

How is work divided between women and men, girls and boys in this community?

Can women and girls do work usually done by men and boys if they want or need to? Can men and boys do work usually done by women and girls if they want or need to? Why or why not? Is this fair?

Who is most active in each part of the coconut - women, men, girls or boys? Why are certain groups more active in some parts of the economy than others?

THE FLOATING COCONUT

Understanding women's and men's roles in economies in Melanesia

THE ECONOMY IS LIKE A FLOATING COCONUT

We can think about the economy as a floating coconut made up of three parts. One part of the economy is visible above the water and the other two parts are submerged under the water:

Above the water:

- **Formal work:** Work done by businesses (including sole traders) who are registered with the government in order to operate. Such businesses usually pay income tax, company registration fees, company taxes, or license fees. They may include, for example, large businesses, permanent shops, and market stall holders. When employees work in a job where they receive a salary or wage this is also considered formal work, and could be a job they hold in a registered business (small or large), a government agency or department, or a non-government organisation.

Below the water:

- **Informal work:** Work done by individuals and small businesses that do not pay any money to the government to operate. Goods and services may be sold for money, bartered or exchanged in kind.
- **Household, care and community work:** Work conducted in the household or the community in the service of others that is unpaid or paid in-kind, i.e. not rewarded with money. This work can be to care for others, to produce a gift, honour a voluntary arrangement or cultural commitment, contribute to a reciprocal labour exchange (I'll help you now, you help me later) or to keep the household functioning. Some specific examples include caring for one's own family members or other families in need (including parenting, child care, elder care, care for people in jail and care for people with a disability), domestic work (washing dishes and sweeping the floor), voluntary work (tree planting, committee work), subsistence work (growing food and weaving baskets for the household) and gifting and sharing (making traditional items for community events, preparing food to contribute to a cultural event).

In most Melanesian communities, the main economic activities are agriculture, subsistence and care-giving work, gifting, voluntary labour, inter-household exchange and unregulated income-generating activities. Self-employed individuals undertake much of this work; cooperative businesses are less common in Melanesia. The availability of formal sector work is often very limited, particularly in rural areas. While all these activities contribute in important ways to sustaining people's lives and creating well being, many governments (and others) tend to focus on developing and measuring activity in the formal economy – that is, the economic activity above the water. This makes economic activity in the formal sector more visible and appear more important than the activity below the water. In reality, activity in all parts of the economy are important and need to be recognised as such.

Women's and men's roles in the economy

In every Pacific economy men and women of all ages play distinctive roles that make different but equally valuable contributions to household well being.

If you ask men and women to create their own separate coconuts you are likely to discover that:

- Both women and men have very creative ways of putting food on the table, accessing cash and improving individual, household and community well being.
- Men often have access to more formal sector work opportunities than women, especially those who are able to travel away from the community.
- Women often undertake more day-to-day household, care and community work than men. Men's household, care and community work can be ad-hoc and seasonal.
- Young men often have fewer responsibilities in the household when compared with their sisters or girls of the same age. This can mean that they have a lot more free time.
- Women often have responsibility for caring for the family, but can have limited access to or control of cash income to purchase necessities. Men often have more opportunity than women to do cash work, but may not contribute fairly to household expenses.
- Household, care and community work binds households and communities together and puts food on the table, but it tends to be valued less than cash work. This means that much of women's work is often undervalued.

Which activities do you think are likely to be the highest paying activities in the formal and informal economies? Do women and men have equal access to these types of activities? What are some of the barriers faced by different groups to doing highly paid work?

Is the total workload in the local economy (the entire coconut) fairly shared in the family and in the community?

How can we make the coconut fairer for everyone?

FORMAL WORK

Job at the ports

Nurse

Receptionist

Teacher

Job with local council

Job at local shop

Job with military

Taxi driver
Contract logging

CARE AND COMMUNITY WORK

Cooking for the family

Sewing curtains for the church

Helping my neighbours build their house

Helping repair church

Helping elderly women

Washing clothes

Fundraising for my netball team

Planting, weeding and harvesting vegetables to eat

Growing flowers for the church

Caring for children

Cleaning out compound

Working on a committee

Labourer

Making traditional medicine

Selling pirated DVDs

Crocheting decorations for sale

Selling stolen items

Fishing for food

Ironing clothes

Making juice for sale

Sex worker

Selling sand and wood

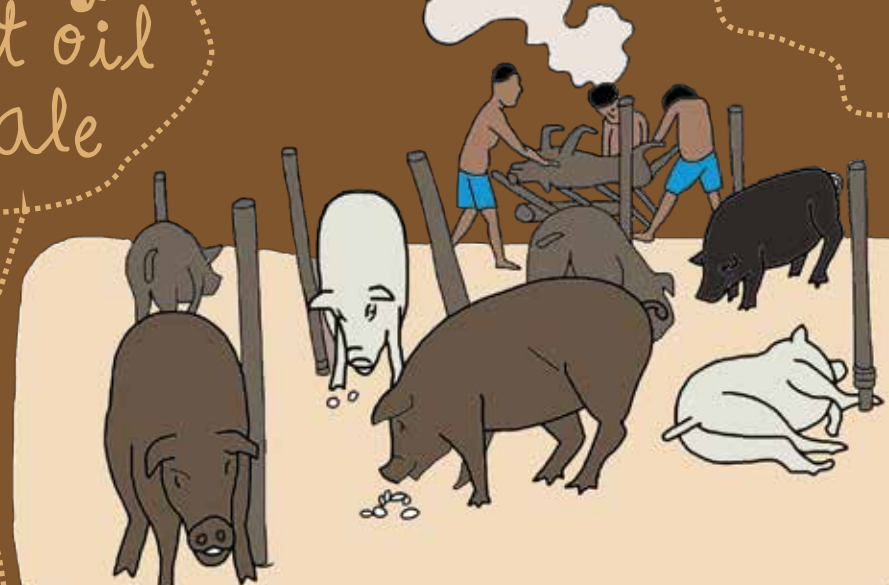
Growing chillies for sale

Working as a house girl

Making coconut oil for sale

Breeding pigs for sale

Poultry farming



Selling fish

Producing jam for sale

Baking cakes for sale

Making and selling brooms

Selling packets of tamarind

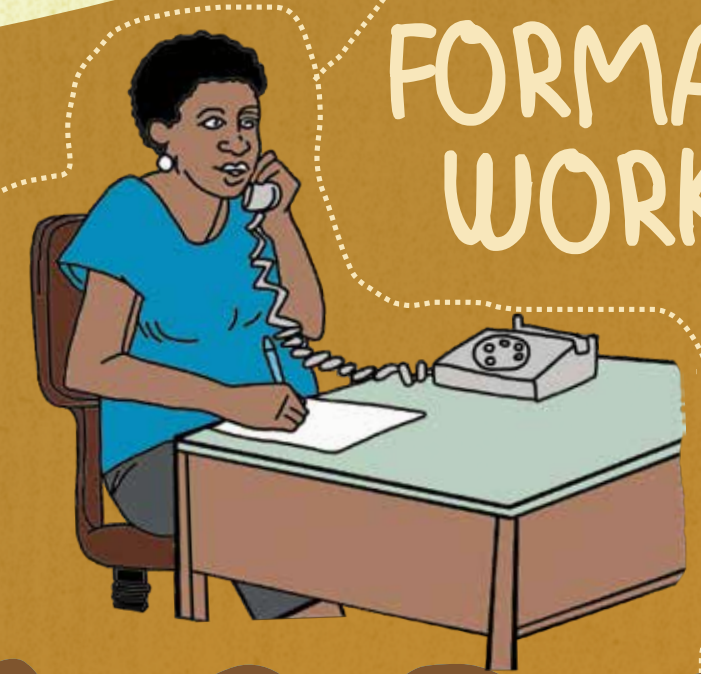
Making ice blocks for sale

INFORMAL WORK

INFORMAL WORK

Selling cigarettes

Running a canteen



CREATING A FLOATING COCONUT WITH COMMUNITIES

Purpose

Create a floating coconut in your community or with your family to help:

- Understand the work that women and men, young women and young men do to create wellbeing in the community
- Identify ways to share workload, work opportunities and work benefits more fairly

Materials

Sticky notes, marker pens,
4 x floating coconut drawings

Method

1. Separate women and men, and then separate the groups again by marital status or age. Ask them to sit in separate areas so they can't hear each other.
2. Ask each group to brainstorm any economic activities that they have done in the last week, writing down the activities on sticky notes – 1 activity per note. Economic activities include:
 - a) Things people do to make money, including illegal activities.
 - b) Things people do to look after their family and household, like growing food, foraging, tending animals, child minding and looking after old, sick or disabled family members, fixing the house, making furniture and creating functional items like baskets.
 - c) Things people do to contribute to their church, family or community network and to meet social and cultural obligations. For example, volunteer work, fundraising, making food for events, helping prepare for festivals, curtains for the church, training or mentoring others, care work for the poor or aged and preparing gifts for important milestones.
3. Explain the three parts of the floating coconut, using the definitions on the other side of this poster. Ask group members to place their sticky notes on the appropriate parts of the coconut. Remove any double ups.
4. Once the coconuts are created, ask each group to present their coconut to the rest of the groups. Promote discussion by asking:
 - Who is usually responsible for purchasing necessities for the household? If both men and women are working, do they both contribute their income fairly to meet household needs?
 - Do young women and men contribute in the same way to the economy? How does young women's workload impact on their schooling, leisure time, and opportunity to earn cash? How could young men help make the coconut fairer for young women?
 - Which activities do you think are likely to be the highest paying activities in the formal and informal economies? Do women and men have equal access to these types of activities? What are some of the barriers faced by different groups to doing high paid work?
 - Is the total workload in the local economy (the entire coconut) fairly shared in the family and in the community?
 - How can we make the coconut fairer for everyone?

Sum Up

Both women and men have very creative ways of providing for their households, accessing cash and improving individual, household and community well being. Women's extensive role in care and community work can mean they carry a significantly larger burden of work in the economy relative to men. As a result, they do not always have the time or the opportunity to access cash work that pays high income. As women do not always have access or control over household income, supporting the family can be difficult. More sharing of unpaid work and household cash income, can mean better outcomes for the whole family. It can also mean a stronger economy. Men, particularly young men can be more actively employed in care and community work, reducing opportunities for anti-social behaviours. This could free up women to expand their education, skills and work activities. Cash could be better allocated from discretionary items to the long term human development of families and the community. Addressing these issues means positive outcomes for everyone.

Key message

We can make decisions in our families and communities to share work opportunities, workloads and work benefits more fairly. This will make the economy operate more smoothly and become more productive. It will also improve relationships in the family and the community.

The company contracts me to organise labourers for the plantation. I sub contract extended family members, paying them in food, smokes and cash. Women are sometimes employed as plantation labour alongside men. But often we need to stay at the plantation overnight, so we don't employ women in villages further away from the plantation because they need to stay close to home

Married man, Solomon Islands

Garden food really supports my family life. If I didn't make a garden I'll suffer, my children will be hungry and my family will break down

Married woman, Solomon Islands

The first harvest is gifted to the church. Other produce is shared with relatives so they can feed their children, and the community for fund raisings

Young woman, Solomon Islands

Three months ago, I attended literacy training. I gained new skills, and started teaching women adults how to read and write

Woman, Solomon Islands.

In our women's group, women create and sell flower arrangements to sustain our group. Income is spent on material costs, with profits used for group needs. Individual members do not receive income for their time

Married woman, Fiji

I run a copra business and employ young men from the neighbourhood, who undertake work in exchange for food. They help in clearing the coconut plantation, husking the coconuts and carrying the coconut husks to the copra drying-house to be dried. Women in my household prepare the food for the workers. I collect firewood, tend the fire for drying the coconuts and remove the coconut shells. I also pack the copra and sell it to buyers

Young man, Solomon Islands

This 'Floating coconut' poster is part of a resource kit of materials that help to understand and measure change in economic activities and relations between women and men in Melanesian communities. Other materials include:

- ➔ A 'River of change' poster, describing four main tributaries of change necessary to improve gender relations in Melanesian communities.
- ➔ Flashcard sets that can be used in opening up discussions on critical gender issues and for monitoring the strength and flow of the 'River of change'.
- ➔ A manual of indicators and tools for tracking change in gender relations and the economy in Melanesian communities. This manual includes a survey questionnaire and six participatory activities that can be used to gather data to track gender equality and economic indicators at the community level. The participatory tools can also be used to start conversations about gender and the economy in Melanesian communities.

This poster is based on research undertaken by the University of Western Sydney, Macquarie University and the International Women's Development Agency in partnership with Fiji National University, Union Aid Abroad APHEDA, Live & Learn Environmental Education (the Solomon Islands) and Women's Action for Change (Fiji).

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