Improving nutrition through women’s and men’s engagement across the seaweed food chain

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Overview

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Background

**Nutrition and food security in the Pacific**

- Good nutrition is important for preventing disease, improving health.
- Pacific Island nations face considerable challenges including malnutrition and food insecurity.
- Gender inclusive, nutrition-sensitive agriculture – provides opportunity for access to nutritious food as well as supporting livelihoods and income

**Seaweed aquaculture**

**Benefits of seaweed**

- Sustainable food source, no feed crop
- Nutritious - vitamins and minerals, fibre, omega fatty acids and in some cases protein.
- Inclusive value chain for men, women and families.
- Socio-economic benefits – low cost; cultural and social significance
Journey to date

**Previous projects (since 2016)**
- technical support for sustainable production and farming
- dietary intakes and potential role of seaweed to improve nutrition outcomes
- understanding consumer motivations and interest

**This project**
To understand the barriers to, and enablers of, men’s & women’s economic empowerment through the seaweed food chain.

- What are the roles (current and potential) of men and women?
- What are the barriers they face in participating?
- What are the things that help them participate?
- How are men and women’s experiences different?
Methods & Sample

Methodology & Data collection
• Photo elicitation process (Roles)
• Focus group discussion (Enablers and barriers)
• Conceptual frameworks:
  • International Labour Organisation Market System / Value Chain Framework (ILO, 2021)
  • Women’s Empowerment and Market Systems (WEAMS) Framework (Jones, 2016)

Context & setting
• Coastal villages across Savai’i (10 villages) during Oct and Nov 2021
• Concurrent project → UN Seaweed Farming Inception project

Participants
• 135 people (men and women) aged 18 – 84 years
• Gender disaggregated groups – 2 groups per village
Photos of the photo elicitation and focus group discussion sessions in the villages
Findings – Roles

INPUT PROVISION
- Not discussed in detail – some similar farming inputs such as acquisition of assets (boats, equipment) apply

GROWING
- Sustainable planning and management of wild seaweed
- Wild gleaming with snorkel
- Wild gleaming shallow water

HARVESTING
- Setting up the cages (off shore)
- Monitoring (off shore)
- Harvesting trays (on shore)

PROCESSING
- Installing the trays in cages (off shore)
- Preparing boat for harvest
- Cleaning of the seaweed
- Sorting and weighing (onshore)

MARKETING (Local)
- Packaging fresh seaweed (to sell)
- Promoting seaweed

CONSUMING
- Awareness of seaweed (availability, benefits etc.)
- Selling seaweed (or other products)
- Buying seaweed (or other products)

Women – traditional roles and knowledge holders

Men more dominant (offshore tasks)
- Strength
- Physical ‘heavy work’
- Concerns women’s safety

Women – roles in processing
- Sorting and weighing
- Cleaning of seaweed
- Packaging fresh seaweed

Women & girls stronger presence
- Area of expertise
- Better quality
- “Because women can do things neatly and completely. If this is given to us then you will see seagrasses still attaching to corals.” (Male participant)

Figure showing the local Samoan seaweed value chain and roles of men and women as perceived by the villages. The arrows indicate the flow of tasks. The circles with the letters represent the genders: M=Men, B = young men (untitled men/older boys), W=Women, G= girls, S=Shared role. Capital letter indicates stronger presence / potential lead role. Dashed boxes indicate opportunities/tasks identified in the focus group discussion data that followed, but roles were not attributed to these.
Findings - barriers & enablers

**ESSENTIAL INPUTS**
- Seaweed governance (Formal village governance structures, planning and decision making)
- Information, knowledge and skills (new required and existing TK)
- Materials and equipment (e.g., cages, boats, gear)
- People / workforce (labour)
- Personal agency (motivation and time)
- Environmental influences
- Access to reef

**CORE FUNCTIONS**

**ACCESS TO SUPPORTING FUNCTIONS**
- Financial supports
- Market opportunities

**FORMAL INSTITUTIONS**
- Laws and regulations

**INFORMAL INSTITUTIONS**
- Social and cultural norms

**Outputs**
- Market outputs – price & profit (Seaweed and seaweed products for sale to end-consumers)
- Seaweed for home and village consumption
- Sustainable harvesting practices
Gender Implications

• Cultural and social norms surrounding traditionally gendered activities → consider negative impacts on participation

• Role and value of women in seaweed value chains (gleaning, knowledge holders, driving force of seaweed industry)

• In creating new opportunities, ensure we are not inadvertently “driving women out of the value chain”
  o Support women to maintain and strengthen their roles
  o Involve women from the start with ‘new’ technologies (institutions and social norms / inclusivity)
What we’ve learned, and where to from here

1. Build on individual and shared strengths:
   - Collaborative nature of Samoan villages
   - Capabilities of men and women

2. Embed roles and value chain within existing structures and support functions

3. Opportunities to create needed (or missing) inputs and to build capacity

4. Allow time and opportunity for people to codesign the solution
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Questions?