



## Gender equality is diluted in commitments made to small-scale fisheries

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### ABSTRACT

Gender equality is a mainstream principle of good environmental governance and sustainable development. Progress toward gender equality in the fisheries sector is critical for effective and equitable development outcomes in coastal countries. However, while commitments to gender equality have surged at global, regional and national levels, little is known about how this principle is constructed, and implemented across different geographies and contexts. Consequently, progress toward gender equality is difficult to assess and navigate. To identify influential policy instruments ( $n = 76$ ), we conducted key-informant interviews with governance actors engaged in small-scale fisheries ( $n = 26$ ) and gender and development ( $n = 9$ ) sectors across the Pacific Islands region. We systematically analysed these instruments according to (1) representations of gender and gender equality, (2) rationales for pursuing gender, and (3) gender strategies and actions. We found that fisheries policy instruments frequently narrowed the concept of gender to a focus on women, whereas gender and development policy instruments considered gender as diverse social identities, norms and relations. In fisheries policy instruments, rationales for pursuing gender equality diverged substantially yet, overall the principle was predominantly pursued for instrumental (i.e., improved environmental outcomes) rather than intrinsic (i.e., an inherent value in fairness) reasons. Over two-thirds of gender equality strategies focused on an organization's own human resourcing and project assessments, rather than on direct action within communities, or for women and men reliant on fisheries. Our findings illustrate gender equality commitments and investments to be narrow and outdated. Critical shifts in dominant gender equality narratives and objectives, and an embrace of multi-level strategies, provide opportunities for fisheries governance and development agendas to rise to current best practice, and ultimately make meaningful (opposed to rhetorical) progress toward gender equality. The methodological approach we develop holds value for other development sectors to critically examine, and subsequently enhance, commitment toward gender equality.

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### 1. Introduction

Gender equality is a mainstream principle of good environmental governance. Written and formal commitment to this principle now characterizes most major environmental conventions, organizational principles and environmentally sustainable development investments. This trend derives from decades of documenting the relationship between gender equality and sustainable natural resource use as positive and self-reinforcing, particularly in development contexts (Resurrección & Elmhirst, 2009; Rocheleau,

1995). For example, the costs of gender inequality have been found to lead to reductions in agricultural productivity and economic losses (FAO, 2011), greater food insecurity (Agarwal, 2018), and reduced effectiveness of environmental management interventions (e.g., marine protected areas) (Kleiber et al., 2018). Correspondingly, harmful gender norms and gender inequalities, including prevalence of gender-based violence, interact with disparities in access to natural resources, such as fisheries, forests, water, and energy, as well as gendered vulnerability to climate instability and disasters (Resurrección & Elmhirst, 2009; Rocheleau, 1995). Consequently, different strands of research and practice have embraced gender equality as a pillar of both equitable and effective environmental governance.

Productive environmental sectors, such as fisheries, reflect the complex interplay between such social and ecological challenges.

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The small-scale fisheries sector supports the livelihoods of approximately 110 million women and men, 97% of which reside in developing countries (World Bank, Food and Agriculture Organization, & WorldFish, 2012). In Small Island Developing States, such as the 22 countries and territories within the Pacific Islands region, coastal ecosystems support exceptionally high levels of biodiversity (CTI, 2009), as well as food and nutrition security, economic opportunity, and human-wellbeing for largely coastal-dwelling populations (Andrew et al., 2019). The social and ecological development challenges and opportunities mediated through small-scale fisheries have attracted the attention of donors, international development organizations, governments, and the private sector. This attention comes amid growing concerns about issues related to social equity and justice in the sector (Cohen et al., 2019). These concerns have generated an unprecedented surge in global, regional and national commitments to address gender equality in the small-scale fisheries sector. These commitments are reflected in the 2015 global Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (FAO, 2015) and in multiple regional and national small-scale fisheries policies across different geographies (e.g., Cohen, Song, & Morrison, 2017; Kusakabe, 2005; Nunan, 2006). Accompanying these commitments is an increase in gender-related financial investments, many of which use small-scale fisheries as an entry point (e.g., DFAT, 2019; PEUMP, 2015).

Despite these growing commitments and investments, the translation of gender equality, from fisheries policy to practice, has been difficult. Broadly, gender equality refers to “the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys” (UN Women, 2017). Promoted as a societal ‘good’, the global principle of gender equality is universal in character (e.g., United Nations, 2015). Critiqued for offering ‘one-size-fits-all universalising remedies’ to complex, diverse and changing issues of inequality throughout the world (Cornwall & Rivas, p. 397, 2015; Oyèwùmí, 1997), scholars emphasize the principle as a ‘global template’ for more locally relevant articulations anchored in local circumstances (Razavi, 2016, p. 28). Yet, language related to gender equality found in regional and national fisheries policies continues to be broad and even conflicting (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015; Lawless et al., 2020). For example, an analysis of small-scale fisheries policy found that gender commitments across global, regional and national level policies of Pacific Island countries and territories were not coherent, open to wide interpretation and, in some cases, completely overlooked (Song et al., 2019). Flexibility within and towards commitments can enable diverse and subjective interpretations of gender equality by different fisheries actors (i.e., policy-makers versus fish workers) (e.g., Johnson, 2017), and also allow adaptations to sectoral, national and local contexts (Jentoft, 2014). Yet, this degree of freedom is frequently unwelcome by researchers and managers who are seeking prescriptions for how to ‘do gender’ (Ferguson, 2015).

A deeper understanding of how and why gender equality is being pursued, and what the proposed actions entail, is crucial to understanding the operationalization of this principle in the small-scale fisheries sector. In this paper we use discourse analysis (e.g., Hajer & Versteeg, 2005; Krook & Mackay, 2010) of small-scale fisheries policy instruments (i.e., global guidelines, regional policies, national policies and legislation, organizational program guides, annual reports, research reports, organizational policies or strategies, gender audits, codes of conduct and promotional material) to understand:

1. How is the concept of gender, and the principle of gender equality, represented in policy instruments that govern small-scale fisheries?
2. What implicit and explicit rationale are used to pursue the principle of gender equality?
3. What are the strategies and actions proposed to address gender inequalities?

We answer these questions for fisheries governance in the Pacific Island region, by examining global and regional level commitments alongside national policy instruments from Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. These questions are pertinent to any sector, policy realm or investment seeking to contribute towards environmental governance and sustainable development. The methodology we develop and apply to examine multi-level gender commitments here would be of value for such future analyses.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Study context

The Pacific Islands region is one of the most biologically and culturally diverse in the world (Veron et al., 2009). Small-scale fisheries (i.e., the people, gears, methods and processes used to harvest and benefit from marine resources in coastal habitats and inland waters) reflect this diversity, providing a foundation for livelihoods, food and nutrition security, and are a cornerstone of Pacific Islanders’ cultural identity (Kronen & Vunisea, 2009; Veitayaki & Novaczek, 2005). To ensure these benefits are secure amidst environmental and demographic change, substantial investments are made throughout the region to improve environmental conservation, fisheries governance and social-ecological resilience (e.g., SPC, 2015).

The articulation of gender in small-scale fisheries both reflects, and reinforces gender norms and relations which are tempered by customary, colonial and contemporary influences on Pacific Island societies (MacIntyre & Spark, 2017; Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2005). Despite common misconceptions, fishing activities are not exclusively undertaken by men (Kleiber et al., 2013). Through the use of sex-disaggregated data, fisheries research in the Pacific Islands region has illuminated the divisions in labor between women and men in fish harvesting (e.g., Bliege Bird, 2007; Kronen & Vunisea, 2009) and value chains (e.g., Barclay et al., 2018; Kruijssen et al., 2013). Research within fisheries reliant coastal communities has extended into examinations of the gender norms and social relations that determine women’s and men’s different freedoms, opportunities and rights. For example, how societal views of women and men differentiate individuals’ voice and agency in decision-making to govern resources (e.g., Rohe et al., 2018; Vunisea, 2008); freedoms to access and rights to govern marine resources (e.g., Foale & Macintyre, 2000); and mobility and physical freedoms to economically benefit from fisheries (e.g., Lawless et al., 2019). These gendered differences have been found to affect the capacities of different women and men to engage with livelihood innovations (e.g., Locke et al., 2017), and access fisheries extension services and support structures (i.e., markets and educational opportunities) (e.g., Cohen et al., 2016; Tekanene, 2006). However, the degree to which these insights have been accounted for as considerations, barriers or as opportunities to progress gender equality has not yet been evaluated.

To explore the construction of gender broadly, and gender equality as a governance principle, we reviewed global, regional and national policy instruments applied in the Pacific Islands region. We selected Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu as comparative national cases, representing three Melanesian nations where rural lives and livelihoods are commonly linked with small-scale fisheries. Given the colonial history of the Pacific Islands region, contemporary coastal ecosystem governance takes the form of col-

laborative management through a combination of customary and central government authority. Fiji's governance system is well defined with customary tenure and boundaries recognized in law, and forms the foundation for a national network of locally managed marine areas (Govan, 2009; Mangubhai et al., 2019). In contrast, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu have informally managed areas that integrate aspects of local and customary governance (Baereleo et al., 2016; Cohen & Steenbergen, 2015; Govan, 2009). The comparison of these countries is useful for examining gender commitments as they have the highest concentration of small-scale fisheries investment and governance actors (i.e., donors, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations, government ministries and independent experts) across the region (SPC, 2017).

A mosaic of regional agencies support Pacific Island countries in the governance of their diverse natural resources, including small-scale fisheries. These agencies include the Pacific Community, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, Pacific Islands Development Forum, and the University of the South Pacific. Support provided by these agencies is mandated by Pacific Island governments, and further strengthened by inter-agency collaboration under the Council of Regional Organizations of the Pacific (Vince et al., 2017). Ocean governance, including small-scale fisheries governance, mainly involves local NGOs and some private organizations, with investment from foreign donors and international NGOs (Vince et al., 2017). In disparate and sometimes coordinated efforts, these actors have helped to establish a range of locally and externally initiated interventions to manage fisheries systems, particularly in coastal marine environments.

While efforts to integrate gender into small-scale fisheries commitments and investments of regional agencies, national governments and NGOs are relatively recent in the Pacific Islands region, they are becoming more widespread (Cohen et al., 2017; Harper & Kleiber, 2019; Mangubhai & Lawless, 2021). For instance, there has been an increase in gender-related commitments across regional and national small-scale fisheries policies and projects (e.g., FAO, 2015; SPC, 2015). Accompanying these commitments has been an increase in financial investments, which often seek gender outcomes via the entry point of small-scale fisheries (e.g., DFAT, 2019; PEUMP, 2015). Despite this trend, international gender equality commitments (e.g., Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979); Beijing Platform for Action (1995)) are still not effectively actioned within the region. A review of 15 Pacific Island countries and territories found that gender was rarely considered and poorly integrated in regional and national legislation, and Pacific Islands governments and ministries (i.e., ranging from health, agriculture and environment) have limited capacity to mainstream gender (SPC, 2016). Consequently, gender inequality remains a pertinent and pervasive issue in the Pacific Islands region that requires urgent questioning and transformation of the ways in which gender equality has, or has not, been addressed to date.

## 2.2. Data collection

We employed a mixed method approach using key-informant interviews to identify global, regional and national policy instruments deemed influential by experts, followed by a systematic document review. Our selection of key-informants ( $n = 35$ ) working in small-scale fisheries ( $n = 26$ ) and gender and development ( $n = 9$ ) sectors involved a combination of purposive and snowball sampling of governance actors in each country, as well as at Pacific Islands meetings and conferences. Key-informants were predominantly Pacific Island nationals and included development practitioners ( $n = 22$ ), government officials and policy-makers ( $n = 9$ ),

and scientists ( $n = 4$ ) who met the following inclusion criteria: (a) self-identified as either a small-scale fisheries and/or gender expert; and (b) were working in, or with a focus on, the Pacific Islands region, Fiji, Solomon Islands or Vanuatu. A process of stratification ensured that all fields of actors (global, regional, governmental, NGOs, private sector and independent experts) were represented in the sample. We developed the stratified sample through a series of consultative discussions with small-scale fisheries governance actors working in the Pacific Islands during a regional workshop in November 2017. All interviews were conducted in country and took place face-to-face between August 2018 and February 2019 and, for the purposes of this study, were used to identify influential policy instruments.

We used two phases of identification to determine the list of policy instruments for review. In the first phase, we invited key-informants to identify and share via email: (a) policy instruments (i.e., guidelines, policies, legislation, program guides, annual reports, research reports, organizational strategies, gender audits, codes of conduct and promotional material) informants used or found useful in guiding the integration of gender within their work; (b) policy instruments from their organization that provided descriptions or details of their work that related to gender; and (c) regional and national small-scale fisheries commitments (i.e., policies, regulations and acts ( $n = 7$ ) and national fisheries corporate plans ( $n = 3$ ) in Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu). We added any other instruments that interviewees mentioned during interviews to the sample. In total, the sample included 76 policy instruments. In the second phase we differentiated instruments into those related to the small-scale fisheries sector ( $n = 55$ ) and those that focused on gender more broadly (i.e., those produced by humanitarian organizations and women's rights groups) ( $n = 21$ ). For these three country case studies, these instruments reflect the full set of formal commitments influencing the governance of small-scale fisheries, and we consider this sample representative of instruments *being used* and *having influence* throughout the broader Pacific Islands region.

Policy instrument attributes are listed in Fig. A1 (see Appendix), and include the geographic focus (panel a), organization types (panel b) and instrument types (panel c). Some instruments were produced in collaboration with multiple governance actors, and we account for these collaborations in Fig. A1 (panel b). We refer to actors working together across different levels of governance (i.e., global to local) as 'multi-level collaborative' groups. Similarly, we refer to actors working at the same level of governance as 'global collaborative' or 'national collaborative' groups. Specific policy instrument titles and authors are not referenced due to confidentiality agreements (i.e., instruments would identify organizations and individual interviewees). Instrument publication dates ranged from 1991 to 2018.

## 2.3. Analytical approach

We used discourse analysis to examine the construction of gender equality as a governance principle across these 76 policy instruments (Hajer & Versteeg, 2005). The qualitative data analysis software NVivo 12 Plus assisted us in organizing and coding all statements on gender. We specifically examined policy instruments to determine how gender was represented, rationalized and the proposed strategies to address gender inequalities, following the three phases of coding based on Saldaña (2009). In the first phase, we used attributional coding to determine policy instrument attributes including publication date, author(s), organization type of author(s), country or region of focus, and instrument type. In the second phase, we applied structural coding, which involved a combination of coding according to both pre-determined and emergent codes. We developed the pre-determined codes (or par-

ent nodes) through reviewing feminist studies grounded in social constructionism that explored how gender equality has been conceptualized in other sectors (e.g., [Krook & Mackay, 2010](#); [Verloo & Lombardo, 2007](#)). We used grounded theory to determine child nodes, which were themes that emerged during coding, and organized under each parent node. In the final phase, we used elaborative coding, which after coding was completed, involved combining similar and duplicate nodes, and in cases where nodes were too broad, we re-coded into more specific sub-nodes.

Our coding was structured according to the three research themes explored in this paper. Our first set of codes were pre-determined and explored how gender equality as a governance principle was represented, including how gender was defined and the nature of issues targeted. We examined definitions of gender equality, femininity and masculinity. We used several search terms including: 'gender', 'women' or 'woman', 'men' or 'man', 'boy', 'girl', 'sex', 'equality', 'equal', 'equity', 'equitable' and 'empowerment' across all 76 policy instruments. We then used emergent coding to identify distinct issue areas gender inequality was associated with, which we coded into 44 child nodes.

We then used a second set of codes we had pre-determined to understand the rationale for why gender equality was pursued as a principle. We conducted this phase of analysis in four stages. In the first stage, we sorted policy instruments into two categories; those that were gender blind and those that were gender aware ([Fig. 1](#)). We considered gender blind instruments as those that did not account for any of the following: different experiences, roles, responsibilities, rights, needs, obligations and power relations associated with being female or male (sensu [IGWG, 2017](#)). In contrast, we considered gender aware instruments as those that acknowledged some or all of these differences. In the second stage, we categorized the gender statements based on whether gender was pursued for instrumental or intrinsic reasons, which we determined according to the broader context they were presented within policy instruments ([Fig. 1](#)). We consider instrumental frames as those that value gender equality as a means to achieve or enhance outcomes such as improved productivity, increased incomes or enhanced effectiveness of small-scale fisheries management ([Tallis & Lubchenco, 2014](#)). In contrast, intrinsic frames are those oriented towards the values of fairness and justice as outcomes in and of themselves ([Tallis & Lubchenco, 2014](#)). In the third stage, we coded all policy statements that expressed gender-related objectives. We thematically aggregated these coded state-

ments (through a process of re-coding into child nodes) into broader objectives. In the fourth stage, we examined the written contexts of these objectives to determine distinct rationale, including associated approaches, for pursuing gender equality within the policy instruments.

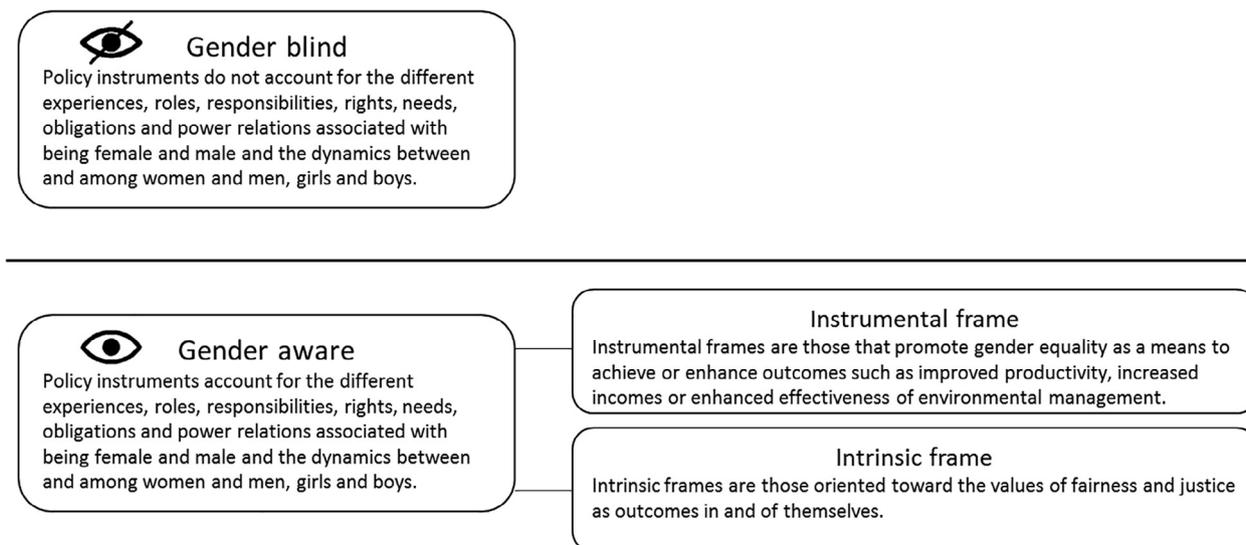
The third and final pre-determined coding involved examination of the different gender strategies proposed in policy instruments. The strategy codes (adapted from [Danielsen et al., 2018](#)) focused on two broad categories of end beneficiary; (1) process strategies that provide a gender-enabling environment for organizations and organizational staff; and (2) project strategies that directly engage with gender concerns of 'stakeholders' including women and/or men within households, communities, and social systems. We analyzed these strategies and determined 31 child nodes corresponding to strategy types.

### 3. Results

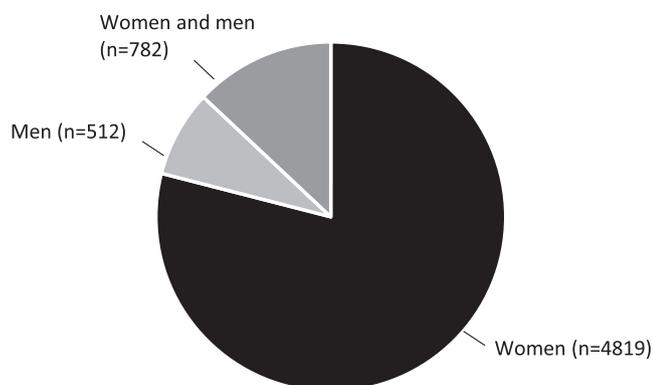
#### 3.1. Representation of gender equality in small-scale fisheries commitments

To understand how gender equality is represented in, with and alongside commitments to small-scale fisheries we examined the 55 policy instruments to determine how gender was defined and the nature of gender issues targeted. We first examined definitions of gender, including constructions of femininity and masculinity. There were 3929 statements that used the term 'gender' in total. Although these policy instruments were identified by key-informants as the most influential around gender and small-scale fisheries, gender was predominantly presented as a focus on women (79%) ([Fig. 2](#)), and rarely used language that indicated an understanding of gender as a social construct (i.e., attention to socially prescribed roles, norms and relations). For example, a list of 'gender equality outcomes' proposed in a Fijian fisheries policy exclusively focused on what should be done for women, such as research on women's participation and access to fisheries services.

Thirty-five out of the 55 small-scale fisheries policy instruments portrayed women as victims or emphasized their vulnerability. A program guide for the Pacific Islands region produced by a multi-level collaborative group reported they had "a specific focus on vulnerable groups such as women and youth", a common sentiment across the policy instruments. Other policy instruments stressed this vulnerability by highlighting areas of weakness



**Fig. 1.** Analysis involved first sorting policy instruments into those that were gender blind and those that were gender aware, and secondly, sorting those that provided instrumental or intrinsic frames for pursuing gender equality.



**Fig. 2.** Statements (n = 6113) referring to 'women', 'men' and 'women and men' found in the 55 small-scale fisheries policy instruments. Twelve policy instruments included no sex-disaggregated or gender language. The search accounted for variations and plurals (including woman, female, man and male).

among women and youth. Specifically, women's "weaker negotiation power" when it came to fisheries business activities (global fisheries guidelines, global collaborative group), and "weak political voices" in community committees (project report, donor, Vanuatu). Only one instrument cautioned this portrayal, stating, "While it is important to be gender-sensitive, there's a need to recognize the danger of stereotyping women as vulnerable in ways that might obscure their strengths and resilience to change" (research report, local NGO, Fiji).

By contrast, men were rarely discussed individually and the majority of statements about men appeared alongside mention of women, for instance, "Marine resources ... form the basis of men and women's livelihoods in Pacific Island countries" (program guide, multi-level collaborative group). In other cases, statements about men were used to highlight differences between genders, for example, "Women and men have different abilities, knowledge, skills and talents to contribute to solutions" (program guide, donor organization, Pacific region). Only one instrument referred to masculinity and the influence of gender norms on men. The policy of a donor organization stated, "Despite the privileged position that gender norms accord males in most respects, these norms nonetheless create distinct vulnerabilities and negative outcomes for boys and men ... particularly those who do not conform to gender norms about masculinity". There were only two policy instruments that positioned men as part of the solution to addressing gender inequalities. For example, one policy stipulated that "Because gender norms are created and perpetuated from birth onward by families, communities, schools and other social institutions, it is key to work with men (e.g., fathers and teachers) ... The more men see gender issues as 'their' issues, the less such issues will be marginalized" (organizational policy, Pacific region).

The conflation of gender with women also reflects a distinct 'watering down' of gender term usage. In fact, we found cases where diluting the term 'gender' was a purposeful and well-intentioned strategy. For instance, a donor guide for gender proposals suggested to;

Avoid the overuse of the word 'gender' throughout project documents as this may disengage people. A clever tactic is to use gender responsive terms without directly using the word 'gender' or 'gender equality'. These terms include: accessible, fair, appropriate, inclusive, collaborative, participatory, equitable, responsive, empowering, sensitive, engaging, universal.

This sentiment was echoed in an international NGO research report, which cautioned;

... the word [gender] is tainted and confrontational. We have to pitch it at the right level and focus on the inclusion aspect ... Discussions surrounding topics on women and gender are mostly received defensively by both men and women. Many people conceive discussions on equality as a prelude to blame and hostility.

The same research report suggested;

... using key words such as "inclusivity" ... have the potential to address issues of inequality ... in a manner that is perceived less confrontationally ... changes in messaging are integral to continue building upon progress made in gender equity in the Solomon Islands.

To further understand how gender is represented as a global governance principle, we examined the issues (or entry points for change) with which gender inequality was associated, prioritized and absent in the small-scale fisheries policy instruments (n = 55) and in the more specific gender policy instruments (n = 21). Eighteen issues were common to both. A unique set of six issues were presented in small-scale fisheries policy instruments, compared with an additional 20 issues identified in the gender and development instruments (Table 1). Fig. 3 provides a visual representation of the number of issues identified within small-scale fisheries policy instruments according to the level of governance focus.

We found there was disproportionately high attention given to gender issues at organizational (38%) and individual levels (37%), compared to societal (13%), communal (8%) and household (4%) levels. At an individual level, small-scale fisheries policy instruments presented a narrow focus on women only. In contrast, the gender and development policy instruments accounted for gender norms (i.e., social expectations of what women and men should do) as well as diverse and intersectional identities that acknowledge the economic, social or other status of different women and different men. At the household level, gender differences in divisions in labor were recognized in small-scale fisheries policy instruments, but issues associated with intra-household or family relations were not acknowledged. At the organizational level, both the small-scale fisheries and gender and development instruments focused on organizational environments (i.e., creating standardized gender research priorities and practice; capacity building; and gender-sensitive organizational environments such as inclusive recruitment processes), and the need to facilitate inter-organizational partnerships to work on gender. These organizational level issues were predominantly identified in policy instruments produced by regional and national level fisheries actors. Yet at this level, only the gender and development policy instruments identified issues beyond individual organizations (i.e., the coordination and coherence of gender commitments and priorities across governments, donors and development partners). At the societal level, fisheries policy instruments identified unique issues (i.e., marine tenure and food and nutrition security) that were not represented in the gender policy statements. Of all the policy instruments, those produced by organizations operating at the global level (i.e., donors and international NGOs) identified the majority of societal level issues including human rights issues and gender-based violence. In contrast, issues identified at the societal level in policy instruments from the gender and development sector were produced by actors operating at various levels. Although we have categorized these issues as 'societal', statements in policy instruments produced by global actors suggested many of these issues were also pertinent at individual, household and communal levels.

**Table 1**  
Gender issues (or entry points for change) addressed in (a) only small-scale fisheries policy instruments, (b) only gender policy instruments, and (c) both small-scale fisheries and gender policy instruments.

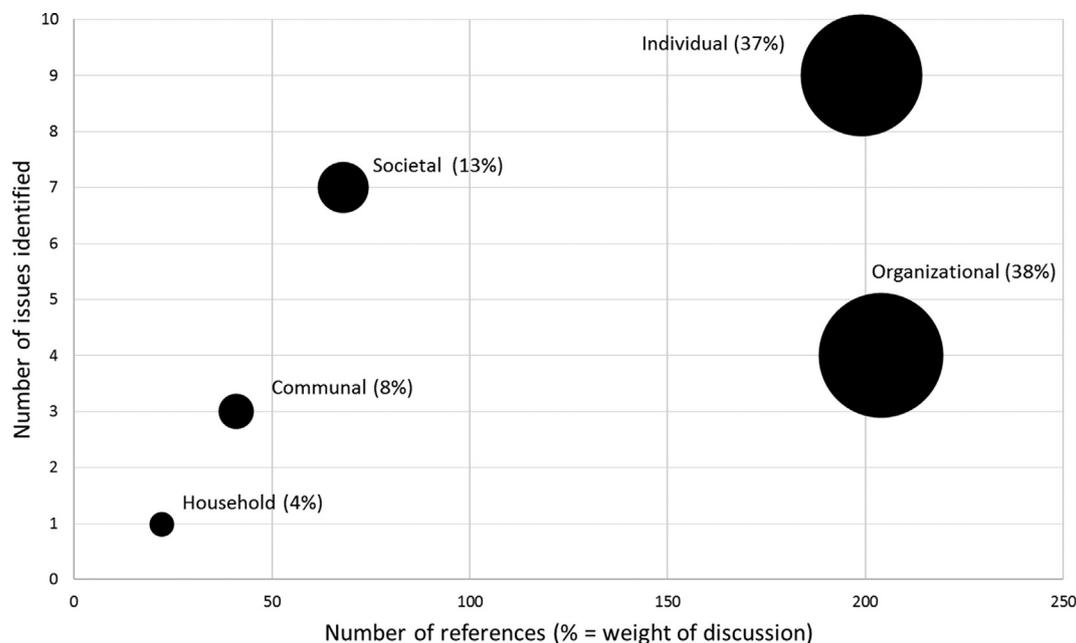
Level of focus	(a) Issues unique in small-scale fisheries instruments	(b) Issues unique in gender instruments	(c) Issues covered by both
Individual	<p><i>Women:</i> Lack of recognition in fisheries policies/legislation/ regulations Under-valued status in fisheries (i.e., invisibility of role and contribution) Overlooked traditional ecological knowledge</p>	<p><i>Women (disabled, widows, single, indigenous, ethnic minorities):</i> Representation in politics, private sector, governance boards/committees Physical mobility restrictions Portrayal in policy/media Power and agency Self-confidence/ efficacy/ aspirations</p> <p><i>Men:</i> Challenging masculinity or men specific interventions</p> <p><i>Youth:</i> Youth development (specifically adolescent girls) <i>Diverse sexual orientations and gendered identities</i></p>	<p><i>Women:</i> Vulnerability to disasters Decision-making Economic empowerment Leadership Participation in development Women's organizations or networks</p>
Household	Nil	Family and marital relations, parenting and child development	Inequitable divisions in labor
Communal	Benefit sharing from small-scale fisheries	Nil	Resource access (material, financial and natural) Opportunities to improve livelihoods
Organizational	Nil	Compliance with gender commitments Coordination and coherence of gender commitments Discriminatory aspects of customary and faith based organizations Gender as a development priority by national governments, donors and development partners Gender responsive budgeting	Establishment of gender research priorities, methods, monitoring and analysis Inter-organizational partnerships to work on gender Organizational gender strengthening (training, knowledge, skills, capacity) Gender-sensitive organizational environments (i.e., cultures and practices)†
Societal	Food and nutrition security Marine tenure rights	Cultural/religious discrimination Gender studies and training Globalization and trade liberalization Health‡ Human trafficking Labor migration Law and policy§ Peace and security Sex for money	Access to basic healthcare Access to basic services†† or welfare Formal employment opportunities Poverty Violence against women (sexual, domestic, gender-based)

†Including accountability to gender commitments, organizational and staff capacity, recruitment processes specifically promotions and salaries, and working environments and conditions.

‡Access to health care (including health education), facilities and infrastructure, gender-sensitive health programs, reproductive health, sexually transmitted disease (incl. HIV AIDS).

§Gender-sensitive and inclusive language, human rights of women, and social protections in terms of productive and reproductive rights.

††Including water, fuel, food, transport, sanitation, technology and electricity.



**Fig. 3.** The level at which small-scale fisheries policy statements referred to gender issues. Circle sizes represent the weight of discussion given to issues at each level.

### 3.2. Rationale for pursuing gender equality in small-scale fisheries commitments

We examined the 55 small-scale fisheries policy instruments to determine the dominant rationale and objectives presented for pursuing gender equality as a governance principle (according to the four stages described in Section 2.3). In the first stage we sorted policy instruments into those considered gender blind (n = 12) and gender aware (n = 43). The gender blind policy instruments included all national fisheries policies and legislation in each country (with the exception of one fisheries policy from Vanuatu), as well as regional and national level guiding policy instruments. Of the 43 gender aware instruments, 30 provided sufficient evidence to determine why gender was committed to in small-scale fisheries. In the second stage, we determined that gender was predominantly presented instrumentally (75%) (i.e., to achieve or enhance environmental outcomes) rather than intrinsically (25%) (i.e., to achieve just and fair outcomes) (Fig. 4). Based on these groupings, in the third stage, we identified 16 distinct objectives indicating why gender was considered across the 121 policy statements.

We analyzed the objectives according to the organization that produced the policy instrument (Fig. 5). A single objective was expressed in 11 of the 30 policy instruments, whereas multiple objectives were expressed in 19 policy instruments. Global level policy instruments (i.e., those produced by international NGOs and donors) presented the most diversity in objectives, yet particularly for international NGOs, there was a clear relationship between ‘improved conservation or environmental outcomes’, ‘sustainable small-scale fisheries management’ and ‘economic development’ objectives. In contrast, policy instruments produced by multi-level collaborative groups tended to present gender considerations as important for the promotion of humans rights and food security. Policy instruments produced by regional agencies expressed the greatest diversity in their objectives and pursued gender for a combination of instrumental and intrinsic reasons, with ‘sustainability of projects’ being the most common. National governments were the only organization type that did not express the importance of gender equality for environmental outcomes in their policy statements. Instead, they cited ‘sustainable livelihoods’, ‘welfare of future generations’ and ‘to influence others to integrate gender’. Evidence of the intrinsic value of gender was

not found in policy statements produced by private, national or local actors, with the exception being a fisheries policy from Vanuatu that cited concerns to “safeguard the welfare of future generations” as a key objective. Policy instruments produced by private organizations were the only organizational type who did not cite the importance of gender for any intrinsic value only identifying economic and environmental objectives. We also found significant divergence in objectives within statements by the same organizations. The most extreme example of objective divergence was an international NGO who cited 13 of the 16 differing objectives for committing to gender in small-scale fisheries, spanning both instrumental and intrinsic reasons. In contrast, policy instruments produced by three separate donor organizations only cited between one and three different objectives.

In the fourth stage of analysis we found that the objectives applied within small-scale fisheries policy instruments were oriented toward six distinct rationale based on desired outcomes: (1) no outcomes (e.g., blind to gender); (2) project outcomes (e.g., donor targets reached or to achieve project success); (3) environmental outcomes (e.g., enhanced environmental stewardship); (4) productive outcomes (e.g., greater fish catches); (5) economic outcomes (e.g., enhanced incomes of fishers); and (6) human opportunity outcomes (expanded in Table 2). The grouping of the six rationale was based on the context the gender objectives were described in the policy instruments. Some of these objectives span multiple rationale, however, they have been grouped according to best fit.

(1) *Gender considerations are not relevant, or inherently addressed.* This rationale de-emphasizes gender as a factor to consider in small-scale fisheries governance. We found three main drivers of this rationale. First, the link between social and ecological systems is weak, where the role of humans in fisheries management is not associated with the management of fish. A review of a national fisheries ministry found “...fishing agreements are very broad and focus on the management of stocks. Therefore, the interlocutor could not see that gender equality could be a priority in this context” (regional agency, organizational gender audit). Second, this rationale emphasizes the absence of, or incentive to address, gender issues in the sector, for example the same review found, “the political will to mainstream gender in the department was rated low”. The review document referred to an interview with a fish-

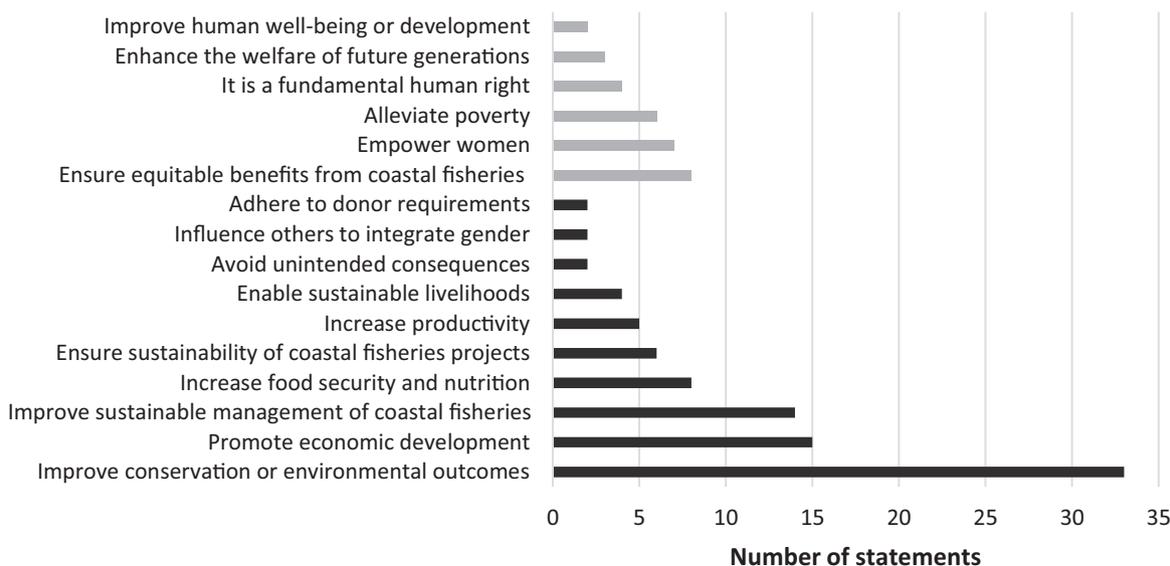


Fig. 4. Number of statements (n = 121) indicating the dominant objectives for why gender equality is pursued as a governance principle in, with and alongside small-scale fisheries. Objectives are organized according to whether they are intrinsic (grey bars, n = 30) or instrumental (black bars, n = 91).

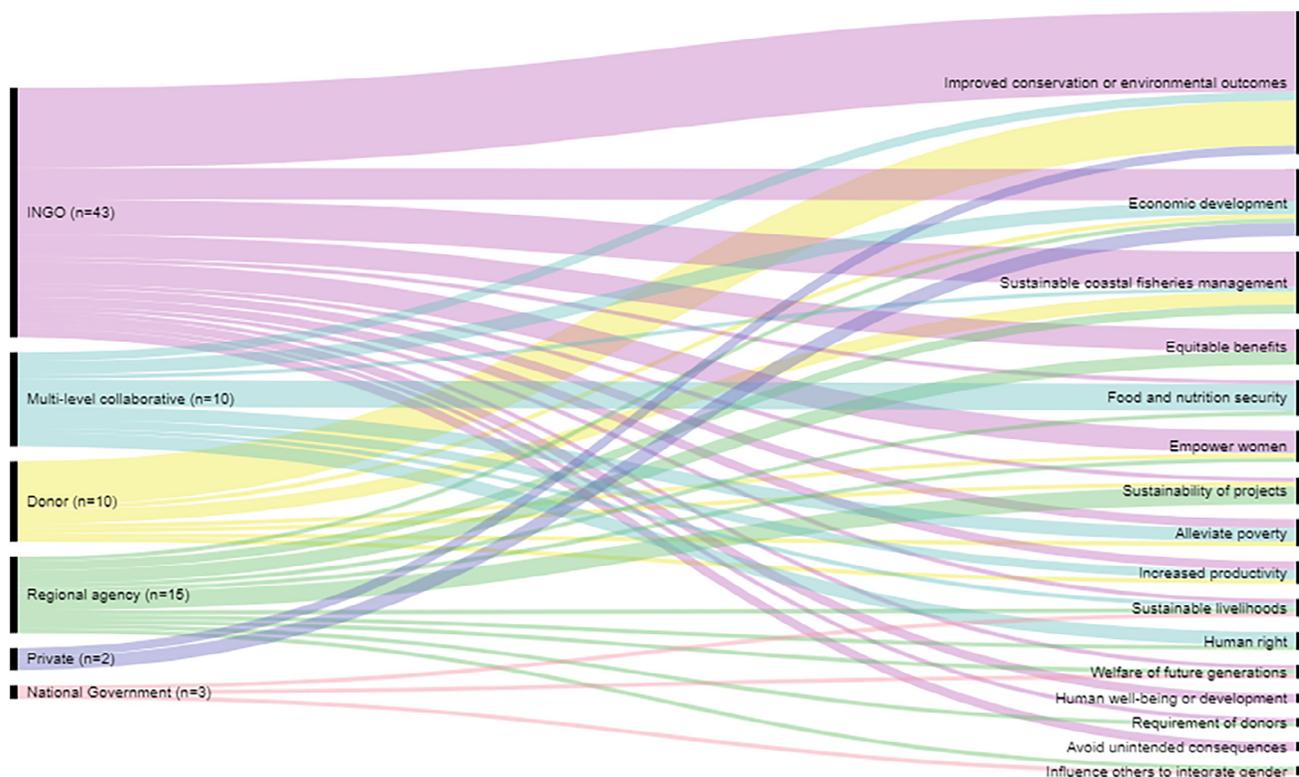


Fig. 5. Relationship between organization type and gender objectives presented in small-scale fisheries policy instruments. Here ‘n’ refers to the number of times any particular organization type (of which we identified six, listed on the left of the figure) stated an objective. Not illustrated in this graph are the policy instruments for which we found no evidence of gender objectives, including those produced by local NGOs (n = 2), global (n = 1) regional (n = 3) and national (n = 1) collaborative groups, independent experts (n = 2) and United Nations agencies (n = 2).

eries department employee citing that “he never came across those [gender or women specific] issues”. A third factor underlining this rationale promotes a business as usual approach, for example, “Women were involved because, in many cases, they are landowners ... It was noted that those initiatives were not the results of particular will for promoting gender equality, but because they were part of the usual programmes carried out by the Ministry” (regional agency, organizational gender audit).

(2) *Gender considerations enhance small-scale fisheries project outcomes.* This rationale emphasizes gender considerations as a means to achieve successful programs and projects as the end goal. Both global organizations and regional agencies suggested the likelihood of project success was dependent on women’s contribution to small-scale fisheries management and the degree to which the interests of women and men were accounted for. A technical report produced by an international NGO in Solomon Islands reported, “there is a potential to amplify the project’s expected benefits by better integration of women into natural resources management”.

(3) *Gender considerations facilitate conservation and environmental outcomes.* Under this perspective, gender is viewed as instrumental to achieving effective conservation and environmental outcomes. In some cases, this rationale may assume that women are innately connected to nature and therefore their participation is vital. For example, a regional fisheries policy stated “... the participation of women in ecosystem-based fisheries management is crucial ... because women are more likely than men to take a long-term (inter-generational) view of the benefits of conservation” (multi-level collaborative group). There is an assumption that the involvement of women will lead to improvements in compliance with natural resource management measures. This is well illustrated in another regional fisheries policy which states, “Women and youth are closely involved in harvesting and selling

marine resources, but are less likely to respect management measures on which they are not consulted” (regional agency).

(4) *Gender considerations increase productivity.* This rationale stresses the potential for productive improvements (i.e., harvests from farming and fishing). Promotional material produced by an international NGO in Solomon Islands emphasized that women are more productive than men agriculturally as they “...produce 60 to 80 percent of all food in developing countries”. This rationale sees potential productive gains when there is equitable access to productive opportunities and resources. For example, promotional material produced by an international NGO in Fiji stated, “Gender-equal access to agricultural resources could increase the average woman farmer’s crop yields by up to 30%. Involving women in water projects can increase their effectiveness by 6 to 7 times”.

(5) *Gender considerations maximize economic opportunity and growth.* This rationale prioritizes economic gain and emphasizes building financial and business capacities of women in particular. An annual report produced by a private organization stated “... a great part of this business capacity development is to incorporate gender dimensions and consider ways in which to enhance women SME’s [small-medium enterprise] capacities and abilities”. Approaches promoted by this rationale often operate under the banner of ‘women’s economic empowerment’.

(6) *Gender considerations are integral to human opportunity.* This rationale recognizes gender equality as its own distinct goal and emphasizes a crucial link between gender equality and human opportunity. The global fisheries guidelines state, “Gender-equitable fisheries policy should necessarily be designed to eliminate all forms of gender discrimination in the fisheries sector” (global collaborative group). The interconnection between gender equality and other development outcomes was recognized in an organizational policy of a conservation focused donor, who

**Table 2**

Six gender rationale emergent within small-scale policy instruments. The rationale (including their underlying narrative and approach) are organized according to whether they are gender blind or aware, instrumental or intrinsic, and the policy instrument and organization type promoting each. The gender objectives associated with each rationale are in the 'Objective(s)' column, and range from 1 to 16: (1) Adhere to donor requirements, (2) Influence others to integrate gender, (3) Avoid unintended consequences, (4) Ensure sustainability of coastal fisheries projects, (5) Improve conservation or environmental outcomes, (6) Improve sustainable management of coastal fisheries, (7) Increased productivity, (8) Enable sustainable livelihoods, (9) Increase food security and nutrition, (10) Promote economic development, (11) Ensure equitable benefits from coastal fisheries, (12) Empower women, (13) Alleviate poverty, (14) It is a fundamental human right, (15) Enhance the welfare of future generations, (16) Improve human well-being or development.

		Rationale	Objective(s)	Narrative	Approach	Policy Instrument	Organization type					
							Governments	LNGOs	Regional agencies	INGOs	Donors	Experts
Gender blind	Blind	(1) Gender considerations are not relevant, or inherently addressed	Nil	Objectives and outcomes are not connected to gender, or assume that gender considerations are automatically incorporated.	None to minimal social analysis. Follows a 'business as usual' approach.	National fisheries policies, strategies and plans Organizational codes of conduct, research reports	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Gender aware	Instrumental	(2) Gender considerations enhance small-scale fisheries projects	1–4	Project outcomes are prioritized and gender considerations are a means to reach targets or achieve project success.	Minimal gender and social analysis. Follows a 'do no harm' approach.	Organizational gender audits, policies, program guides			✓	✓	✓	
		(3) Gender considerations facilitate conservation and environmental outcomes	5, 6	Gender is considered instrumental to achieving conservation and environmental outcomes. Conservation and environmental goals are the principle priority.	Accounts for gender norms and relations, particularly emphasizes gendered access and control over natural resources and the goods and services they provide. In some cases, this can take the form of essentializing women's connection with nature.	Organizational policies, program guides Regional policies Global gender and fisheries guidelines			✓	✓	✓	✓
		(4) Gender considerations increase productivity	7, 8	Equitable access and support in harvest and post-harvest activities is prioritized to increase efficiency and benefits.	Avoids considerable changes to environmental function but promotes productive livelihood models. This often involves providing direct support and services to women.	Organizational policies, program guides Global gender and fisheries guidelines				✓	✓	
		(5) Gender considerations maximize economic opportunity and growth	10	Ambivalent about the relationship between gender and the environment. Financial benefits prioritized over environmental outcomes.	Environmental management geared toward maximizing economic benefits, including market oriented and value-additive approaches to generate income. Economic objectives can lead to gender exploitative methods.	Organizational gender audit, policies, program guides Global gender and fisheries guidelines			✓	✓	✓	✓
	Intrinsic	(6) Gender considerations are integral to human opportunity	11–16	Gender equality is viewed as a fundamental human right or of its own intrinsic value.	The environment is viewed as an entry point or means to promote gender equitable outcomes. Gender relations, power and intersectionality are prioritized.	Organizational gender audit, policies, program guides Regional policies Global gender and fisheries guidelines	✓		✓	✓	✓	

expressed that “efforts to combat environmental degradation and those to address gender inequality can be mutually supportive is also reflected in the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, which recognizes gender equality and women’s empowerment as a sustainable development goal in its own right, as well as a catalyst for reaching all other goals”.

### 3.3. Gender strategies in small-scale fisheries commitments

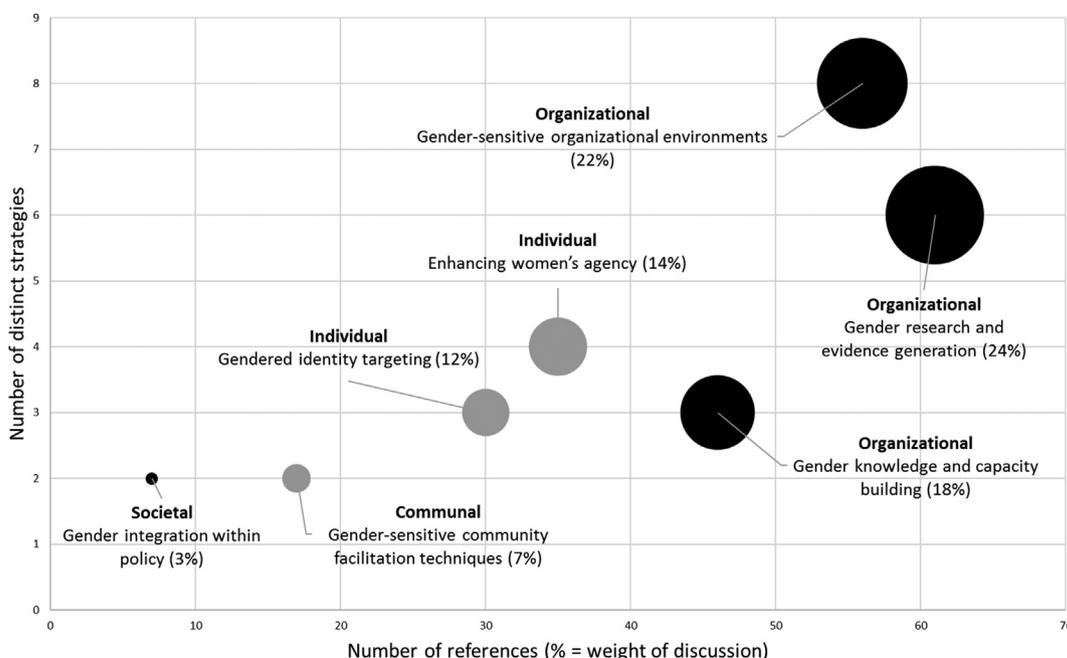
We coded for evidence of gender strategies (i.e., a set of actions proposed for implementation targeting a specified gender issue or to accomplish a non-gender defined goal) proposed in small-scale fisheries policy instruments. We found 261 statements providing evidence of different gender strategies, which we aggregated into seven distinct strategy types (Fig. 6, see Table A1 in Appendix for detailed strategies). We grouped these strategy types into two broad categories based on the end beneficiary; (1) process strategies which aimed to foster a gender-enabling environment for organizations and organizational staff; and (2) project strategies which directly engaged with the gender concerns of ‘stakeholders’ (i.e., women and/or men within households, communities, and social systems).

Two thirds of gender strategies (67%) proposed in small-scale fisheries policy instruments focused on process (i.e., evidence generation and internal organizational process), whereas only a third of strategies (33%) were proposed to more directly tackle gender inequality issues within communities, and/or social systems. Of the process strategies, 64% were targeted within organizations and the remaining 3% were targeted at the societal level. Process strategies related to ‘research, monitoring or other evidence generation’ were the most common strategy proposed, with greatest focus on monitoring and evaluating the gendered impacts of programs and projects during or after their implementation, and quantifying women’s roles in, and contributions to, the fisheries sector. Yet, for all these evidence generating strategies only two articulated the next steps or pathway through which this increased understanding would be employed to contribute to any gender or

social change. Most strategies explained the need for evidence generation for reporting reasons, for example, “sex-disaggregated data will be collected throughout various activities of the project for . . . gender considerations to be reflected in reporting” (organizational strategy, donor, Pacific region). The remainder of strategies (33%) were project oriented and were targeted at the individual (26%) and communal level (7%). We found no evidence of strategies targeted at the household level. Of the project strategies, only 28% acknowledged intersectional identities or a need to engage both women and men. The remaining 72% focused exclusively on women (i.e., enhancing their agency or delivering projects directly to women).

## 4. Discussion

In environmental governance, policies set the formal rules of play, priorities and visions to which funding, human resourcing, practice and behaviors will seek to align. In this section, we discuss the construction of gender, and gender equality as a principle, within policy instruments that are influencing the governance of small-scale fisheries in the Pacific Islands region. First (Section 4.1) we discuss the implications of how we found gender and gender equality to be represented. In particular, we examine the common conflation of ‘women’ with gender, and discuss why it matters that gendered opportunities and issues at household and communal levels are largely overlooked in policy. Second (Section 4.2), we discuss the multiplicity of gender objectives articulated within the policy instruments. By drawing on gender and development literature, we examine the limits of the dominant ‘instrumental’ framing of gender. Third (Section 4.3), we discuss the value and limitations of gender strategies that we found to be largely focused on the workplace, and projects that target women as primary beneficiaries. For each of these findings, we present some alternative views and recommendations in our conclusion (Section 5) that, if taken up, would lead to a more balanced and effective set of policies and strategies more likely to contribute to gender equality in



**Fig. 6.** Seven gender strategy types – of which four are process strategies (black circles) and three are project strategies (grey circles) – are organized according to the level (bold text) at which they are targeted. The circle sizes are proportionate to the number of policy statements identified at each level (i.e., individual (n = 65), communal (n = 17), organizational (n = 163) or societal (n = 7)).

small-scale fisheries and in environmental governance more broadly.

#### 4.1. Representing gender and gender equality

Gendered understandings, opportunities and barriers are socially constructed and in the broadest sense reflect societal views of what women and men should or should not be, or can and cannot do, and how people should relate to each other within society and households (Boudet et al., 2013). Yet, our examination of influential global, regional and national policy instruments suggests that gender is typically used synonymously with 'women' in Pacific Islands small-scale fisheries (i.e., what women do, what women should do, or what should be done for women). Unlike the gender and development sector, attention to men, masculinity, or gender relations was rarely part of analysis and project design. A more holistic and current view of gender as intersecting with various elements of identity (i.e., a multiplicity of different social markers such as sex, ethnicity, age, religion, class) was overlooked. These results closely align with a phenomenon known as 'gender shrinking', where gender as a concept is diluted to a limited set of meanings and problems (Lombardo et al., 2010).

The "gross essentialism" and "patronising paternalism" (Cornwall, 2007, p. 71) of conflating gender with women fails to account for the diverse experiences and perceptions of gendered and sexual identities (Oyěwùmí, 1997), reinforces men's absence in the conceptualization of gender, and men's and societies agency to question, challenge and address gender inequalities (Chant & Gutmann, 2002). Explicitly acknowledging men as being part of gender problems and solutions, requires questioning and challenging unequal power relations between women and men (Lombardo et al., 2010). This view can be uncomfortable for many, and even fuel resistance to engage with gender issues, within policies, projects and workplaces (Nazneen & Hickey, 2019). In these cases, the conflation of gender with women can be a deliberate strategy making the gradual acceptance of working on 'gender' more palatable with stakeholders that may not fully support the gender equality principle (Nazneen & Hickey, 2019). The one-dimensional focus on women could also be the result of the limited capacity and capability of governance actors who are newly tasked with integrating or mainstreaming gender at the behest of their organization or donor (Mangubhai & Lawless, 2021; Nazneen & Hickey, 2019). This problem can persist where governance actors (i.e., organizations and individuals within them) rhetorically adopt (and passively resist) or are actively resistant towards meaningfully considering gender amongst all the other commitments they have made, or reluctant to adjust their engrained frame (i.e., intrinsic or instrumental) or pre-planned strategies (Lawless et al., 2020).

The dilution of gender in commitments made to small-scale fisheries is consistent with the essentialist portrayals of women that have been found in broader environment and development contexts. For decades, gender analysis in natural resource management has emphasized women as the main victims of environmental change, which then commonly translates to women-targeted strategies (i.e., women as participants and beneficiaries) (Resurreccion & Elmhirst, 2008). By contrast, views stemming from theories such as ecofeminism buy into the myth that women, more so than men, have an innate connection with nature, and are the best champions of conservation (Leach, 2007). Both these essentialist portrayals position women as "key assets to be 'harnessed' in resource conservation initiatives" (Resurreccion & Elmhirst, 2008, p. 6). The tension between depicting women as either victims or development champions can be counterproductive to women (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015; Leach, 2007). For example, targeting women to achieve conservation project goals or directing liveli-

hood activities at women can increase women's labor and time burdens (Lawless et al., 2019) and even lead to backlash (particularly where gender relations have not been engaged with) (Chant & Gutmann, 2002), without advancing women's agency or positions within the household, community or society (Rao, 2017).

Regardless of how a women-only focus is implicitly or explicitly justified, the narrow interpretation of gender as women-only is reinforced by governance actors who hold, and then by extension expect and perpetuate, the view that women are vulnerable and inferior to men, legitimizing the notion that "Third World women" are in need of help (Cornwall, 2007; Koczberski, p. 401, 1998). The focus on women-specific issues, women as 'victims', 'participants' or 'recipients of help' highlight a tendency within policy instruments to depict women as individual and vulnerable agents disconnected from social settings, rather than contextualized in gendered environments (i.e., the household, community and wider social-systems). This sense of moral obligation to 'help' (whether that be to improve the status of women as victims or champions) without attending to gendered environments, particularly in post-colonial contexts, can serve to further subjugate and imperilise women (Cornwall, 2007).

Barriers and opportunities for addressing gender inequalities permeate across multiple levels of governance (Heise, 1998). We found the focus on gender issues (or entry points for change) in policy instruments across different levels of small-scale fisheries governance was patchy, with a concentrated focus on individual and organizational levels. Policies provided minimal attention to gender dimensions at the household and communal levels, downplaying gender norms and relations, and broader structures in which inequalities are embedded and (re)produced. Gender power relations within households and communities fundamentally influence the experiences of individuals (including how they make choices, receive benefits, and experience costs) (Rao, 2017). Fisheries interventions that do not consider gender within household and community relationships may compound women's poverty (Cole et al., 2015), reduce innovation capacities (Cohen et al., 2016; Locke et al., 2017), undermine social-ecological resilience (Kawarazuka et al., 2016) and create greater barriers in women's abilities to access, control and benefit from resources (Lawless et al., 2019). Conversely, where gender is understood as a social construction that creates different barriers and opportunities that span areas like tenure rights, education, access to material resources (Rao, 2017), a broader range of strategies becomes apparent to governance actors. Research has illustrated there to be benefits to understanding, then working in ways that might challenge (or at least not reinforce or exacerbate) structure and power, including destabilizing inequitable divisions in labor (Lawless et al., 2019; Locke et al., 2017) and providing more equitable access to productive assets (Cole et al., 2015) in order to drive both ecological and social improvements.

Extending the focus on the levels in which gender issues are attended to (i.e., to also recognize those at household and communal levels) inevitably requires examining and renegotiating relationships of power, which are situated within broader social systems perpetuating inequality (Morrison et al., 2019). Engaging with structural and power relations is complex and may feel out of the realm of fisheries actors and their associated interventions. While we do not have conclusive evidence as to why fisheries policy instruments do not recognize or strategize addressing gender issues at these levels, we acknowledge that working on gender issues that require negotiation of power relations necessitates more expertise, funding and time. As Ferguson (2015) articulates, it is easy to argue practitioners are not doing enough to address unequal power relations without considering the bureaucratic constraints within organizations themselves, including the need to build a business case for tackling such issues and garnering the

willingness to do so. Such processes may require navigating equally complex internal organizational dynamics of power.

#### 4.2. Rationalizing gender equality

The way gender is rationalized will influence the parameters within which governance actors think and operate (Bacchi, 2009). This understanding is essential to assessing organizational priorities and, by extension, the extent to which progress toward gender equality is likely to be achieved. Across all policy instruments we found six distinct rationale used to justify the importance of gender equality. In fact, we found that within instruments produced by a single organization, up to 13 different objectives were used to explain why gender equality should be pursued. Diversity in governance objectives and their rationale has previously been described in the fisheries sector as involving “hard but delicate choices often between equally desirable but [in some cases] contradictory goals” (Jentoft & Chuenpagdee, 2009, p. 556). Such diversity shows that gender is recognized as integral to many different goals, but also reinforces the wickedness of governability problems, where values around the importance of gender equality are incongruent, and potentially, in conflict with each other (i.e., blind vs. intrinsic). Further, the multiplicity in gender objectives may create friction between the gender outcomes sought by small-scale fisheries interventions. This diversity raises questions about the extent governance actors can advocate for gender equality successfully without consensus or clarity on the reasons for pursuing the principle.

Although there was some variance, the predominant portrayal of gender was instrumental, where gender considerations were important to facilitate or accelerate environmental outcomes. This framing was distinct from intrinsic portrayals, where gender was considered to lead to fairness and justice as outcomes in and of themselves (i.e., through improving human well-being, or ensuring equitable benefits from fisheries). In some sense our finding is similar to Cohen et al. (2019) who argue that equity of rights over small-scale fisheries are being “squeezed” by conservation and economic objectives and associated strategies, compromising the substantial equitable benefits to human well-being. The deliberate rationalization of gender equality as an instrumental pathway towards conservation or economic gain can, for example, enable the concept to enter more easily into policy agendas to become a commonly accepted goal (Verloo & Lombardo, 2007). This is also referred to as ‘norm bending’ where governance actors partake in a process of molding a global principle (i.e., gender equality) to fulfil alternative goals (i.e., economic growth) (Lombardo et al., 2010). In the absence of analysis such as ours, the rationale behind pursuing gender equality as an accelerant or pathway to other goals limits the opportunities of actors to contest such goals (Lombardo et al., 2010). Norm bending shrouds progress toward gender equality and raises questions about the extent governance actors are able to make this progress, when (for the most part) equality is not ultimately the priority or end goal.

Yet, instrumental considerations of gender and associated interventions can accelerate the uptake of gender equality as a governance principle. In fact, instrumental frames that gain gender a foothold in sectors that have not historically integrated this principle can be a launch point to enable future progress. Nazneen and Hickey (2019) document how particular norms around women’s rights are more compelling to non-advocates when presented instrumentally, particularly when they align with (rather than disrupt) dominant ideologies. We found the preferred language around ‘inclusion’ rather than ‘gender equality’ in small-scale fisheries commitments was strategic, and proposed to mask meanings of gender equality. This masking of gender offers the opportunity

to build incremental acceptance of the principle, overcome resistance, and win the support of small-scale fisheries actors.

Despite some promise, promoting gender instrumentally essentially depoliticizes gender and gendered power dynamics (Lombardo et al., 2010). In this sense, gender equality is only valued contingent on whether it leads to other outcomes, such as improved conservation or increased productivity (Nazneen & Hickey, 2019; Rao, 2017). Viewing the importance of gender equality through the lens of achieving environmental goals, often means there are no provisions or mechanisms to account for, improve, monitor or continue to invest in changes to the status of women or men (i.e., women’s sexual and reproductive rights, women’s unpaid labor, violence against women, toxic masculinity and the harms of patriarchy upon men) (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). Fisheries interventions that promote gender instrumentally are less likely to have explicit gender-related outcomes, meaning project goals are achieved without any progress to overcome inequalities. In this sense, instrumental views of gender make “women work for development, rather than making development work for their equality and empowerment” (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015, p. 398). In these cases, the social justice goal is lost and the inherent moral and complex nature of such principles can be overlooked, and at worst, serve to reinforce or amplify inequalities.

#### 4.3. Strategizing actions towards gender equality

Understanding the gender strategies proposed in commitments to small-scale fisheries is important to determine whether actions meet current best practice, and ultimately make meaningful progress towards gender equality. The gender strategies proposed predominately focused on processes to improve gender equality through formal workplace practice (e.g., equal opportunity recruitment) and evidence generation (e.g., data on the contribution of women in fisheries), rather than those applied in fisheries projects (e.g., actions toward enhancing women’s agency). The tendency to focus on internal organizational gender strategies can be appealing as these strategies are often formal, bound by relatively prescriptive organizational policy and practice, including reporting requirements. While the recognition of organizational strategies are essential to establishing standards for a gender-sensitive and equitable workplace, the predominant focus on internal strategies may serve as a distraction from bringing gender equality to the forefront of the organization’s priorities and goals (Walby, 2005). In fact, the skew in focus may simultaneously limit resources and attention directed toward gender strategies applied within projects (i.e., for fishers, households and communities engaged in or affected by small-scale fisheries) (Walby, 2005). For instance, we found the focus on evidence generation for gender-related reporting was disconnected from efforts to ensure data contributed to gender or social change, suggesting that these strategies were more rhetorical than actionable.

Of the project strategies identified, we found a considerable focus on women as primary project beneficiaries. This approach is common, and strategies that exclusively focus on addressing ‘women’s issues’ have been noted across different sectors and contexts (e.g., Cornwall & Rivas, 2015; Rao, 2017; Stacey et al., 2019). The examples we encountered included facilitating improved links between women, markets, fisheries value-chains, training opportunities and business networks. Separate studies examining the application of gender strategies in coastal livelihoods and fisheries development projects in the Pacific Islands and Indonesia respectively, also found strategies were largely targeted toward women, for instance, to facilitate their participation in projects and increased access to material or financial assets (Mangubhai & Lawless, 2021; Stacey et al., 2019). These approaches can be appealing as they offer tangible and quantifiable results. However,

strategies solely focused on reaching women (or men) through the delivery of livelihood projects, assets or natural resources, without substantive strategies to address gender dimensions of access, use, adoption and distribution often fail to achieve their intended goals (Resurrección & Elmhirst, 2008). The inattention of these strategies to the relational and structural dimensions of gender has led to gender exploitative interventions (i.e., those that intentionally or unintentionally reinforce or take advantage of gender norms, relations and stereotypes that exacerbate inequalities) (Resurrección & Elmhirst, 2009; Stacey et al., 2019).

### 5. Summary and recommendations

The quantity of written commitments and level of investments toward gender equality in environmental governance are unprecedented. On the surface, this suggests there to be, more than ever, meaningful progress towards gender equality. However, deeper examination of how gender is represented, rationalized and strategized by governance actors and within policy instruments illustrates that the nature of commitments and investments may not be fit for the complex social-ecological challenge at hand. In our examination of policies that govern small-scale fisheries in the Pacific Islands, gender commitments are often diluted and expressed through narrow and outdated strategies. The small-scale fisheries sector remains preoccupied with a focus on ‘women’s issues’ rather than gender equality and the power-laden dynamics of gendered identities and relationships. Organizations are mostly inward looking, restricting their attention to internal strategies for reform, rather than societal, community and sector-based initiatives.

In extreme, yet prevalent examples, we found gender to be prioritized as an accelerant of instrumental goals, rather than for its own inherent value. Such instrumental approaches pay insufficient attention to the deeper, difficult-to-quantify, and more intractable social challenges. Preference for instrumental approaches tend to offer immediate and measurable changes or impacts (e.g., counting women’s attendance), which may be appealing, perceived as achievable, and more palatable for fisheries governance actors. Yet, these approaches can unintentionally, or intentionally, distract from the deeper, multi-level and harder won shifts necessary to address the environmental, economic and social elements of sustainable development. To reclaim the gender agenda, with representations, rationale and strategies fit for purpose, a paradigm shift across environmental governance sectors is needed. We offer four recommendations to achieve this shift.

First, if gender equality goals are to be met, the small-scale fisheries sector requires an urgent recalibration to recognize that ‘gender’ is more than just a focus on women. At a minimum, alternate narratives and corresponding strategies need to recognize gender as socially constructed, including concerted effort to understand how interactive gender relations determine the freedoms, opportunities and rights of different women and different men. This effort is essential to recognizing men as dynamic actors in both problem identification and framing. The lowest bar, still often not reached, might be the proper implementation of sex-disaggregated data standards (e.g., Doss & Kieran, 2014) and gender-inclusive facilitation techniques (e.g., Kleiber et al., 2019). Yet, to avoid gender considerations being ‘tacked on’, gender analysis needs to be applied and integrated from project conception (e.g., Van Eerdewijk & Brouwers, 2014).

Second, the sector requires greater balance between the almost singular focus on the instrumental rather than intrinsic value of gender equality. In the fisheries sector, this might be articulated as more balanced commitment to both Sustainable Development Goal 5 on Gender Equality and Goal 14 on Life Below Water. Such

a shift necessitates the re-negotiation of organizational normative ideals about the gender-environment relationship. Therefore, dominant rationales about why governance actors care about gender need to be questioned. The methodology we develop and apply, as with other analyses of fisheries governance (e.g., Cohen et al., 2019; Morrison, 2017; Song et al., 2017), can elucidate both explicit and implicit governance objectives (particularly identification of social-ecological tensions) as a starting point to promote more equitable pathways for change.

Third, shifting the current pathways for change also requires working to address relational and structural inequalities across multiple levels of governance. Multi-level governance analyses are increasingly applied as a means to identify opportunities for solutions fit to address complex social-ecological challenges (e.g., Cohen et al., 2017; Jentoft & Chuenpagdee, 2009; Morrison et al., 2020). Our analysis of the gender issues targeted across the different governance levels (i.e., the individual to societal level) has illustrated the areas of attention, and conversely inattention, given to gender by the small-scale fisheries sector, helping to identify future areas for improved gender integration. The household, communal and societal spheres present untapped opportunities and entry-points to balance current views and develop multi-level strategies for gender integration (Fig. 7). For example, in the Pacific Islands region, we find the fisheries sector is uniquely positioned to address gender issues of marine tenure and food and nutrition security, which were not prominent in gender and development policy.

Finally, in building both gender-nuanced and multi-level strategies and actions, it would seem from our analysis that at least in the short term, fisheries actors will need to engage with gender and development experts and develop novel partnerships (i.e., feminist fisheries think tanks as proposed by Williams, 2019). This process may help to gradually transfer capacity and expertise to the fisheries sector. Such a step requires broadening collaboration beyond fisheries, and a fuller embracement of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary principles in a sector which has traditionally prioritized ecological sciences over study of the human dimensions (Stephenson et al., 2018).

We have demonstrated how gender equality manifests in commitments to small-scale fisheries across different Pacific Island geographies, in order to improve gender equality outcomes in

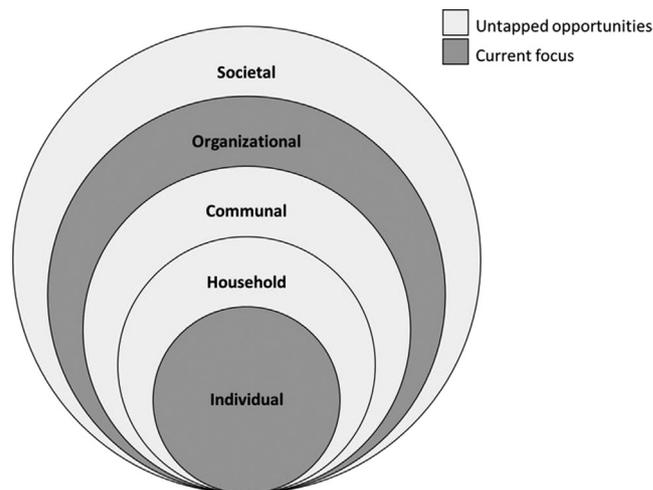


Fig. 7. Gender equality outcomes are affected (hence can be understood and addressed) at different levels, represented here as spheres (adapted from Heise, 1998). Small-scale fisheries policy instruments predominately focus on gender issues at individual and organizational levels of governance (dark grey), with few issues and strategies identified at societal, communal, and household levels of governance (light grey).

practice. Importantly, narrow and outdated representations, rationale and strategies of gender equality are not isolated to the small-scale fisheries sector; these issues are pertinent to any sector, policy realm or investment seeking to contribute towards environmental governance and sustainable development (e.g., Agarwal, 2018; Resurrección & Elmhirst, 2009). The methodology we developed and applied to closely examine multi-level gender equality commitments offers substantial potential to measure and then improve the quality of outcomes of such commitments both across and within environmental governance sectors.

### Credit authorship contribution statement

**Sarah Lawless:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Resources, Data curation, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing, Visualization, Project administration. **Philippa J. Cohen:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing, Visualization, Supervision. **Sangeeta Mangubhai:** Methodology, Investigation, Resources, Data curation, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing, Visualization, Project administration. **Danika Kleiber:** Methodology, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing, Supervision. **Tiffany Morrison:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing, Visualization, Supervision.

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### Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.105348>.

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