

The Pandanus Value Chain in RMI Laura Area

The Pacific Organic and Ethical Trade community (POETCom), housed within the Land Resources Division (LRD) of the Pacific Community (SPC), is implementing a four-year project Building Prosperity for Women Producers, Processors and Women Owned Businesses through Organic Value Chains (BPWP) that promotes gender equality and women's economic empowerment through the development of organic agriculture value chain models. The project is funded by the Government of Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and is being implemented in four countries: Palau, Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI), the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)—Pohnpei and Kiribati. The project acknowledges women's unique contribution to agriculture in the Pacific, as well as existing gender inequalities. It recognizes the interlinkages between women's empowerment and the organic sector.

To understand existing challenges and opportunities for women as primary actors, the BPWP project conducted a gender assessment of the pandanus value chain in RMI in 2019/2020.

Why Pandanus?

Pandanus has been an essential plant in Marshallese society for thousands of years. It serves as a traditional food source and raw material for handicraft production. It is also more drought tolerant than other plants and edible species on atoll nations such as RMI, making it an ideal crop for sustainable practices.

The pandanus sub-sector therefore provides valuable opportunities for women's economic empowerment through current or potential livelihood activities.

Why the Laura area of RMI?

The Laura area of RMI is an ideal location for the gender-sensitive assessment for the following reasons:

- 1 The pandanus tree is readily available, making its cultivation a dominant rural activity.
- 2 A large number of women are involved in farming activities in the pandanus sector.
- 3 Organic pandanus production is possible given the current eco-friendly farming practices and environmental conditions.

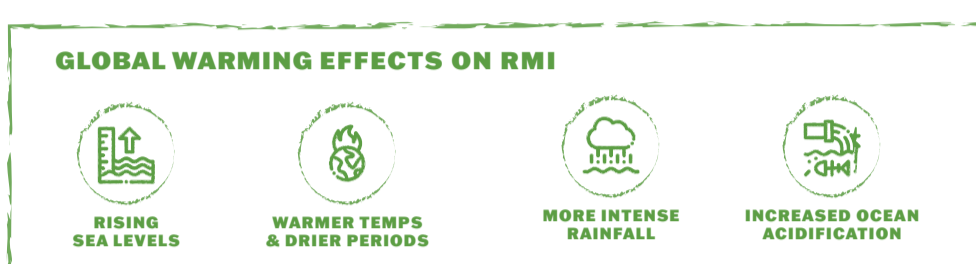
Gender in RMI

RMI is a matrilineal society: Land rights are passed down through daughters. Traditional Marshallese custom includes defined roles for men and women that are often complementary and highlight the valuable contributions of each sex.

There are dissonant gender stereotypes, roles and inequality. The BPWP project was designed in response to this environment. By making resources available and promoting new skills among women, the project aims to boost gender mainstreaming and the gender equality and women's empowerment agenda while also strengthening the organic sector.

Climate Change in RMI

Small island developing states are identified as being at a significantly higher risk of the adverse consequences of global warming. RMI is considered at greatest risk.



Organic practices provide sustainable solutions to build resilient farming systems capable of addressing and combating climate change. To date, more than 20,000 Marshallese climate refugees have emigrated due to climate-related extreme weather conditions.

Pandanus Value Chain in RMI

STEP 1 LAND PREPARATION

INVOLEMEN BY GENDER
Mainly men

Women usually trim the branches of the pandanus tree while men dig the soil.

CONSTRAINTS FACED BY WOMEN
Different physical strengths, technical and traditional knowledge related to land preparation.

Lack of proper equipment

UNDERLYING CAUSES
Rigid gender roles, internalized over time by women and men.

Women's limited exposure to training opportunities and interaction with extension services that are gender blind or neutral.

VALUE CHAIN CONSEQUENCES
Women's preferences and priorities related to pandanus may be treated as secondary in decisions regarding land use, leading to possible delays of needed or preferred actions.

ACTION NEEDED
SEE RECOMMENDATIONS 1a 2a 4a

STEP 2 PLANTING

INVOLEMEN BY GENDER
Mainly men

CONSTRAINTS FACED BY WOMEN
Lack of technical knowledge

UNDERLYING CAUSES
Same as land preparation

VALUE CHAIN CONSEQUENCES
Same as land preparation

ACTION NEEDED
SEE RECOMMENDATIONS 1a 2a 4a



STEP 3 MAINTENANCE

INVOLEMEN BY GENDER
Mainly women

CONSTRAINTS FACED BY WOMEN
Lack of awareness on the importance of investing time in pandanus tree maintenance

UNDERLYING CAUSE
No farming culture or knowledge, but rather "gatherers" culture/attitude

VALUE CHAIN CONSEQUENCES
Limited interest in and perceived need for production training.

Delayed harvest, resulting in lower production.

ACTION NEEDED
SEE RECOMMENDATION 2a

STEP 4 HARVESTING

INVOLEMEN BY GENDER
Women (on lower branches)

Men (higher branches)

CONSTRAINTS FACED BY WOMEN
Lack of proper equipment

Limited autonomous decisions by women

UNDERLYING CAUSE
Gender norms—lack of favorable attitudes toward women climbing trees.

VALUE CHAIN CONSEQUENCES
Additional production cost due to hiring extra people.

Lack of autonomy could limit and undermine women's potential contribution to the value chain. A woman's decision and priorities about which resources to invest in and when could be treated as secondary.

Women's limited decision-making power could lead to less motivation for active participation in value chain upgrading activities.

ACTION NEEDED
SEE RECOMMENDATIONS 1c 2a 4a

STEP 5 PROCESSING/VALUE ADDITION

INVOLEMEN BY GENDER
Mainly women

CONSTRAINTS FACED BY WOMEN
Limited knowledge and skills for making value-added products.

Lack of equipment.

UNDERLYING CAUSE
Norms that influence different roles and stereotypes on entrepreneurial behaviors by gender. This results in lack of entrepreneurial/business skills, self-confidence, networking with other women; lack of visibility for strong female role models in business; lack of capital (and knowledge to access loans).

VALUE CHAIN CONSEQUENCES
No competitive products targeting changing consumer preferences and needs.

No opportunity for value chain expansion or upscaling

ACTION NEEDED
SEE RECOMMENDATION 2c

STEP 6 STORAGE

INVOLEMEN BY GENDER
Mainly women

CONSTRAINTS FACED BY WOMEN
Traditional techniques used to store pandanus are time consuming and repetitive work.

UNDERLYING CAUSE
Family units have become smaller and fail to provide household support needed.

VALUE CHAIN CONSEQUENCES
Less availability of the product, as well as fewer opportunities to use it as part of an adaptation strategy in case of food shortage.

ACTION NEEDED
SEE RECOMMENDATION 1c



STEP 7 TRANSPORT

INVOLEMEN BY GENDER
Men

CONSTRAINTS FACED BY WOMEN
Limited access to private and public means of transport.

UNDERLYING CAUSE
Gender gaps in accessing assets

VALUE CHAIN CONSEQUENCES
Fewer options for women's access and contribution to the markets. This could result in limited availability of products.

Lack of planning from women producers and vendors could potentially create conflicts among them and lead to less motivation for active participation in value chain.

ACTION NEEDED
SEE RECOMMENDATION 1d



STEP 8 DISTRIBUTION AND MARKETS

INVOLEMEN BY GENDER
Mainly women

CONSTRAINTS FACED BY WOMEN
Women producers have limited aggregation and market options.

No agreements in place between markets/supermarkets and producers to ensure consistency of offer.

Limited access to documentation needed (among producers) to sell to formal markets.

UNDERLYING CAUSE
Lack of proper recognition of women's traditional roles and activities that results in lack of entrepreneurial/business skills and weak perception of farming as an income-generating activity for women producers.

Lack of technical knowledge about selling requirements; lack of a sales network and women's confidence for selling.

VALUE CHAIN CONSEQUENCES
Limited options for value chain upscaling and expansion.

Limited choice of products on the market.

Lower profit along the value chain.

ACTION NEEDED
SEE RECOMMENDATIONS 1d 3a 3c

Country and Value Chain Specific Recommendations

INSTITUTIONS: Apply a cross-sectoral approach to gender, climate and agriculture institutions

Build synergies with relevant institutions and interventions to ensure sustainability, efficiency, local ownership and greater development intervention.

Key stakeholders: Ministry of Natural Resources and Commerce (MNRC), Ministry of Culture and Internal Affairs (MCIA), Local Government, Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI), Development Partners

- 1a Gender sensitize extension services, and relevant authorities/departments working in agricultural fields at the institutional, programming and policy level through awareness activities, trainings, and applying a cross-sectoral approach.
- 1b Apply a gender sensitive cross-sectoral approach to opportunities at the national level within gender, agriculture, and climate change-related fields.
- 1c Collaborate with policy makers to increase climate change resilience while promoting women as key agents of change in climate responses to create space for and reinvigorate the gender and natural resources management debate. Explore new and "forgotten" techniques to boost climate change adaptation strategies.
- 1d Collaborate with local governments to explore opening new locations for selling directly to the consumers, as well as providing additional transport options for vendors.

SUPPORT SERVICES: Extension services and business development support providers are critical for expanding and strengthening women's skills to enable their movement up the value chain. Though women dominate the value chain, their limited technical, financial and business skills restrain their ability to change their status.

Key stakeholders: Marshall Islands Organic Farmers Association (MIOFA), other farmer associations, local nutritionists and promoters of healthy eating habits, National Training Centre (NTC), College of the Marshall Islands (CMI), Office of Commerce, Investment and Tourism (OCIT), etc.

- 2a Gender sensitizing agricultural extension services. Engage farmer associations, in collaboration with the MNRC, to provide extension services and training tailored for women in order to build their skills and confidence in agriculture and climate change related fields.
- 2b Increase knowledge and awareness of organic agricultural practices among women producers.
- 2c Provide value addition and processing trainings to women through the promotion of healthy and nutritional products, and undertake related-trainings to improve individual health within the community.
- 2d Engage business development support providers to offer basic business management training to women including business plan preparation, marketing, financial management, literacy and budgeting, etc. The women's mentorship programme, mentioned above, should be part of this training.

PRIVATE SECTOR: Build partnerships with the private sector to promote sustainable value chain development. RMI's narrow geographical scope suggests partnership with one or two businesses is recommended to ensure stable production and accessible markets.

Key stakeholders: business development support providers, local institutions, individual entrepreneurs, Marshall Islands Service Corporation (MISCO); Robert Reimers Enterprises/Pacific Pure Water Inc.

- 3a Identify existing or potential women-owned businesses that could play an intermediary role between market points and female producers. The selected business could coordinate and facilitate women's involvement in pandanus production. This coordination role could leverage existing community networks and leadership and be supported by the establishment of a formal collective, self-initiated by women.
- 3b Provide business plans, financial literacy trainings and food safety and hygiene trainings to businesses in order to meet national standards to access formal markets. Support businesses to develop a resilience strategy to cope with the effects and future risks of climate change.
- 3c Conduct a more detailed market assessment to understand consumer preference and pandanus demand to ensure the commercial feasibility of pandanus products.

COMMUNITY Draw a link from the community back down to the household and individual level for project interventions.

Key stakeholder: WUTMI

- 4a Provide Gender awareness trainings at the community level by using a family-based approach.
- 4b Develop a women-to-women mentorship programme at the community level in partnership with private sector.

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