fisheries by building strategic partnerships with development organisations

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ABSTRACT

Gender equality, a universal agreed principle and value, has been adopted widely but implemented to varying levels in different sectors. Our study was designed to contrast how gender development (hereafter 'development') and fisheries sectors view and invest in gender, and then explore opportunities to strengthen collaborative relationships and networks between the two, with the aim of improving capacity for gender inclusion in practice in fisheries. We conducted key informant interviews with fisheries (n = 68) and development (n = 32) practitioners (including managers) in Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu between 2018 and 2019. We found three points of divergence between fisheries and development practitioners and/or their organisations when it comes to the inclusion of gender into their work: (1) fundamental differences in organisational motivations for working on gender – (i.e., fisheries organisations viewed gender equality as a means to achieve fisheries objectives (*instrumental*), while development organisations viewed it as a core value or principle (*inherent*); (2) fisheries practitioners had comparatively little to no access to qualified gender focal points and training, and limited networks with gender experts; and (3) differences in what each considered successful versus failed approaches to gender integration. Our findings illustrate opportunities, as well as limitations or challenges (e.g. resistance and indifference), to transfer knowledge and capacity to integrate gender into fisheries policies and practice. We suggest using these divergences to 'pivot change' in the fisheries sector by building on decades of knowledge, learning and experience from the development sector focusing on four areas for strategic partnership: (1) shifting values; (2) gender mainstreaming; (3) adopting gender best practice; and (4) investing in gender networks and coalitions. We argue that fundamental to the success of such a partnership will be the ability and willingness of fisheries and development practitioners and their organisations to break down silos and work collaboratively towards gender equality in the fisheries sector.

1. Introduction

The fisheries sector has made exceedingly slow progress when it comes to valuing and implementing gender equality as relevant and integral to fisheries planning, management and development. Whilst commitments, attention and approaches to address gender inequality in the sector are growing, many policies, projects, programmes and data collection tools still proceed as gender blind, perpetuating harmful gender norms (Kleiber et al., 2021).

Examples of this blindness include: the absence or the underrepresentation of data on women's contributions to the fisheries sector including in national statistics (Salmi & Sonck-Rautio, 2018; Harper et al., 2020); the invisibility of and undervaluing of women's labour in fisheries research, policies and programmes (Grantham et al., 2020; Thomas et al., 2021); missing or poorly resourced gender expertise within fisheries agencies and institutions (Mangubhai & Lawless, 2021); gender blind or poorly articulated gender commitments in fisheries policies (Barclay et al., 2022; Gopal et al., 2020; Lawless et al., 2021); and inadequate

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approaches to the implementation of gender in fisheries projects and programmes (Mangubhai & Lawless, 2021).

In the fisheries sector, including aquaculture, global estimates of women's contributions are constrained by lack of sex- or gender-disaggregated data in all value chain nodes – pre-production, production, post-harvest (processing, marketing), and subsistence. Fisheries labour data, collected by some countries and aggregated by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), pertains only to the production node where women are estimated, globally, to comprise 12% of registered workers (FAO, 2020). Because women are unable to register as fishers in many countries, this is an underestimate. Regionally, in Oceania, including the Pacific countries, about a quarter of fishers are women, the second highest prevalence after the Americas (30%) (FAO, 2020). For small-scale fisheries, Harper et al. (2020) estimated that 25% of Pacific fishers were women, comprising 45% of fishers in Melanesia (our area of interest), 31% in Micronesia and 19% in Polynesia. In aggregate, women workers comprise the majority of post-harvest workers and post-harvest workers outnumber fishers by about two to one, making women 47% of the estimated workforce (World Bank, 2012; updated estimates currently in preparation). Large numbers of post-harvest workers typically are engaged in processing in industrial factories, such as those processing tuna in Fiji and Solomon Islands.

There is a notable disconnect between fisheries versus gender policy instruments in terms of the depth of gender commitments (in the former), the issues that are prioritised as entry points for change, and who is targeted (i.e. individual, household, community, organisation, or society) (see Table 1 and Fig. 3 in Lawless et al., 2021). Consequently, fisheries policies and practice by leading organisations (e.g. fisheries management agencies and authorities, NGOs, academic institutions) are highly skewed towards organisational (e.g. gender-sensitive recruitment) and individual levels, with a narrow focus on women, rather than addressing harmful norms and gender relations at the household, community and societal-level. Furthermore, responsibilities for gender integration tend to be confined to lower-level roles or specific gender focal points within an organisation, with limited agency and power to influence or make decisions (Mangubhai & Lawless, 2021). Unless these issues are addressed, there is a high risk that the gender approaches and policies used by the fisheries organisations will not make the needed progress toward gender equality and, at worst, further exploit gender inequalities, norms and stereotypes, rather than lead to much-needed transformative change (Mangubhai & Lawless, 2021; Stacey et al., 2019).

'Gender equality' is a universal agreed principle or normative standard that is enshrined in international instruments such as the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Within these instruments, gender equality is valued for its own inherent quality – the promotion of human rights, women's equal rights, and dignity of humanity – and should be integrated into international, regional and national policy and practice. Gender equality is articulated as a way to demand rights, justice, and deep-rooted structural and systemic change, particularly within economic, social and political structures (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015).

The advancement of gender equality is also valued for instrumental reasons, and is considered critical for advancing broader social and development goals (e.g. poverty alleviation, food and nutrition security) as well as to achieve specific sectoral (e.g. environment, fisheries, forestry, agriculture, livestock, energy) objectives (e.g. Ali et al., 2016; Aregu et al., 2016; Farhall & Rickards, 2021; Leisher et al., 2016). Examples of the use of instrumental frames for gender equality are ample. For example, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development explicitly states that "the achievement of full human potential and of sustainable development is not possible if one half of humanity continues to be denied its full human rights and opportunities" (United Nations, 2015). Other claims include that the elimination of discrimination in the workforce (e.g. the gender division of labour and the gender pay gap) will likely boost national economic growth and productivity (International Monetary Fund, 2018), and result in estimated gains of US$7.5 trillion globally (PWC, 2019). Further, it is argued that reducing gender inequality in the agricultural sector will likely increase food production by more than 2.5–4 percent and will reduce global food gaps of 100–150 million people by 12–17 percent (FAO, 2011).

Increasing evidence suggests gender inequality can limit the effectiveness of environmental management outcomes, such as forest biodiversity (Agarwal, 2009), sustainable fisheries (Thomas et al., 2021), and marine managed areas (Baker-Médard et al., 2017; Kleiber et al., 2018; Rohe et al., 2018). For example, in a remote village in Solomon Islands male-dominated governance and decision-making led to the placement of a traditional marine closure over an area women fished for subsistence, leading to low compliance with the resource management rules (Rohe et al., 2018). In Fiji, the exclusion of women from community-based fisheries management is leading to the overharvesting of some fish species from mangrove and seagrass nursery areas as more engage in commercial fisheries to supplement household income (Thomas et al., 2021). Some activities, especially those that are not considered income generating becoming gender-selective activities (e.g. mangrove planting and cultivation in Tanzania), with women taking on this work as men avoid these responsibilities (Sabai, 2021). Furthermore, failure to properly account for gender at the community level can lead to decreased economic and livelihood opportunities for households and communities, increased tensions or conflict between men and women, and reduced access to and control over natural resources for women (Baker-Médard et al., 2017; Rohe et al., 2018).

With limited gender knowledge, skills and capacity, fisheries practitioners[1] that are applying gender inclusive approaches have set a 'low benchmark' for acceptable gender practice and policy (Lawless et al., 2021; Mangubhai & Lawless, 2021). Some authors have argued that fisheries institutions are unlikely to integrate gender into their work on their own and therefore "*those interested in promoting gender equality need to develop strategies to motivate the mainstream actors to use a gender lens*" (Williams, 2019). Barclay et al. (2021) noted that fisheries experts also may have limited comprehension of what gender equality entails, for example interpreting the presence of a few women in senior positions in regional fisheries bodies as a sign of overall progress on gender equality in Pacific tuna fisheries. Globally and regionally, development organisations have a long history of working on gender equality. This may provide a unique opportunity to build and invest in partnerships and networks with development organisations to strengthen the capacity for gender inclusion in practice into individual sectors, including especially fisheries (Mangubhai & Lawless, 2021). Fisheries organisations could both learn and adapt to their sector the development knowledge that remains true to gender equality principles. This includes avoiding approaches that, while prevalent, lack real impact; for example, approaches that equate gender to women and narrowly focus on interventions for women while avoiding addressing harmful gender norms and relations that prevail in patriarchal cultures and societies (Nazneen & Hickey, 2019). In other words, on gender, the fisheries

[1] Fisheries practitioners (includes managers within ministries of fisheries) are those implementing fisheries projects or programmes, but themselves are not actors in fisheries supply chains. In our paper development practitioners (including managers in ministries for women) are those that work on gender and development.

sector has the opportunity to avoid repeating the growing and learning pains of the development sector, and instead benefit from the lessons of the past and tap into the current knowledge on gender best practice that is already tailored to specific cultural and geographic contexts. For example, for many development organisations based in the Pacific Islands gender equality is part of a rights-based approach to development or 'people-centred' development, with a strong emphasis on economic, social and cultural rights (Llewellyn-Fowler & Overton, 2010; Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2012) that could be applied to the fisheries sector.

Our study aimed to provide guidance and recommendations on areas of strategic partnership or opportunities more generally, to strengthen the capacity of fisheries practitioners and organisations to integrate gender best practice into the sector. To do this we first compared the differences in how fisheries versus development practitioners and/or their organisations view and invest in gender. This was done by: (1) examining the different motivations for practitioners considering gender in their work; (2) assessing practitioners' awareness of gender commitments (regionally and globally), and their organisations' respective investments in gender focal points, gender training and gender networks; and (3) examining the approaches perceived as successful versus failures by the two sectors. This helped situate the fisheries sector (limited knowledge and experience in gender) compared to the development sector (decades of experience and learning). We then had development practitioners and gender and fisheries experts describe the opportunities to meaningfully engage in gender within the fisheries sector. By reflecting on the differences in the way the two sectors viewed and invested in gender, and the opportunities (as well as the challenges or limitations), we provide guidance and recommendations on areas of strategic partnership between the fisheries and development sectors to mainstream gender into fisheries and strengthen capacity in the sector, thereby fast-tracking decades of learning to make more meaningful progress towards gender equality.

2. Methods

2.1. Study context

Our study was conducted in three Melanesian countries – Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. All three countries are biologically and culturally diverse, with a high dependence on wild capture small-scale fisheries resources for food and livelihoods (Bell et al., 2009). We focus the present study on gender issues in small-scale fisheries because there is a greater body of scholarship on gender than that for industrial fisheries and aquaculture. In these countries women are engaged in different parts of fisheries value chains, making significant contributions to household food and livelihood security (Harper et al., 2020; Kronen & Vunisea, 2009), including in the periods following disasters (Thomas et al., 2019). At the same time women's roles in small-scale fisheries are dynamic and expanding into spaces that were traditionally considered the domain of men (Barclay et al., 2018; Cohen et al., 2016; Thomas et al., 2021).

The Pacific region has a diversity of regional organisations that sit under the coordinating umbrella of the Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific (CROP), that are mandated by Pacific Island governments to provide technical support, policy and additional resources to their countries and territories (Vince et al., 2017). Within the scope of their mission, a number of these regional organisations (e.g. Pacific Community (SPC), Pacific Islands Development Forum, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), University of the South Pacific (USP), Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme) work and invest in gender and fisheries in different capacities, including policy, research and practice (Mangubhai & Lawless, 2021). In Melanesia, United Nations (UN) agencies, international and local environmental non-government organisations (NGOs) also engage, to different degrees, in small-scale fisheries sub-nationally, nationally and/or regionally. In addition, there are a diversity of national organisations (e.g. Vanuatu Council of Women), international humanitarian or development organisations (e.g. Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), CARE International, Oxfam, Save the Children, WorldVision), regional CROP agencies (e.g. SPC, PIFS) and UN agencies (e.g. UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)), that work specifically on gender equality or use gender-sensitive, transformative and inclusive approaches in their work.

2.2. Study sample and design

We conducted key informant interviews with individuals from two groups of organisations working in Fiji, Solomon Islands and/or Vanuatu: (a) 'fisheries practitioners' who included government agencies (n = 15), local and international non-government organisations (NGOs) (n = 25), regional (n = 11) and global organisations (n = 5) designing and/or implementing fisheries projects or programmes; and (b) 'development practitioners' who included government agencies (n = 7), development NGOs (n = 11), regional (n = 4) and global organisations (n = 4), and donors (n = 2) engaging on issues that impact gender equality (Table 1). Independent consultants and researchers (academic and non-academic) with expertise on fisheries (n = 12) or gender (n = 4) at national and/or regional levels were also interviewed and are referred to as 'experts'. Three consultants worked on gender and fisheries but were listed under fisheries, given this was their primary qualification and their work was targeted at the fisheries rather than the development sector.

We used a stratified approach to ensure all levels of governance (i.e. global, regional, and national) were represented in our sample. Organisations and individuals were selected based on purposive and snowball sampling through consultation with locally-based experts. Although data were collected across the three countries, we aggregated the data for analysis. All interviews were semi-structured and conducted face-to-face (n = 98) or virtually (n = 2) in English between August 2018 to February 2019 and lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. Although one of the interviewers was from Fiji, and the other spoke Solomon Island pijin, no translation was required. We conducted 55 of the 100 interviews with both researchers present to ensure consistency. Some questions focused on the experiences of individual practitioners, while others on the organisations they worked for. We recorded interviews independently in writing, and jointly scribed in Microsoft Excel, to reduce biases in interpretation, and allowed for cross-checking and validation of responses.

2.3. Questions and analysis

To understand organisational motivation for considering gender (section 3.1), we asked practitioners to choose one statement from a pre-defined list developed and used by Lawless et al., (2022), that 'best described' this rationale:

1. To increase the number of women in our organisation;
2. To increase the number of women participating in our programmes;
3. To increase the likelihood of sustainably managed fisheries/sustainable development;
4. To increase the productivity and profitability of coastal fisheries/livelihoods;

Table 1
Access to gender focal points and/or gender training received in the last 12 months.

Type			Practitioners		Gender	experience (years)
#W			Gender focal point	Gender training	#M	Organisations
Fisheries	**40**	**28**				
Experts	8	4	17.8 (0–33)	n/a	n/a	Solomon Islands National University, University of the South Pacific, Research Institute Development (IRD), individual consultants
Government	9	6	4.7 (0–21)	47%	27%	Ministry of Fisheries (Fiji), Ministry of Economy (Fiji) Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources (Solomon Islands), Department of Fisheries (Vanuatu)
NGO	16	9	11 (3–58)	64%	48%	Conservation International, Fiji Locally Managed Marine Area (FLMMA) network, Live and Learn, Partnerships in Community Development Fiji, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Tongoa-Shepherd Islands Women's Association, Vanuatu Environmental Science Society, Wildlife Conservation Society WCS), Women in Fisheries Network-Fiji, WorldFish, World Wide Fund for Nature
Regional organisations	3	8	8.3 (2–23)	82%	27%	Melanesia Spearhead Group, Pacific Community (SPC), Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF), Pacific Island Private Sector Organisation (PIPSO)
Global agencies	4	1	10.1 (3–25)	80%	80%	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
Development	**26**	**6**				
Experts	4	0	15.7 (12–20)	n/a	n/a	University of the South Pacific (USP), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), individual consultants
Government	5	2	13.7 (0–30)	86%	14%	Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation (Fiji), National Council of Women (Solomon Islands), Department of Women's Affairs (Vanuatu), Vanuatu Cultural Centre
NGO	8	3	14.9 (1–34)	100%	70%	Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), Care International, OXFAM, Vanuatu Climate Action Network (VCAN), Vanuatu National Council of Women, Wan Smol Bag, WorldVision
Regional organisations	4	0	15.8 (11–20)	100%	75%	Pacific Community
Global agencies	3	1	10.1 (3–25)	100%	100%	UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)
Donor	2	0	11 (10–12)	100%	n/a	Fiji Women's Fund, Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (Pacific Women)

5. Because we recognise gender equality as a fundamental human right;
6. Because it is something our donor requires us to do; or
7. Other.

We then asked practitioners to choose the statement (from the same list above) that 'least described' why their organisation considered gender in their work. Practitioners were then asked to explain in detail the reason for their selection.

We assessed individuals' access to gender expertise (section 3.2) in two ways. Firstly, we asked practitioners if their organisation has a gender focal point or dedicated gender office, and if so to describe who and how many staff were employed, and their role(s). In the cases where organisations did not have a specific gender focal point (e.g. Fiji Women's Fund, UN Women) because but all their staff had formal qualifications or had received training on gender as a requirement for working with the organisation, we deemed the internal gender expertise equated to the presence of a gender focal point.

Secondly, we asked if practitioners worked with any gender specialists or organisations with gender expertise, and if so, to provide details (e.g. the name of the organisation, the type of expertise accessed and how often). Using these responses, we undertook a social network analysis in R to better understand connectivity (i.e. who interacts or collaborates with whom), and which organisations were 'gender influencers'. For practitioners who listed individuals, we identified the host organisation of the gender expert. For those listing private consultants, the data were not included in the social network analysis. Social networks were plotted in R using *igraph* (Csardi & Nepusz, 2006) and ggraph (Pedersen, 2020) packages, using the Fruchterman-Reingold graph drawing algorithm for force-directed placement – commonly used to visualise social networks. Graphs were directed, and normalised degree centrality was calculated based on indegree (i.e. the number of incoming edges).

We asked practitioners to describe the specific approaches used to include gender in their work, and then describe one in detail that that they felt was a successful example, as well to describe approaches that had been the least successful or they felt had failed (section 3.3). As interviewers we purposely did not predefine what 'success' or 'failure' was to avoid biasing or influencing answers. The question focused on the approaches practitioners used within their organisations, rather than linked to specific projects or project outcomes. We then asked those working in the development sector and experts working on gender in the fisheries sector if they thought that the fisheries practitioners resisted including gender in their work (section 3.4) and what could be done to encourage meaningful engagement with gender issues in the fisheries sector (section 3.5). Using a three phase methodology for coding by Saldana (2009), we employed an interactive grounded theory approach to code and analyse the qualitative descriptions of the gender approaches. To decipher the core meaning of responses we identified short phrases that captured the essence of the information that practitioners shared in an Excel database. Then we grouped responses into categories according to themes that emerged from the data. To enable both a qualitative and quantitative analysis and presentation of the data, for each category a '1' or a '0' was given to indicate if a respondent listed a particular approach or barrier, or not. The number of practitioners were tallied up for each category and then we did a third review to consolidate a smaller group of categories to better visualise and represent the data.

3. Results

3.1. Motivations for considering gender

Fisheries practitioners reported that their organisations considered gender in their work for multiple reasons, most notably "to

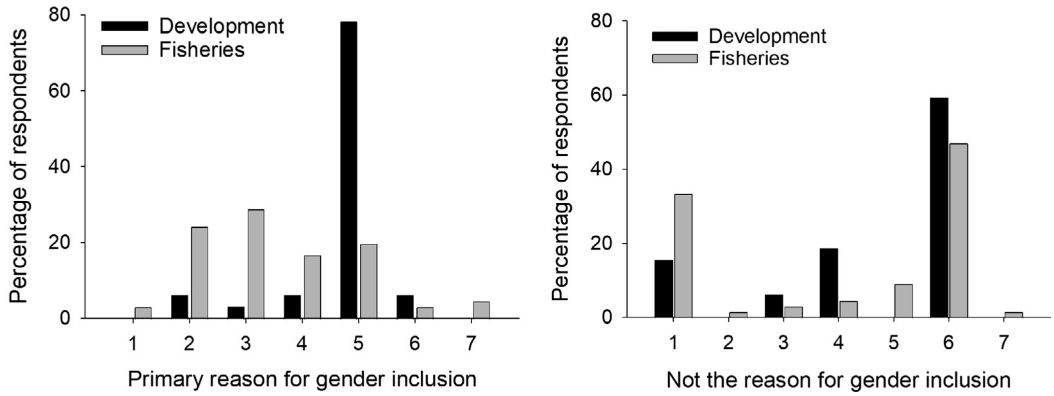

Fig. 1. The main reasons fisheries and development organisations include gender in their work. 1 = To increase the number of women in our organisation, 2 = To increase the number of women participating in our programs, 3 = To increase the likelihood of sustainably managed fisheries/sustainable development, 4 = To increase the productivity and profitability of coastal fisheries/livelihoods, 5 = Because we recognise gender equality as a fundamental human right, 6 = Because it is something our donor requires us to do, 7 = Other.

increase the likelihood of sustainably managed fisheries" (28.8%) or "to increase the number of women participating in our programmes" (24.2%) (Fig. 1). In contrast, the primary reason for development organisations was "because we recognise gender equality as a fundamental human right (78.1%)"; only 19.7% of fisheries practitioners selected this option. We also observed development practitioners were quicker to respond to this question, compared to those working in fisheries who needed more time to think through and consider the options available to them, with some struggling to choose the answer that best fitted their organisation. There were a small percentage of practitioners working in fisheries (3%) and development (6.3%) that felt their organisations were only working on gender because the donor required it (Fig. 1), with one emphasising that "*gender mainstreaming appealed to donors*" (NGO, Solomon Islands). The statement that least described why fisheries and development organisations considered gender was "because it is something our donor requires of us" (47.0% and 59.4%, respectively). A number of practitioners in fisheries (33.3%) and development (15.6%) organisations selected "to increase the number of women in our organisation" as the statement that least described their motivation to work on gender.

3.2. Gender commitments, expertise, training and networks

To understand practitioners' awareness of global and regional gender commitments, we asked "do you know any international or regional gender commitments your country or the Pacific region is signatory to?" It is important to note that we only asked practitioners to list the commitments made by their country, and did not test their knowledge of the content and how they were being applied in their respective countries. For fisheries practitioners the convention most familiar to them was CEDAW (36.8%, Fig. 2). For those that listed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), very few could list the goal number for gender equality; fewer than 6% of fisheries practitioners knew any Pacific regional gender commitments. No one listed the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication, although the guidelines includes gender as a cross-cutting theme. Overall knowledge of commitments was highest with NGOs and lowest with government staff. Only four of the 15 (26.7%) national fisheries ministries staff could list gender commitments their countries had signed up to, despite the requirement to provide gender data to the Ministry of Women in their respective countries – two listed CEDAW and two listed the SDGs, and none were aware of the regional commitments their countries have made on gender equality. Poor awareness of inter-

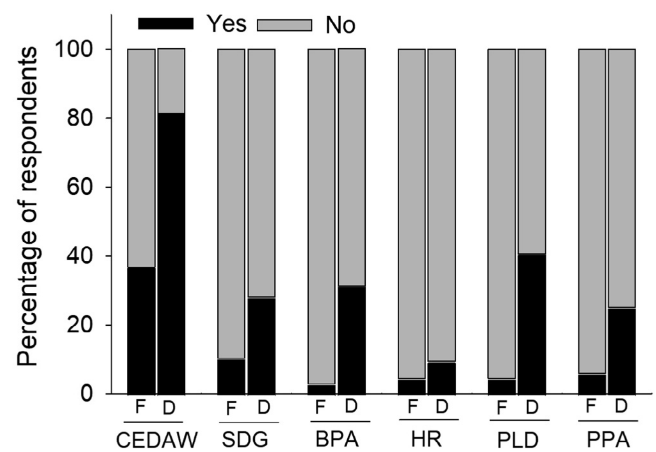

Fig. 2. Knowledge of global and regional gender commitments by fisheries (F) (n = 68) versus development (D) (n = 32) organisations and experts in Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Global: CEDAW = Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979), SGD = Sustainable Development Goals (2015), BPA = Beijing Platform for Action (1995), HR = Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948). Regional: PLD = Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (2012), PPA = Pacific Plan for Action on Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights (2017).

national and regional commitments also extended to staff designated as a 'gender focal point' within their respective fisheries organisations. In contrast, development organisations had a higher awareness of regional and global conventions and commitments (Fig. 2). For example, CEDAW was listed by 81.3% of practitioners from this group. However, surprisingly other conventions and commitments were each listed by <45% of development practitioners. For example, the regional commitments such as the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration and the Pacific Plan of Action on Gender Equality were less known (40.6% and 25.0%, respectively), particularly by those interviewed in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Overall, <10% listed the 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

With the exception of one respondent within a government ministry, all staff working for development organisations listed gender focal points sitting directly in their office or within the larger network of their organisation (Table 1). However, investments in gender expertise varied. For example, a staff member from a regional organisation explained that their division was "[the gender focal point] *for the whole ... organisation. But* [there are] *none across divisions. The appointment of gender focal points in other divi-*

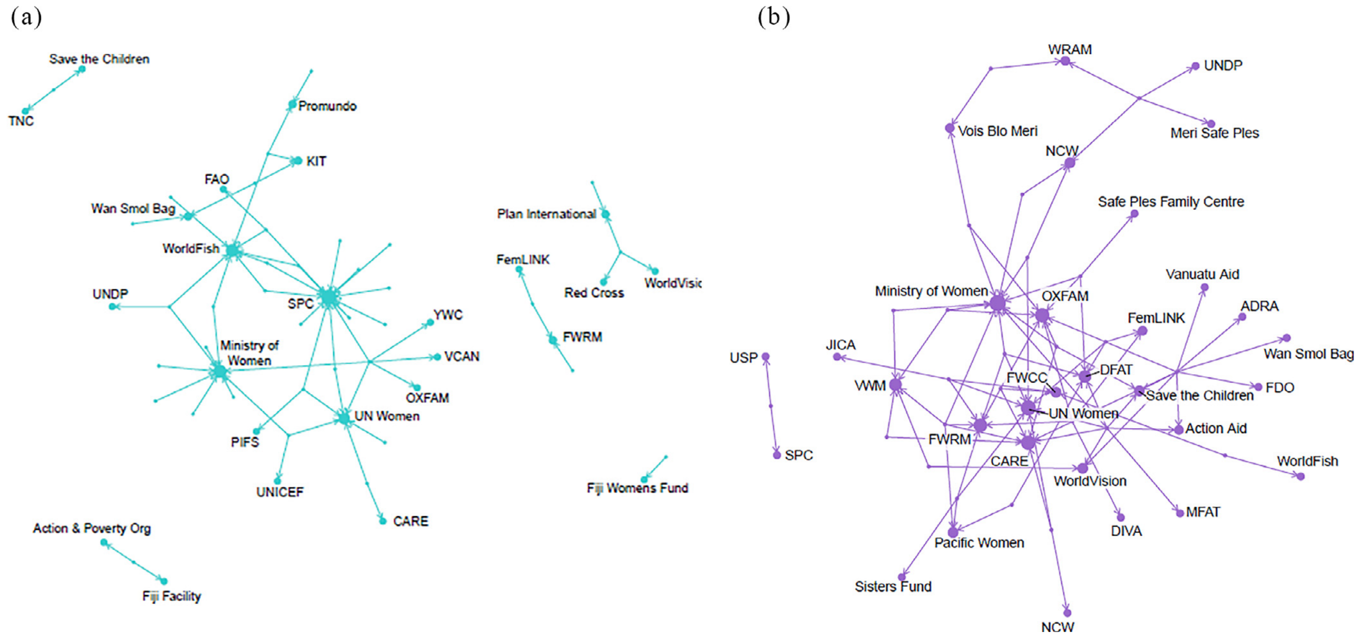

Fig. 3. Relationships and networks that individual practitioners in (a) fisheries and (b) development have with development organisations working on gender. In the analysis the direction of each arrow is from an individual to the organisation(s) they identified they worked with (at the time of the surveys). The larger the circle, the organisational node, the more frequently an organisation was listed by a respondent. Full names of organisations are listed in Table 1. Those not included are: DIVA = Diverse Voices for Action, FDO = Frangipani Disability Organisation, FWCC = Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, FWRM = Fiji Women's Rights Movement, KIT = Royal Tropical Institute (Amsterdam), MFAT = New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, NCW = National Council of Women, VWM = Vanuatu Women's Centre, YWC = Young Women for Change.

sions [is] *more ad hoc – people who have become or been appointed as gender focal points*". Other practitioners highlighted that their organisation hired staff with a gender background for specific programmatic positions, so the expertise and responsibility were not limited to a single person. This contrasted with fisheries organisations where on average 53% of practitioners stated they did not have a gender focal point, and those that did had largely appointed people who lacked formal gender-training or experience (for details see Table 1 in Mangubhai & Lawless, 2021). Despite development organisations investing more in gender focal points and having more opportunities to receive training, many still listed gender capacity as a barrier because they felt: (a) insufficient skilled gender specialists were within their larger organisation; (b) new hires often did not have the skills and so required significant investments; or (c) their key partners lacked this capacity. A grant manager explained, "*It's hard to find gender people. The ones that have the skills and expertise are already working in the areas they love. Looking for local expertise is challenging.*"

When asked whether they have received any gender training in the last 12 months, with the exception of government ministries, almost all practitioners from development organisations had received training (Table 1). This contrasted with the fisheries sector where between 27 and 48% of practitioners working for government, NGOs or regional organisations had received gender training in the last 12 months. The exception were global organisations working on fisheries, where 80% of practitioners had received gender training. Very few (14%) of government staff working in the development sector (i.e. within ministries of women across the three countries) had received training in the last 12 months.

The social network analysis showed the number and diversity of connections fisheries practitioners had with development organisations (Fig. 3). A total of 25 organisations were identified by fisheries practitioners, with nodes of centrality highest for SPC (0.233), Ministry of Women (0.150), WorldFish (0.133) and UN Women (0.100). However, the majority of organisations had listed only one connection. In contrast, 31 organisations were identified by development practitioners, with nodes of centrality highest for Ministry of Women (0.185), UN Women (0.148), CARE (0.130), Oxfam (0.130) and the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (0.111), with most organisations having more than one connection. When working on gender, development organisations had many more connections with each other, compared to fisheries organisations but few connections to sectoral (e.g. fisheries) organisations (Fig. 3).

3.3. Successful and failed approaches to gender inclusion

We contrasted the 15 most successful gender approaches identified by fisheries and development organisations and found little overlap with the exception of three – the use of the right-based tools, gender sensitisation training and the application of multiple approaches (Fig. 4). For successful approaches, development organisations described those that brought more *enduring change* such as gender mainstreaming[2], use of rights-based approaches, and behavioural change. In contrast, fisheries organisations focused on community-based approaches designed to 'reach' women such as participatory processes, separate focal group discussions, supporting women champions, and projects for women. 'Reach' approaches explicitly focus on women's participation in activities or projects (e.g. attendance at meetings, workshops or trainings), rather than specific benefits or the empowerment of women to make strategic life choices (Johnson et al., 2018; Mangubhai & Lawless, 2021). The other notable difference was that development organisations

[2] The United Nations Economic and Social Council (1997) defines the concept of gender mainstreaming as "*Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women as well as of men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal of mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality.*"

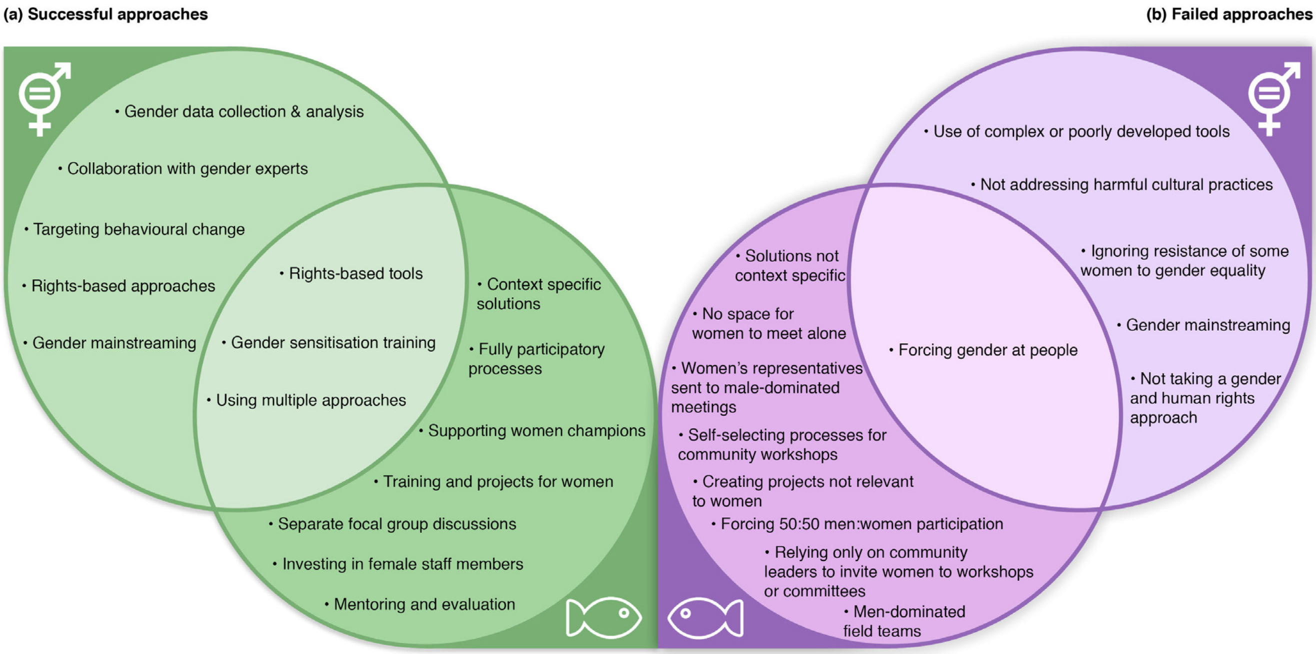

Figure 4. Contrasting the fifteen most (a) successful (green colour) and (b) failed (purple colour) approaches used by fisheries (fish symbol) versus development (female-male/gender equality symbol) organisations for gender inclusion. The overlap in the circles indicates approaches highlighted by both types of organisations.

focused on actions that addressed societal change, compared to fisheries that worked with women as individuals.

In terms of failed approaches, development practitioners highlighted the use of overly complex or poorly designed tools, not taking a gender and human rights approach, not addressing harmful cultural practices, and failing to take into account the role women can play (especially older and/or traditional women) in perpetuating gender inequalities (Fig. 4). Interestingly, gender mainstreaming was listed as a failure by some and a success by others in the development sector. A number of practitioners explained gender mainstreaming was not tangible and therefore hard for others to understand, with one suggesting it was largely a term used to attract donors.

In contrast, fisheries practitioners listed failed approaches largely associated with community engagement processes such as: selection processes for village workshops and committees resulting in poor representation of women, or women attending male-dominated meetings; forcing fifty-fifty male-to-female representation; not providing a space for women in a workshop or meeting to discuss issues without men present; creating projects not relevant to women; male-dominated field teams leading to poor engagement of women in rural settings; and creating solutions that are not context specific, especially the contexts relevant to women. For example, a woman working for an international NGO explained: "*Most times when decisions were made women weren't participating. In Fiji we have community-based management, which means 'no take' areas are often closest to the villages - and women are the most impacted, so we need to find a more inclusive way of managing fisheries.*" Within organisations, fisheries practitioners highlighted failures associated with recruitment processes and male-dominated field teams. For example, a government staff member explained that while an open merit recruitment system was in place and the number of women in senior roles was increasing, at the ministerial level women still faced more barriers than men; for example, only women are asked whether they will have time for senior positions given their "*roles in the family*". Both groups agreed that approaches that forced gender at people without sufficient explanation of what gender equality is and the impact of inequality, had failed.

3.4. Resistance to gender inclusion

We asked practitioners working in the development sector and experts working on gender in fisheries if they thought "there is resistance from some coastal fisheries partners or organisations to include gender in their work?" The majority highlighted that the main resistance was political will at the national government level, with some practitioners experiencing active pushback from senior government officials, while others struggled to get those in leadership to understand the relevance of gender and to take action. A gender advisor stated "*Do I really believe a male-dominated government ministry really want to consider gender? Only when compelled to. I don't think they really want to. Just* [by] *including women in men's work they think they've done enough, and* [in their opinion] *it didn't work*" [implying the type of attitude they hold]. A fisheries consultant explained that gender was seen as a foreign idea by a senior male government leader and "*he pushes back against outside interference.*" Without commitments, particularly at the upper levels of government (e.g. Permanent Secretary or Director), many felt it was very difficult to get meaningful institutional commitments and traction on gender issues.

Some highlighted that in male-dominated institutions there was active resistance to focus on women at provincial levels (i.e. subnational) with many holding views that "*gender means only elevating* [or favouring] *women*" and was therefore seen as harmful to families. The conflation of gender with women was a reoccurring theme when discussing resistance to work on gender. Others explained that among national and provincial officials as well as those in the fisheries sector, there were strong viewpoints that culture and religion were incongruent with gender equality. A staff member from an international development organisation explained "*the government is made up of Christian and cultural values, so it's always hard.*" Some senior fisheries officials held the viewpoint that cultural practice dictated that "*women's place is in*

[the] *house*". Religion was listed as a significant barrier to more meaningful inclusion of gender, and was highlighted by development practitioners in Vanuatu, and in particular around their work on domestic violence and the promotion of equal rights and social protection of LGBTQI (i.e. lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex) persons. For some, the resistance they experienced was because gender was seen as specifically for the promotion of LGBTQI rights, which was not considered acceptable from a cultural or religious perspective.

3.5. Opportunities

To improve gender integration in the fisheries sector, we asked practitioners working in the development sector if they perceived there were any opportunities in Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, or the wider Pacific region to encourage meaningful engagement with gender issues in coastal fisheries management. Their recommendations focused on the factors or enabling environments that underpin and are critical to the success of gender mainstreaming efforts. These perceived opportunities fell broadly into two categories: (1) institutionalisation of gender; and (2) gender inclusion approaches for the implementation of projects or programmes (Fig. 5). The institutionalisation of gender pertained to political understanding and commitment, conducting of gender audits of the organisation, monitoring and evaluation to measure gender impact, gender-sensitive budgeting and tracking, and investing in training and strengthening the capacity of staff. Many highlighted the diversity of tools available that have been successfully developed, tested and are used by gender development practitioners (some of which have been vernacularised) that can be used in the implementation of projects targeted at the fisheries sector. These include the CARE gender assessment framework (CARE, 2012) and associated tools, power mapping, and the unpaid work framework for use at the village level to better acknowledge and where possible redistribute the workload between women and men more evenly and fairly (see Barclay et al., 2021; Carnegie et al., 2012; Fiji Women's Fund, 2019). Many practitioners also recommended investments in leadership: women leaders both internally within their own organisations and externally, particularly those who are in positions of influence and/or who might make good mentors for other women; investing in organisational gender advisors or focal points; and supporting male champions in organisational leadership positions (i.e. positions of power) who can serve as strong advocates for gender equality. This also included exploring opportunities to engage and work more closely with faith-based organisations, especially churches, to address harmful practices that impact women. A respondent from an international development NGO in Vanuatu explained "[We are] *working with the Council of Churches through their sermons on Sunday. They've accepted us and allowed us to talk about prevention of sexual assault and abuse.*"

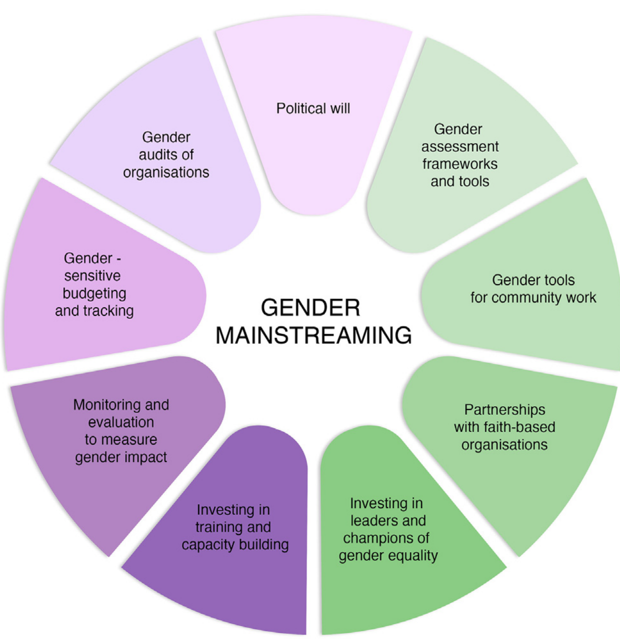

Figure 5. Opportunities identified by development practitioners to mainstream gender into the fisheries sector. Purple = institutional culture and practice, Green = practice for implementation of projects and programmes.

Development practitioners also recommended undertaking regular gender audits to assess the institutionalisation of gender equality into organisations (e.g. policies, projects, programmes, budgets), monitoring and evaluating projects and programs to measure impact of projects, and using expenditure tracking tools to monitor financial investments in women and/or gender. Some mentioned the need to mainstream gender into annual workplans, business plans and budgeting (i.e. gender responsive budgeting) of national governments. Many recommended that fisheries organisations rethink how they built and maintained capacity for leading gender work – specifically to include the hiring of staff with gender expertise, and investing in regular (rather than one off) training for staff. A Fijian government staff stated "*For me it took quite a while to be convinced on gender. A three-hour session on gender for the whole year is not enough to be convincing.*" In the case of governments there was a suggestion to follow the Solomon Islands example of internalising the training within government (as opposed to outsourcing) to make it accessible and potentially compulsory for those in the public service, including those in senior positions.

4. Discussion

Drawing on decades of knowledge, learning and experiences from experts within the development sector, we discuss and recommend areas of strategic partnership or opportunities more generally to mainstream gender into fisheries and strengthen capacity in the sector. Our analysis highlights divergence between fisheries and development practitioners and/or their organisations that can serve as 'pivot points' to change the way gender is integrated into fisheries. In this context, a 'pivot point' indicates an opportune point of reference to take fisheries organisations away from their current 'tinkering' (gender exploitative) or 'tailoring' (gender accommodative) pathways, and change to a 'transformative' pathway and the long-term agenda of gender equality (Rees 1998 in Benschop & Verloo, 2006; Lawless et al., 2022).[3] These opportunities include: (1) re-evaluating organisational motivations for working on gender; (2) investing in the enabling environment for gender mainstreaming; (3) shifting understanding of what constitutes successful gender approaches; and (4) investing in learning networks. Below we describe the likely pitfalls the sector can avoid, and how fisheries practitioners can progress commitments on gender equality if they embrace these opportunities; this includes setting a clearer delineation or benchmark for *gender best practice* in the fisheries sector.

[3] *Gender exploitative* refers to approaches that "reinforce or further exploit gender norms and dynamics" to achieve desired outcomes; *Gender accommodative* refers to approaches that "work around barriers to women's or men's participation and try to acknowledge and compensate for gender differences, norms, relations and inequalities"; and *Gender transformative* approaches "aim to transform harmful social and gender norms, change power imbalances and eliminate gender-based discrimination" (Delisle et al., 2021).

4.1. Shifting value systems

The primary motivation between fisheries and development organisations for considering gender in their work diverged strongly, highlighting different values, goals and ideas of what activities are considered successful and not when it came to gender equality. Development practitioners recognised and responded quickly that gender equality was a fundamental human right (*inherent*), while there was less consensus and more hesitancy amongst fisheries practitioners who largely saw gender as a means for their organisation to achieve other outcomes such as fisheries sustainability, productivity and profitability (*instrumental*). These findings are consistent with a growing number of studies that suggest some sectors are only valuing gender equality as an *instrument* to achieving or improving outcomes such as productivity, conservation, management or development, rather than a fundamental human right (Lawless et al., 2021, 2022; Nazneen & Hickey, 2019; Rao, 2017). Although poorly understood and recognised, human rights are inherent and gendered in fisheries and includes rights to natural resources, a heathy and safe working environment, to be food secure, and to be free from violence (FAO, 2015, 2017). As such they should not be considered optional or a by-product. While instrumental frames are easier for fisheries practitioners to understand and implement than trying to address complex issues of power and social justice in different cultural contexts (Kabeer, 1999), this framing may be problematic. They can lead to inadequate interventions and investments to address the underlying causes of inequalities that exclude or marginalise women in decision-making, may even strengthen negative gendered power dynamics that may be harmful to women and men (Nazneen & Hickey, 2019). Furthermore, instrumental frames may promote investments in the fisheries sector to use women as a tool (i.e. their productive capacity) for delivering fisheries benefits to others in the formal (or informal) economy, without improving the wellbeing or rights of the women themselves (Chant & Sweetman, 2012), rather than seeking to benefit, empower or transform their lives (Mangubhai & Lawless, 2021).

While we recognise that instrumental frames may present opportune entry points to address gender inequalities, this framing should be used cautiously in view of potential unintended consequences, e.g., further entrenching harmful social norms. We argue that a strategic partnership with development organisations may help fisheries organisations understand the sectoral advancements that come and the sectoral pitfalls that may be avoided when gender equality is valued intrinsically and recognised as a fundamental human right. For example, gender equality will enable women to share and contribute their knowledge on fisheries to improve management (Chapman, 1987; Vunisea, 2008), pass on moral and social values to the next generation to equitably improve marine stewardship (Ram-Bidesi, 2015), strengthen social-ecological resilience (Kawarazuka et al., 2017), and increase or 'unlock' their innovative capacity (Cohen et al., 2016) needed to address fisheries declines and build healthy, and resilient blue food systems critical for human health and wellbeing (Short et al., 2021). By simply instrumentalising gender equality, fisheries practitioners are failing to address human rights that may be violated by current practices. The fisheries sector needs to pivot and commit to egalitarian values and adopt gender equality, as a key cross-cutting principle rather than an instrument.

4.2. Addressing political resistance and gaining support for gender mainstreaming

A lack of political will within national governments was highlighted as the main barrier to addressing gender equality within sectoral ministries such as fisheries, with active resistance by male leadership. This finding is not limited to Melanesia. There is global recognition that governments are unwilling to promote and implement policies that actively challenge gender norms and relations that privilege men (Waylen, 2007). This is enabling pushback against progress on the rights of women and girls in the public realm (Goetz 2018 in Nazneen et al., 2019). This was evident by the discomfort and resistance of fisheries ministers to having constructive global dialogue on gender and human rights during the development of the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (Jentoft, 2014). While the FAO guidelines are voluntary, they are linked to international laws (e.g. CEDAW) to which many fisheries nations (including Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu) are signatory and have obligations to fulfil. However, fisheries and development practitioners' low knowledge of Pacific regional gender commitments highlighted the empty rhetoric of political leaders that fails to translate into national policy change, gender-responsive budgeting, and transformative actions on the ground (Pacific Community, 2016).

Mainstreaming gender and human rights (especially women's rights) across all sectors and governance was recognised at the World Conference on Women in 1995 as a "*critical strategy for achieving government commitments to gender equality and sustainable development*" (Pacific Community, 2016). In our study, gender mainstreaming was identified as a key opportunity by development practitioners and gender and fisheries experts for the fisheries sector. They recommended increased investments in six priority areas that are also reflected in national gender audits in the Pacific Islands region: political will (i.e. actions taken on gender equality commitments and formalised within systems); legal and policy frameworks (i.e. laws and policies to reflect international and national gender equality commitments); organisational culture (i.e. attitudes of staff, policies and systems in place to support gender equality); accountability and responsibility (i.e. monitoring and evaluation to track progress towards gender-equality impact); technical capacity (i.e. skills and experience of organisation to mainstream gender across projects and programmes); and adequate human and financial resources (Pacific Community, 2016). While performance management and reporting systems to make institutions and people accountable are quite weak in several Pacific Islands countries the Public Service Commission in Solomon Islands, however, had developed accessible and compulsory gender training modules that integrate standards and monitoring (including gender deliverables in contracts of Permanent Secretaries). These measures hold some promise, provided ministries and their sectoral portfolios face consequences for non-integration or non-compliance (Asian Development Bank, 2015; Pacific Community, 2016), and should be accompanied by high-level government support for policy and sectoral strategy reviews to institutionalise gender equality.

A notable difference and potential pivot point for change for fisheries organisations is in the type and intensity of investment in internal institutional capacity building. Fisheries practitioners had limited opportunities to receive training with internal gender focal points who also lacked the skills to provide that training. In contrast, development organisations hired multiple staff with gender expertise, thereby avoiding gender being the responsibility of a single focal point, and provided recent and ongoing training for staff. This approach made gender equality everyone's responsibility, as opposed to it being delegated to gender focal points, experts, or small teams within organisations. However, we recognise that gender training on its own is unlikely to be sufficient to shift (or will be slow to shift) core values of people around gender equality (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). This will be particularly the case in cultures and religions with strong patriarchal norms and values and 'cultures of silence' as evident in the Pacific Islands (Vunisea, 2008). In fact, efforts towards gender equality may lessen or weaken after training if practitioners see this as a tick box exercise, and gender equality is not valued as a normative principle (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). Investment in gender capacity must be designed to equip individuals and their organisations with the knowledge and skills to deal with gender blindness and bias. Such barriers have to be overcome in order to change the gendered systems, structures and cultures that support inequalities, and prevent fisheries practitioners using 'incomprehension' to hide unwillingness to change (Benschop & Verloo, 2006). Development organisations can work with fisheries practitioners to help them better understand the value of gender equality, identify approaches to tackle the root causes of gender blindness and bias, and take a stronger stance against systems of discrimination. It is important not to underestimate the resistance of some women to gender integration, particularly those who see it as being in conflict with Pacific Island culture or religious beliefs. Women may have their own stakes in patriarchal arrangements (Cornwall, 2003). The pursuit of gender equality will require the engagement of both men and women, and strategic alliances, with the pursuit of gender equality and the integration of gender into different sectors and society, being the responsibility of all.

The differing opinions of development practitioners on whether gender mainstreaming was listed as a successful or a failed approach likely reflects people's experiences working with government in the study countries or wider Pacific, and the challenges of institutionalising gender into structures and processes that determine public policy. While theoretically robust there is a large gap in practice (Daly, 2005; Moser & Moser, 2005). As a result gender mainstreaming is a globally contested concept that has received criticism by those who object to the depoliticising of the term away from roles and power dynamics within governments to a more 'integrationist' approach (Andersson, 2018; Azcona & Bhatt, 2020) that dilutes and therefore weakens feminist approaches to gender and development (Ahikire, 2008; Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). Currently, the responsibility for delivering on gender mainstreaming and gender equality commitments is siloed with the Ministry of Women (especially in Fiji and Vanuatu) with little authority to influence other sectoral ministries, enabling fisheries ministries to abdicate their roles and responsibilities in addressing gender inequalities (this study; Mangubhai & Lawless, 2021; Pacific Community, 2016). As a result, gender is not widely communicated and mainstreamed into governance systems and across sectors to address the structures and relations of power and privilege that produce gender inequalities and discrimination. This in turn makes it challenging for the fisheries organisations to address sectoral gender issues on their own, especially with their current low capacity for gender inclusion (Mangubhai & Lawless, 2021).

Given the national level gender mainstreaming investments by some development organisations, especially CROP agencies (e.g. SPC's Human Rights and Social Development Division) mandated to support Pacific Islands' governments, it would be advantageous and more cost-effective for fisheries organisations to draw on and contribute through these processes to transform the approaches their sector uses. While there is still debate on whether the responsibility for gender mainstreaming is the responsibility of one or all ministries, we argue the answer should be both, with a central ministry (e.g. Ministry of Women) and sectoral ministries, with each having a role to play. There are examples of countries that have similarly tried to widen the responsibility for gender beyond a single Ministry. The governments of Ireland and the United Kingdom have tried to decentralise gender mainstreaming, treating it as a cross-sectoral issue that is the responsibility of all levels of government (Daly, 2005). Other governments have attempted to put in place a national strategy where individual ministries are assigned objectives and targets (e.g. Belgium, France, Greece, Lithuania, Spain), or use gender analysis tools in the design and implementation of policies that is embedded across institutions in society (e.g. Sweden) (*Ibid*). While none of these approaches are without their flaws (e.g. see critiques by Andersson, 2018; Benschop & Verloo, 2006), they do attempt to mainstream gender into government structures and processes, and in the case of Sweden into society, and try to address sectoral resistance and avoidance of responsibility. Development practitioners in the Pacific Islands region can help with institutional adoption of gender mainstreaming, and how to address issues of power, discrimination and privilege in sectoral practices, particularly fisheries activities targeted at rural poverty, food and nutritional security and livelihoods. Furthermore, a strategic partnership with development organisations including the Ministry of Women within individual countries may help ensure gender is mainstreamed into the fisheries, and there are increased investments at the household, communal and societal levels.

4.3. Investing in gender best practice using approaches adapted from development

The approaches being enacted and perceived as successful diverged notably between development and fisheries practitioners. Development practitioners described investments in structural and systemic change (e.g. gender mainstreaming, behaviour change) as successful for achieving gender equality, whereas those in fisheries focused on 'quick fix' approaches that reach women as individuals but do not ultimately benefit, empower or transform their lives (this study; Mangubhai & Lawless, 2021). This narrow focus on individual agency is currently reinforced by the way in which gender is represented and articulated in fisheries policy (Lawless et al., 2021). The differences in favoured approaches is not just a reflection of different motivations and values, but also of a greater understanding by development practitioners and their organisations that gender equality is a relational issue that will not be solved by simply empowering women as individuals, but requires structural and systemic reform (Chant & Sweetman, 2012) to be addressed by governments, development institutions, private sector, and wider society. Furthermore, the approaches used by development organisations avoid conflating gender with women, which is prevalent in the fisheries sector (Lawless et al., 2021; Mangubhai & Lawless, 2021), do not frame women's positions as a disadvantage (i.e. men's positions of power as the norm), and do not make women solely responsible for exerting their agency to address structural inequalities (Benschop & Verloo, 2006; Nazneen & Hickey, 2019).

A partnership approach is strategic because development practitioners have more experience dealing with resistance to or misalignments with gender equality principles, such as, for example, those stemming from religious interpretations (Rakau et al., 2019). According to national census data, Christianity is the dominant religion in the Pacific, including in Fiji (64% of the population), Solomon Islands (92%) and Vanuatu (83%). Religion has a strong role in shaping gender ideologies and viewpoints on gender equality, and its interpretations, especially those that promote strong patriarchal doctrines, can be barriers to engaging in meaningful dialogue (Alexander, 2018; Seguino, 2011). Religion was only highlighted by development practitioners (not by those in fisheries) as a barrier to gender inclusion, despite its dominant role in shaping social rules, cultural norms and behaviours in Melanesia (Douglas, 2002; Scheyvens, 2003). Development practitioners recognise the large influence religion, religious institutions and their leaders have on their congregations and followers, and highlighted that working with faith-based organisations may help the fisheries sector address resistance to gender equality, and tackle more harmful gender norms (e.g. controlling access to fisheries resources).

Opportunities could be found that frame the conversations around gender equality in culturally appropriate ways that resonate with the religious beliefs of people (e.g. biblical interpretations that promote equality). This may help break down barriers, particularly for those that see gender equality as foreign ideas coming from western societies.

Lastly, closer partnership and collaboration with development practitioners can create opportunities to facilitate knowledge and skills transfer on gender best practice, as well as the diversity of tools and rights-based approaches development practitioners have produced and applied to different contexts, including in the Pacific Islands region (this study). Integrative tools used by development practitioners target investments beyond individual agency to include changing gender relations and transforming structures in both formal and informal spheres to support more enduring change at multiple strategic levels (CARE, 2020; Hillenbrand et al., 2015). Many of the tools are already being used in the Pacific Islands region by regional organisations and national NGOs and are being adapted for work in the fisheries sector (Barclay et al., 2021; Mangubhai et al., 2022; Mangubhai & Cowley, 2021). Investing in gender best practices, particularly institutionalising transformative practices may help the fisheries address inequalities in the sector.

4.4. Getting together strategic coalitions

Most fisheries practitioners and/or their organisations had few connections to development organisations with knowledge of, and commitments to gender equality. In contrast, development organisations had strong networks amongst themselves but were poorly connected to sectoral partners, including those in fisheries (Fig. 3). This suggests that silos may be preventing cross-learning, knowledge and skills transfer, and collaborations to mainstream gender into all sectors and facets of society. The Pacific Gender Coordination Group (formally the Pacific Gender Taskforce) established in 2017 may be one opportunity for fisheries organisations committed to gender equality to quickly broaden their gender networks. The coordination group meets virtually every two months and provides exposure to CROP, UN agencies, women-led and feminist civil society organisations, and broader group of partners working on the advancement of gender equality across the Pacific. The mandate of the network is "ensuring greater and continued collaboration, cooperation, and coordination between partners working on gender, recognizing the different organizational mandates and values that each brings to the realization of sustainable development and fulfilment of gender equality and women's empowerment in the Pacific."

Given that progress on gender equality is slow, building coalitions that purposely break down siloes (e.g. between development and fisheries sectors) and build collaborative work towards tangible outcomes in specific sectors may succeed in improving gender equality from the ground up. Coalitions between development organisations and those that work in specific sectors (e.g. fisheries) can strengthen social movements, and may have a higher likelihood of getting political commitments to change national structures and systems of governance that shape and influence gender equality aspirations and outcomes for society. Laurel Weldon & Htun (2013) highlighted that national feminist organisations are able to use regional and international conventions and agreements to leverage and advance gender equality. These coalitions may be especially strong if they are led by national organisations capable of overcoming political resistance to 'outside' influence or labelling gender equality as 'not the Pacific way'. For example, fisheries practitioners appear to lack interest in and resist discussing gender equality at the Pacific technical and heads of fisheries annual meetings (S.M., pers. obs.). Although a number of non-government fisheries organisations attend the regional meetings, they mainly focus on environmental issues, and occasionally on labour abuses at sea, ignoring gender inequality and women's fisheries issues. At present, women's collective voices are not represented in such regional forums. A strategic alliance between gender equality advocacy groups or ministries of women may help strengthen and increase the number of voices advocating for gender equality to be integrated into the fisheries sector. These voices, however, would need credibility in fisheries issues to succeed. In some countries, strategic alliances between women representatives in different political partners have led to the successful adoption of new laws and gender equity policies or broader improvement in gender equality, especially during democratic transitions in some countries (Alexander, 2018; Waylen, 2007). Because women's mobilisation is a critical part of achieving greater gender equality (Alexander, 2018), there needs to be focused and sustained investment to build women's representation at pivotal national and regional fisheries assemblies.

5. Conclusion

In three Melanesian countries (Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu), the present study revealed how fisheries sector organisations and practitioners diverged in their comprehension, motivations and assessment of successful gender approaches from development organisations and practitioners. Fisheries professionals framed the need for gender equality in instrumental terms; e.g., to increase likelihood of sustainably managed fisheries, with little reference to human rights, understood little of the wider gender equality context nationally and internationally, and defined success in narrowly based approaches that reached individual women to improve their agency in a vacuum of concern for deeper gender norms and power relations change. Some practitioners also revealed their disbelief and even resistance to engaging with gender issues. Development organisations provided their practitioners with richer sources of knowledge and training on gender, frame the gender needs as inherent to human rights and were more attuned to approaches that help transform existing social and professional cultures (e.g., by targeting behavioural change).

These positions could be justified by the respective mandates of the sectoral and development agencies where fisheries organisations focus on production and its sustainability and development agencies on social outcomes. Not surprisingly, the different types of practitioners maintained separate networks, creating challenges to bringing them together on common work. In the present study, we are interested in how development organisations could contribute to breaking through the resistance to gender in fisheries and increase uptake of gender-focused action to become gender responsive and eventually gender transformative. We have devoted considerable space in our Discussion to this issue but not addressed why development organisations would want to engage with a sector such as fisheries. We therefore conclude by speculating that the benefits to development organisations are threefold. First, the cooperation would help them break out of their own silos and apply their knowledge and expertise in a key economic and food security sector for Melanesians. Second, progress at the sectoral level would contribute to progress at the whole-of-society level and welfare levels. Finally, lessons from fisheries – one of the hardest challenges in gender equality – could be valuable for the development organisations tackling other sectors with renewed insights.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Sangeeta Mangubhai: Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Resources, Data curation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Project administration, Funding acquisition. **Sarah Lawless:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Investigation, Resources, Data curation, Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Project administration, Funding acquisition. **Anna Cowley:** Writing – review & editing. **Jayshree P. Mangubhai:** Writing – review & editing. **Meryl J. Williams:** Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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