



Fiji



Trade Facilitation Challenges for Women Traders and Freight Forwarders

Survey findings and recommendations

Fiji

Number of active cross-border trading firms (2018): 4,702 (484 owned by women)

Capital City: Suva

Region: East Asia & Pacific

Income category: Upper middle income ¹

Population (2018): 883,483

GDP (current US\$ billions, 2018): 5.54 ²

Est. GNI per capita female/men (2011):
\$5,838/\$12,923 ³

Labor force participation rate (% ages 15 and older) female/male: 40.8/75.4

Exports and imports (% of GDP): 78

Main exports:

sugar, garments, gold, timber, fish, molasses, mineral water and coconut oil ⁴

Main imports:

manufactured goods, machinery, petroleum products, food and chemicals

WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement ratification date: May 1, 2017

¹ GNI per capita between \$3,996 and \$12,375.

² World Development Indicators database.

³ Human Development Report, UNDP.

⁴ Import and export data taken from Investment Fiji.

Key recommendations based on survey findings:

Initial findings demonstrate an opportunity to improve the design of trade facilitation interventions to better address traders' needs (women in particular), e.g. by:



Improving access to and the quality of information on border related processes and procedures.



Strengthening the role of the NTFC.



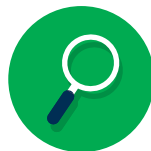
Strengthening formal grievance procedures.



Expanding the Authorized Economic Operator scheme, incl. to women traders.



Promoting pre-declaration practices.



Exploring reasons for detention and seizure of goods.



Strengthening the system for electronic payments.



Reviewing opening hours of ports/border agencies.

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Employees at Ben's Trading Limited,
exporter of agricultural products.

1 Introduction

This note presents the results of a survey undertaken in Fiji from May to June 2019 with the intention to identify the specific challenges men and women cross-border traders are facing related to trade facilitation at the firm level.⁵

Research has shown that while women-owned Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) represent about 31-38% of all SMEs in emerging markets, the average growth rates of these firms do not come close to matching that of their male counterparts.⁶ Women entrepreneurs also tend to operate with smaller sized businesses (about 32-39% make up micro firms, 30-36% make up small firms, and 17-21% make up medium-sized firms).⁷ Moving goods across borders implies challenges for traders, and research has also shown that only one in five exporting firms are led by women.⁸ What challenges do women-led firms face? Do women-led firms face more challenging roadblocks to cross-border trade than men, which may consequently prevent them from growing their businesses globally?

Generally, efforts to improve trade conditions, especially relating to women cross-border traders, have been progressing over the years. Yet, there is limited work focusing on trade facilitation initiatives and trade competitiveness interventions aimed at women firms who face trading barriers that are not strictly linked to tariffs or policies. There is a global data gap on the nature of barriers that women traders face related to trade facilitation at the firm level.⁹ In fact, the problem is even deeper rooted; there is a global vacuum of knowledge about the exact proportion of cross-border traders that are women. No country, not even the gender equality champions in Northern Europe, can easily confirm the number of women that undertake cross-border trade in their respective countries.

Designing interventions that are inclusive—benefiting women as well as men—is difficult without strong data on the gender of those who participate actively in cross-border trade. Without this knowledge and that of the exact challenges faced by both genders, it is also hard to tell how much any subset of the economy any intervention would impact.

⁵ Trading refers to cross-border trade. Traders in this note refers to representatives of firms importing and/or exporting across borders. In this survey, the World Bank Enterprise Survey's definition of firm sized is used: micro (1-4 employees), small (5-19 employees), medium (20-99 employees), and large (100 employees and above). A firm is "woman owned" if (1a) $\geq 51\%$ of the shares are owned by a woman or (1b) $\geq 20\%$ is owned by a woman; (2) it has ≥ 1 woman as CEO/COO/President/Vice President; and, (3) has $\geq 30\%$ of the board of directors composed of women (where a board exists). "Managed" refers to the highest management individual in the firm.

⁶ IFC and GPF, Strengthening Access to Finance for Women-Owned SMEs in Developing Countries, 2011

To help fill the data gap with an aim to better inform future trade policy design and implementation, the World Bank Group (WBG) initiated research to identify and examine the cross-border trade challenges faced by both women and men, challenges that impede women more acutely than men, and challenges that impede solely women traders at the firm level.

A survey designed to collect data on these challenges is being rolled out in the Pacific. Countries in the Pacific Islands region face unique development challenges: they are physically detached from major markets, have small populations spread across many islands and time zones, confront the worst impacts of climate change, and are some of the most vulnerable countries to natural disasters in the world.¹⁰

This research project is led by a WBG team and funded by the Trade Facilitation Support Program. A private firm was selected through a competitive process to support the team with the implementation of the survey on the ground in Fiji.

The work undertaken in Fiji is intended to lay the foundation for a larger rollout of the survey in the Pacific,¹¹ followed by other regions, which could serve to confirm trends in challenges to trade between countries ("traders" is used interchangeably with "firms" in this report but should be understood to represent registered firms undertaking cross-border trade and not individual, private traders).

The team would like to recognize the Government of Fiji for their invaluable contribution to the project, including through the provision of trader data. Recognition also goes to the IFC and World Bank offices in Fiji for their support of this work.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ ITC, Unlocking Markets for Women in Trade, 2015

⁹ Higgins, Gender Dimensions of Trade Facilitation and Logistics: A Guidance Note. April 2012, (World Bank, 2012)

¹⁰ World Bank, 2019

¹¹ Target countries for the project in the Pacific region are Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Timor-Leste and Vanuatu.



Central business district, Suva.

2 Description of the sample and methodology



Efforts to identify the universe of female traders in Fiji preceded the survey. In 2018 there were 4,702 active traders in Fiji, of which 484 were women and half of which participated in this survey.^{12, 13} A parallel survey of all 42 formally operating freight forwarders in Fiji was also undertaken.¹⁴

The WBG undertook Focus Group Discussions with both male and female traders and government stakeholders in Suva in February 2019. These helped to finalize the survey questionnaires and enabled a more qualitative discussion of the challenges in conducting cross-border trade. The survey questionnaire focuses on main areas of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement.¹⁵ It was administered by phone in English.

A total of 529 women and men traders were interviewed in Fiji between May 20 and June 13, 2019. Following a quota sampling strategy, 279 men and 250 female traders working with different sized firms and sectors in Fiji were interviewed.¹⁶ **Table 1** provides a breakdown of survey respondents by gender, size of firms and sectors (HS sections).

Table 1: Breakdown of trader survey respondents by gender, size of firms and sectors (HS sections)

HS Section*	Women					Men					TOTAL
	Micro (1-5)	Small (6-19)	Medium (20-99)	Large (100+)	Sub-total	Micro (1-5)	Small (6-19)	Medium (20-99)	Large (100+)	Sub-total	
1-4 (agriculture)	5	7	11	5	28	4	9	4	10	27	55
5-10 (minerals)	14	13	3	2	32	2	18	16	11	47	79
11-12 (textile)	31	29	13	6	79	2	13	7	5	27	106
13-15 (stones)	9	4	7	2	22	1	9	10	8	28	50
16-21 (machinery)	23	28	28	10	89	18	51	62	19	150	239
Sub-total	82	81	62	25	250	27	100	99	53	279	529

* If the interviewee is an importer, then the HS code is based on the imported goods. If the interviewee is an exporter, then the HS code is based on the exported goods.

12 Out of the 4,700 active traders in 2018, there were 484 female registered firms and 1,330 additional firms where women owned shares (with a total of 1,814 firms). The percentage of shares by firm is not known.

13 The survey results have been analysed and synthesized to identify key takeaways. Survey participants are not identified in the report in order to preserve confidentiality.

14 The 42 freight forwarders are individuals representing the same, or different, firms (including branches) providing freight forwarding services.

15 The WTO TFA came into force on February 22, 2017, and contains provisions for expediting the movement, release and clearance of goods, including goods in transit. It also sets out measures for effective cooperation provisions for expediting the movement, release and clearance of goods,

All 42 freight forwarders in Fiji were surveyed in the same time frame, using a simplified version of the trader questionnaire.

The survey was limited to identifying constraints that existing traders face. Therefore, it may suffer from a selection bias in that it did not explore obstacles to engaging in cross-border trade among women firms who currently only trade domestically (possibly as a result of barriers to cross-border trade). In fact, the finding of low engagement of female firms in trading could be caused by constraints that prevent them from trading across borders. Exploring the reasons of non-engagement in cross-border trade would require a deeper assessment of why non-trading female firms do not trade, which goes beyond the scope of this survey and likely also the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. Additional details of the sampling strategy and survey methodology are provided in **Annex 1**.)

Given that 79% of survey respondents exclusively import, the survey findings in Fiji do not distinguish between importers and exporters unless otherwise specified. This, however, may be possible in other countries and could provide additional insights once the survey is rolled out in other regions.

including goods in transit. It also sets out measures for effective cooperation between customs and other appropriate authorities on trade facilitation and customs compliance issues.

16 The eligibility criteria for the survey included firms of any size engaged in cross-border trade (import and/or export), as well as whether the respondent owns/manages the firm. State-owned enterprises were excluded. In addition to gender, quotas for sectors were set using the Harmonized Schedule as such: HS Sections 1-4 (animal, vegetable products, beverages, tobacco), HS sections 5-10 (minerals, chemicals, rubber, leather, wood, paper products), HS sections 11-12 (textile, footwear), HS sections 13-15 (stone, glass, precious stones, metals,) and HS sections 16-21 (machinery, transport equipment, medical instruments, ammunitions, artwork). Annex 1 provides additional details on the survey methodology and rollout.



Port of Suva.

3 Summary of survey findings

General trader and freight forwarder findings

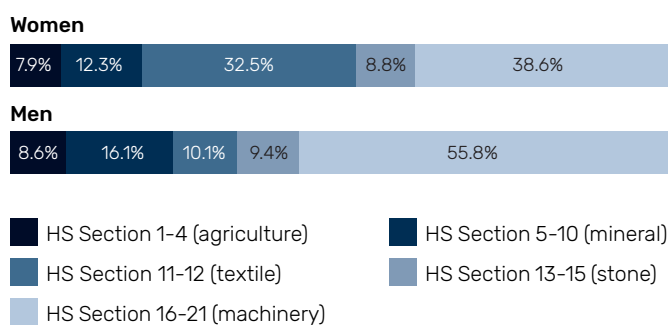
■ **Women owned firms and women freight forwarders appear to be underrepresented in Fiji.** Out of the 4,702 trading firms in Fiji, only about 10% (484) are women owned, though an additional 1,330 firms have some degree of female ownership.¹⁷ Of the 42 freight forwarders in Fiji, 24% (10) are women.

■ About 90% of the traders are between 25 and 55 years old, with the highest share of both men (45%) and women (49%) between 36 and 45 years old.¹⁸ All but two of the 529 traders have undertaken a minimum of secondary school level education. More men than women traders have university degrees. University-level education is higher among traders from larger firms.

■ The majority of women freight forwarders in Fiji are between 36-45 years old (60%), while half of the male freight forwarders are slightly older – between 46-55 years old (50%). More women freight forwarders than men have university-level education.

■ The main import commodity category for both female and male traders are within HS Sections 16-21 (machinery and artwork). A significant share of women also imports products within HS section 11-12 (textile and footwear).

Figure 1. Main Commodities Imported by Gender

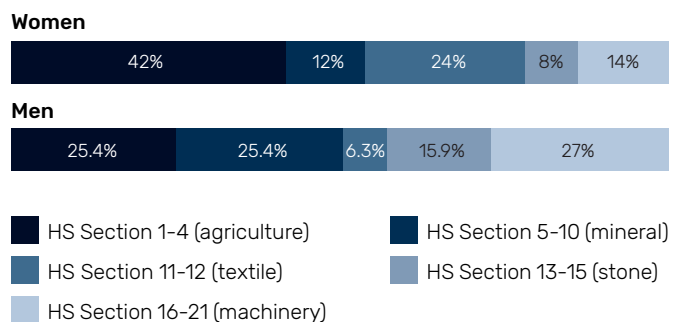


¹⁷Exact number of shares owned by women is unknown.

¹⁸According to the CIA World Factbook (2018), roughly 41% of the population in Fiji is between 25-54 years old.

■ **The dominant export category for women traders is agricultural products followed by textile and footwear.** Men export mostly machinery, ammunitions and artwork, followed by mineral and agricultural products. Samples are spread across micro, small, medium and large firms in each commodity classification group.

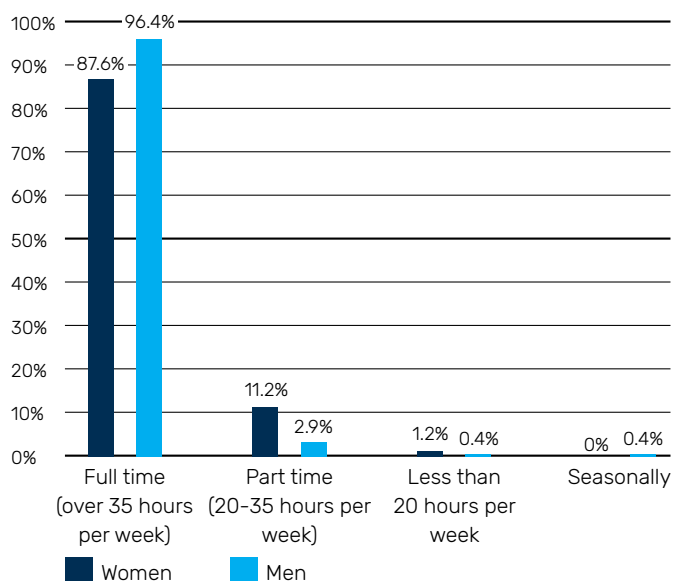
Figure 2. Main Commodities Exported by Gender



■ **Women traders in Fiji appear to trade less frequently than men.** While 44% of women and 39% of men reportedly trade once every three months or less, 25% of women trade seasonally compared to 15% of men; and, only 13% of women trade more than once a month compared to 27% of men.

■ **Women traders reportedly spend fewer hours working on their businesses than their male counterparts.** 96% of male traders are engaged full time in the occupation versus 88% of female traders. Only 3% of male traders and 11% of female traders work part time. All freight forwarders work full time.

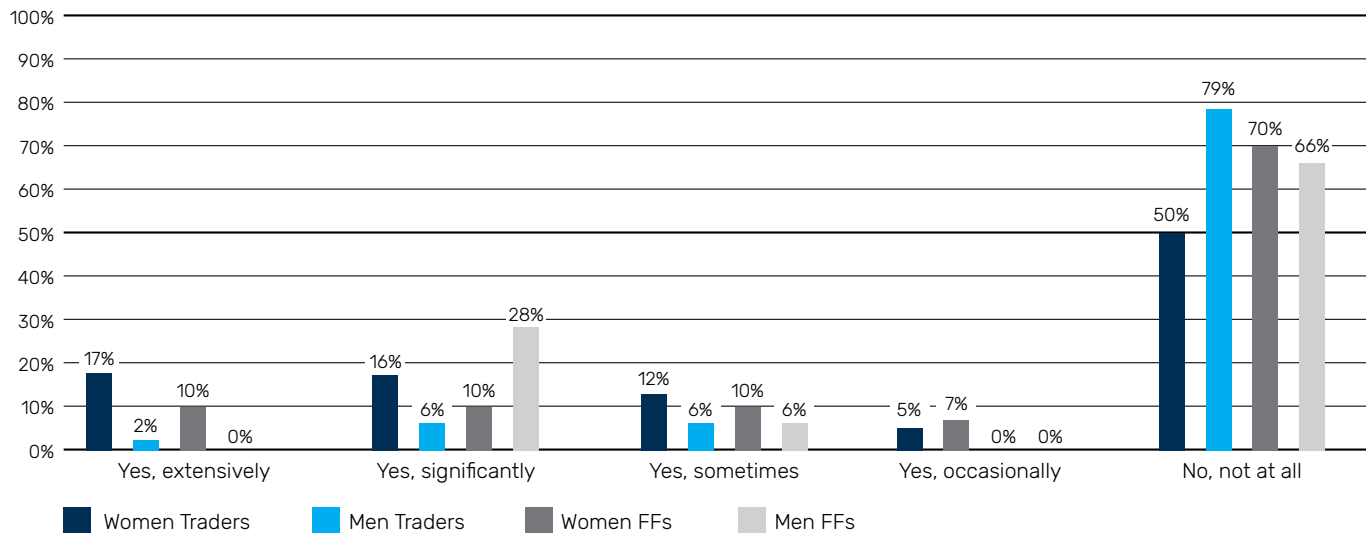
Figure 3. Number of Hours Traders Work in a Week



■ **Women traders spend more time than their male counterparts in taking care of children and elderly in their families.** 17% of women traders spend more than 5 hours per day compared to only 2% of men spending the same amount time on family care obligations. 16% of women spend 3 hours per day compared to 6% of men. Almost 80% of men and 50% of women, however, do not spend any time taking care of family members.



Figure 4. Time Spent on Family Care Obligations



■ **Most traders in Fiji, regardless of gender, use transport operators.** Over 95% of both men and women traders use transport operators whilst only 5% of women and 3% of men traders use their own transportation to move their goods.

■ **Almost 100% of both men and women traders reportedly use freight forwarders.** Most traders, regardless of gender, appear to be using freight forwarders to handle shipping, transport and paperwork; about half of women (49%) and 31% of men also use freight forwarders to handle warehousing.



Trade facilitation specific findings

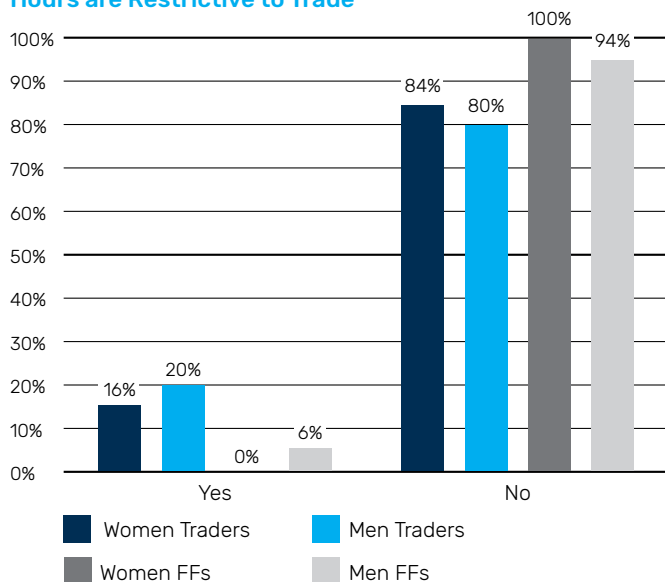
i. Port opening hours

Limited port opening hours by one or more border agency may restrict businesses' ability to conduct trade and may have a severe impact on their cost of doing business.

Related survey finding:

■ Most traders do not see border or port opening hours to be restrictive to their ability to do business (80% of men and 84% of women do not find hours restrictive). Between 16–20% of both men and women traders do, however, find the opening hours to be restricting their ability to trade. Only 6% of male and no female freight forwarders find opening hours to be restrictive. Anecdotally, a few respondents mentioned that there are port congestion issues restricting trade.

Figure 5. Perception of Whether Border/Port Opening Hours are Restrictive to Trade



ii. Consistency in implementation of border procedures

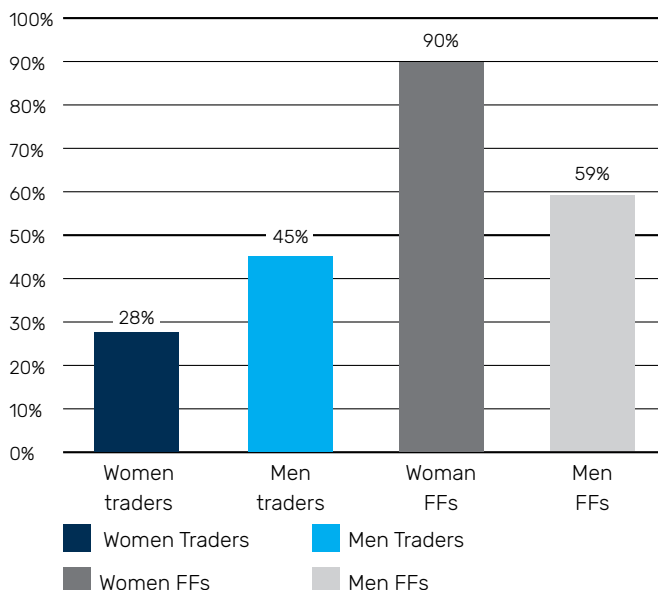
Consistent implementation of border procedures ensures predictability for traders in terms of cost and time involved in undertaking cross-border trade.

Related survey findings:

■ A significantly higher number of men traders (45%) compared to women traders (28%) find official regulations and procedures to be consistently implemented by border officials. Larger firms report that regulations are implemented consistently compared to small firms, regardless of gender. Regardless of firm size, more women traders state that they are not sure whether regulations are implemented consistently compared to men traders.

■ The majority of men and women freight forwarders find that official regulations and procedures are implemented consistently by border officials.

Figure 6. Consistency in Implementation of Border Procedures



iii. Time to release goods

Faster and more predictable release processes enable the traders to better plan, manage and optimize supply chains. Unpredictable release times make it challenging for traders to participate in time-sensitive logistics chains, may increase trader inventory holdings or cause disruption in local supply, increase transport and logistic costs (e.g., warehousing, labour, fuel, storage fees) and may increase the time for exporters to receive payment.

Related survey finding:

■ Women and men traders report almost identical patterns across sectors in terms of the time taken to

release imported goods. Most women (57%) and men (75%) report that it takes up to three days to release imported goods from Customs.

- Half of women freight forwarders and 32% of men report that it takes three days to have imported goods released.

- **Women traders appear to have their export goods released somewhat sooner than male traders** (64% of women traders compared to 23% of male traders reported that goods are released in one day or less).¹⁹ One exception is HS16-21 (machinery, ammunitions, and artwork) where both men and women report three days to release their goods.

- More women freight forwarders (44%) than men (17%) report that it takes three days to have exported goods released. About one-third of women freight forwarders says it takes less than half a day, while 50% of men say the same. There seems to be no correlation between the size of the freight forwarding firm and the time it takes to release goods from Customs, nor between the export product and the time it takes for clearance.

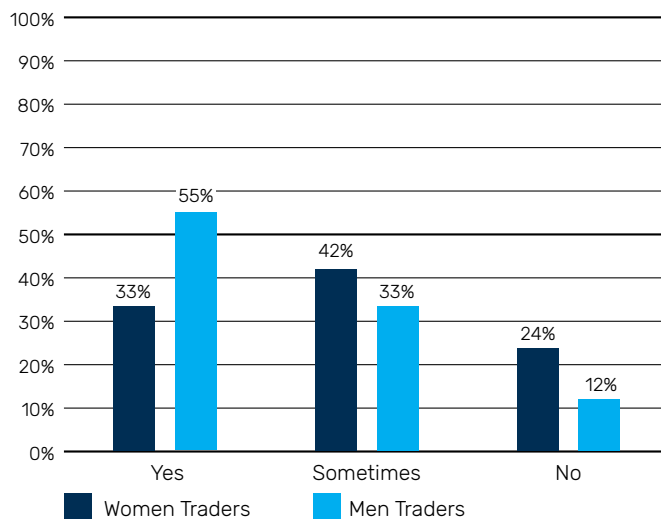
iv. Access to and understanding of official border regulations and procedures

Difficulties in accessing and understanding information on official rules and regulations regarding border processes and procedures may make it difficult to voluntarily comply and act as a barrier to entry for international trade.

Related survey findings:

- **Women traders find it more difficult to understand official regulations and procedures than men, regardless of firm size.** About 33% of the women find official regulations and procedures easy to understand, compared to 55% of male respondents. More women than men report that information on official regulations and procedures is not easily available (33% compared to 19% for men). Regardless of gender, a larger proportion of the traders representing micro firms are reporting that they do not find information easily available. The majority of both men and women that find official regulations and procedures easy to understand have university-level education.

Figure 7. Ease of Understanding Official Trade Regulations and Procedures



- **Almost half of women traders that do not find information to be easily available are associated with micro firms and tend to not be a part of industry associations.** Less than 5% of women traders that don't find information to be easily available are from large firms. Overall, 70% of women and 84% of men freight forwarders, as well as 57% of women and 72% of men traders, find information available online, signifying a gap between the women and male respondents in terms of access to information online.

- **Government offices (not at the border) and the internet (e.g., websites, trade portal) are the most used sources for traders to find additional details of announced changes.** Enquiry points at the border are rarely used (1% for both genders). 18% of men use trade/industry associations to check details, while only 4% of women do.

- **Only about 10% of women and men freight forwarders respectively do not find information on official regulations and procedures to be easily available.** Both women and men freight forwarders hear about changes to official regulation from similar sources, including government gazette/email (about 40%), trade/industry associations (about 38-40%), and officials at border (30% of women and 25% of men). No freight forwarder reportedly uses enquiry points at the border to check for details on changes.

¹⁹ It should be noted that the number of female and male firms under each HS group was not large enough to determine statistical significance based on type of exported goods.

v. The National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC) and membership in trade/industry associations

National Trade Facilitation Committees (NTFC) are important platforms for institutional coordination and stakeholders' consultation with balanced private and public sector participation. NTFCs enable the planning and implementation of successful trade facilitation reforms and can serve as an important entity for the government in increasing transparency and information-sharing around trade.

Related survey findings:

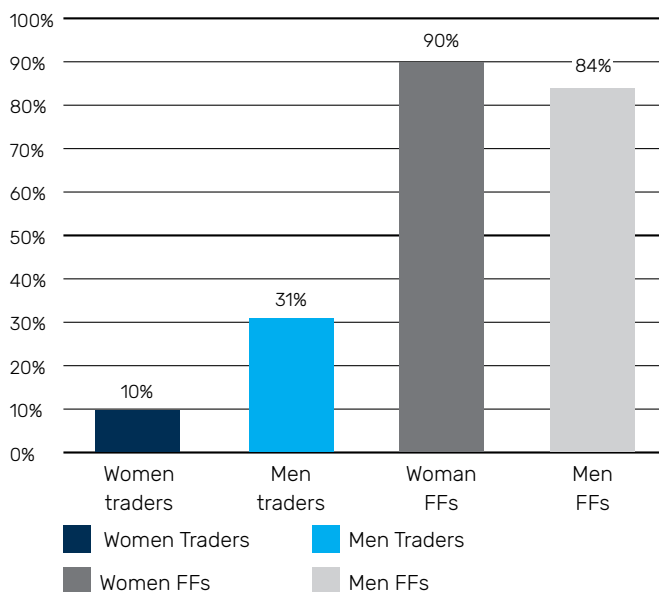
- **An overwhelming majority of both men and women traders are not aware of the existence of the Fiji NTFC** (98% of women, 93% of men). In terms of freight forwarders, 30% of female and 63% of male freight forwarders report that they do not know about the NTFC. Only one trader who knows about the NTFC's existence also knows whether the Committee has any female members.

Figure 8. Awareness of NTFC's Existence



- **Only 31% of men and 10% of women are members of a trade or industry association.** In contrast, 84% of men and 90% of women freight forwarders are members of industry associations. While private sector NTFC members can be expected to share information to their respective industry groups, the 90% of women traders who are not members of a trade or industry association would most likely miss out on accessing this information.

Figure 9. Membership in Industry/Trade Associations



vi. Consultation mechanisms

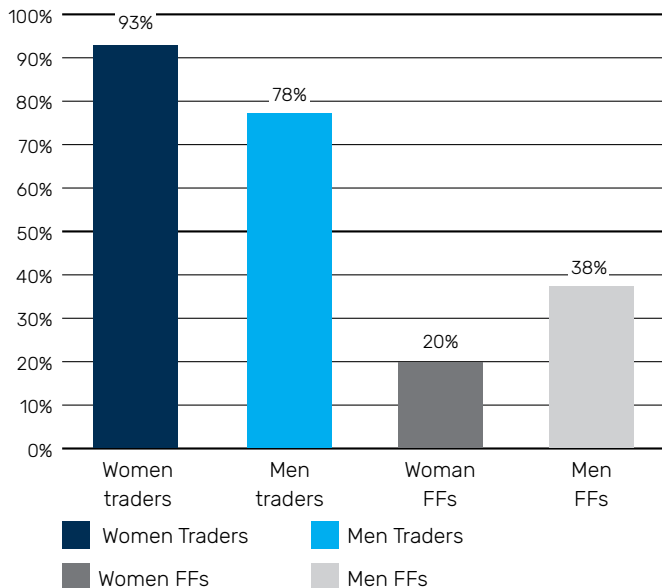
Involving the business community in regular consultations around proposed changes to official processes and procedures increases the transparency of the changes and increases the likelihood of readiness and compliance on implementation.

Related survey findings:

- **Over 90% of women and almost 80% of men say they are not, or do not know, if their business is regularly consulted on changes to official trade processes and procedures.** The survey results show that 42% of female traders that are members of a trade/industry association are regularly consulted (by any entity and not just the associations of which they are members), while only 3% of female non-member traders are regularly consulted. Similarly, men traders that are members of associations are regularly consulted more often than non-members.

- Freight forwarders feel to a stronger degree than traders that they are regularly consulted on changes to processes and procedures. Industry associations are identified as the main mechanism through which freight forwarders are consulted on changes to official trade processes and procedures.

Figure 10. Lack of Regular Consultations



■ **Around 40% of men and women traders respectively believe that the feedback provided through consultations is taken into consideration by the government.** About half of respondents, however, are not sure while just over 10% of men and women believe their feedback is not taken into consideration.

■ **The majority of freight forwarders believe their feedback is taken into consideration.** More men (80%) compared to women (63%), however, believe that feedback was taken into consideration.

vii. Authorized Economic Operations

The Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) scheme is an internationally recognised accreditation that indicates that a company’s role in the supply chain is secure and reliable, and that any Customs controls and procedures are efficient and compliant. According to the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service, benefits for AEO members include measures to expedite cargo release, reduce transit time and lower storage costs, providing access to information of value to AEO participants, special measures relating to periods of trade disruption or elevated threat level and first consideration for participation in any cargo processing programs.²⁰

²⁰ <https://www.frccs.org.fj/news/2018-2/revenue-customs-launched-aeo-pilot-programme/>

²¹ The pilot AEO program commenced on June 1, 2018, with an official launch of the full-fledged AEO program on January 26, 2019.

Related survey finding:

■ **There are seven Authorized Economic Operators (AEO) in Fiji; all are large, male-owned firms.**²¹ Two AEO firms participated in the survey, yet 10% of the male respondents and 2% of the female responded affirmatively to being AEO certified (there could be some confusion with the Fiji Gold Card scheme). Large firms may have an advantage over smaller firms to becoming AEOs due to the technical and financial requirements the certification requires. More than half of both men and women traders do not know whether they are AEO certified.

viii. Pre-declaration of goods

Pre-declaration of goods allows traders to notify border authorities of future arrival of goods and enables traders to save time if done correctly.

Related survey finding:

■ **Pre-declaration of goods is more frequent among male traders of all firm sizes than among women traders.** 64% of women and 85% of men traders pre-declare shipments to some varying degree (25% of the time, 50% of the time, or 100% of the time). 27% of female small and micro firm do not pre-declare at all because of a perception that Customs does not allow it. 9% of women firms know they can pre-declare in principle but do not pre-declare. 40% of these respondents claim to be missing the required documents to pre-declare, and 60% reportedly do not see any benefits in pre-declaring. There appears to be some correlation between the traders that do not pre-declare or presume they cannot pre-declare and those that find official regulations difficult to understand.

ix. Electronic payments

The ability to pay official fees electronically can release the trader from the logistic burden of making cash available and ensuring the secure transport of the cash. Cash payments may provide an enabling environment for corruption, as they require a face-to-face encounter between the trader/broker and Customs, making it difficult to differentiate between cash payments for duty collection or cash payments for “facilitation fees.”

Related survey findings:

■ **Only 16% of men and 15% women traders in Fiji report that fees can be paid electronically all the time.** About one-third say fees can be paid electronically half the time and about another one-third of both men and women say they cannot



“Trade facilitation is important for female traders. Promoting gender equality is key for implementing reforms to increase private investment.”

Mere Samisoni,

Owner of Hot Bread Kitchen,

<https://www.facebook.com/hotbreadkitchenfiji/>

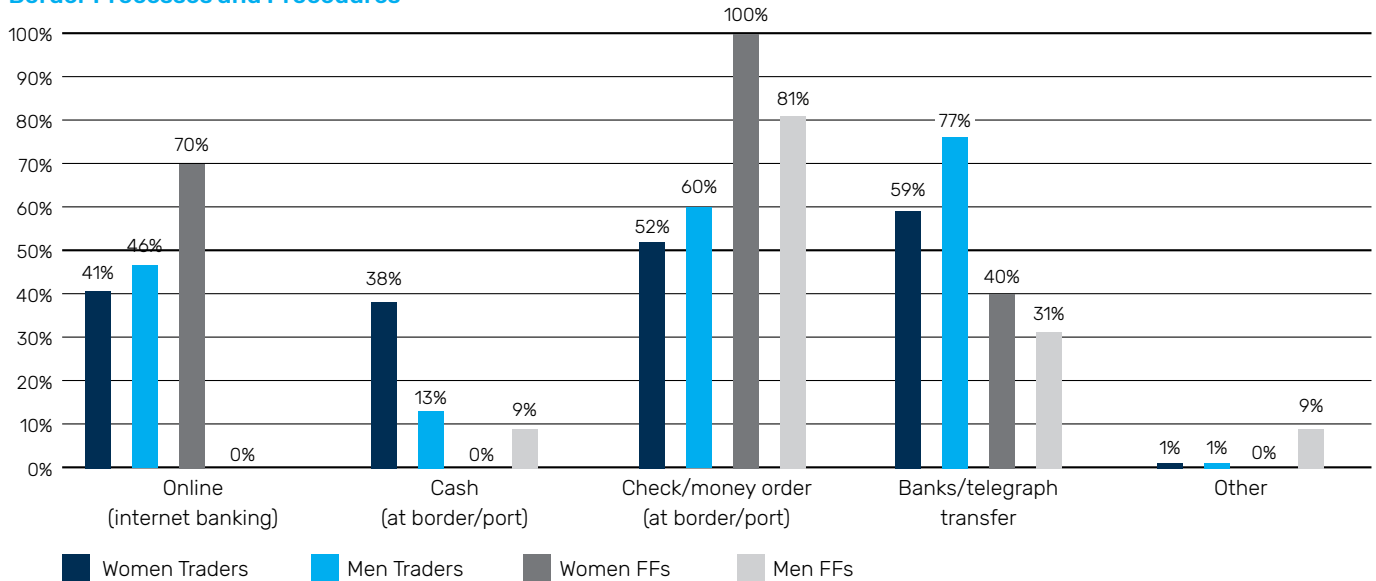
Mere Samisoni and staff at Hot Bread Kitchen.

pay electronically. The most frequently used methods of payment for both men and women traders are bank/telegraph transfer and check/money order at the border.

■ **While 38% of women traders also reportedly pay fees by cash, only 13% of men do the same.** Smaller firms tend to pay by cash more often, while larger firms pay electronically, by check or via banks/tele transfer.

■ **About half of both women and men freight forwarders reportedly have goods seized or detained 25% of the time.** Half of women freight forwarders and 38% of men have never had goods seized or detained. Freight forwarders reporting seizures or detention cite Customs (60% of women and 58% of men) and Quarantine (20% of women and 32% of men) to be the agencies holding up their goods.

Figure 11. Method of Paying Official Fees for Border Processes and Procedures



■ **A larger share of men than women freight forwarders pay fees electronically all the time.** When adding the shares of respondents that pay electronically half the time and all the time, the share by women and men freight forwarders are relatively equal. Three male freight forwarders pay official fees by cash at the border/port, while no women pay by cash. Freight forwarders most frequently use the same payment methods as the traders.

Almost 100% of all traders and freight forwarders reportedly receive receipts for all fees and charges that are paid.

x. Detention of goods

Related survey findings:

■ **While a significant majority of traders in Fiji reportedly have never had their goods seized or detained (90% of women and 86% of men), about 10% of women and 13% of men traders have had goods seized or detained up to 25% of the time.**

xi. Official grievance procedures

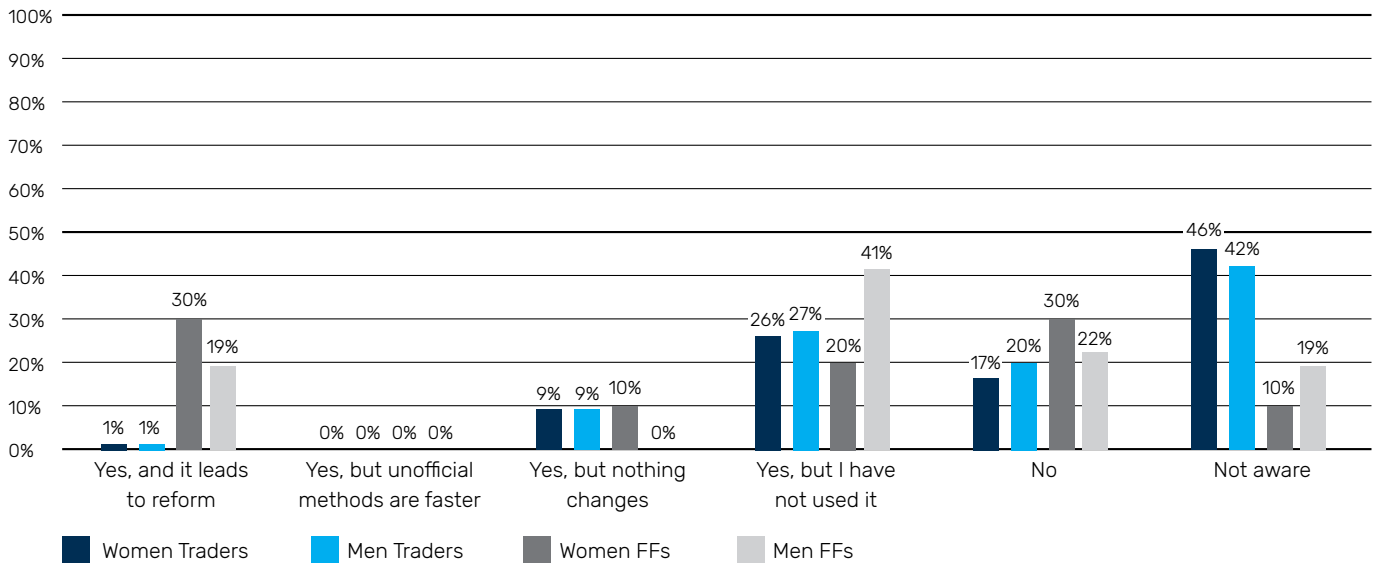
The existence of official grievance procedures ensures that traders have a mechanism through which they can appeal against Customs or other border agencies' decision.

Related survey findings:

■ **Almost half of all traders do not know if formal grievance procedures exist; 17% of women and 20% of men traders do not think they exist.** About 9% of both men and women respectively know formal grievance procedures exist, but do not believe these procedures change anything.

■ **While only 1% of traders believe the formal procedures result in changes, freight forwarders have slightly more faith in these procedures; 30% of women and 19% of men freight forwarders believe they lead to change.**

Figure 12. Traders' and Freight Forwarders' Awareness of the Existence of Official Grievance Procedures



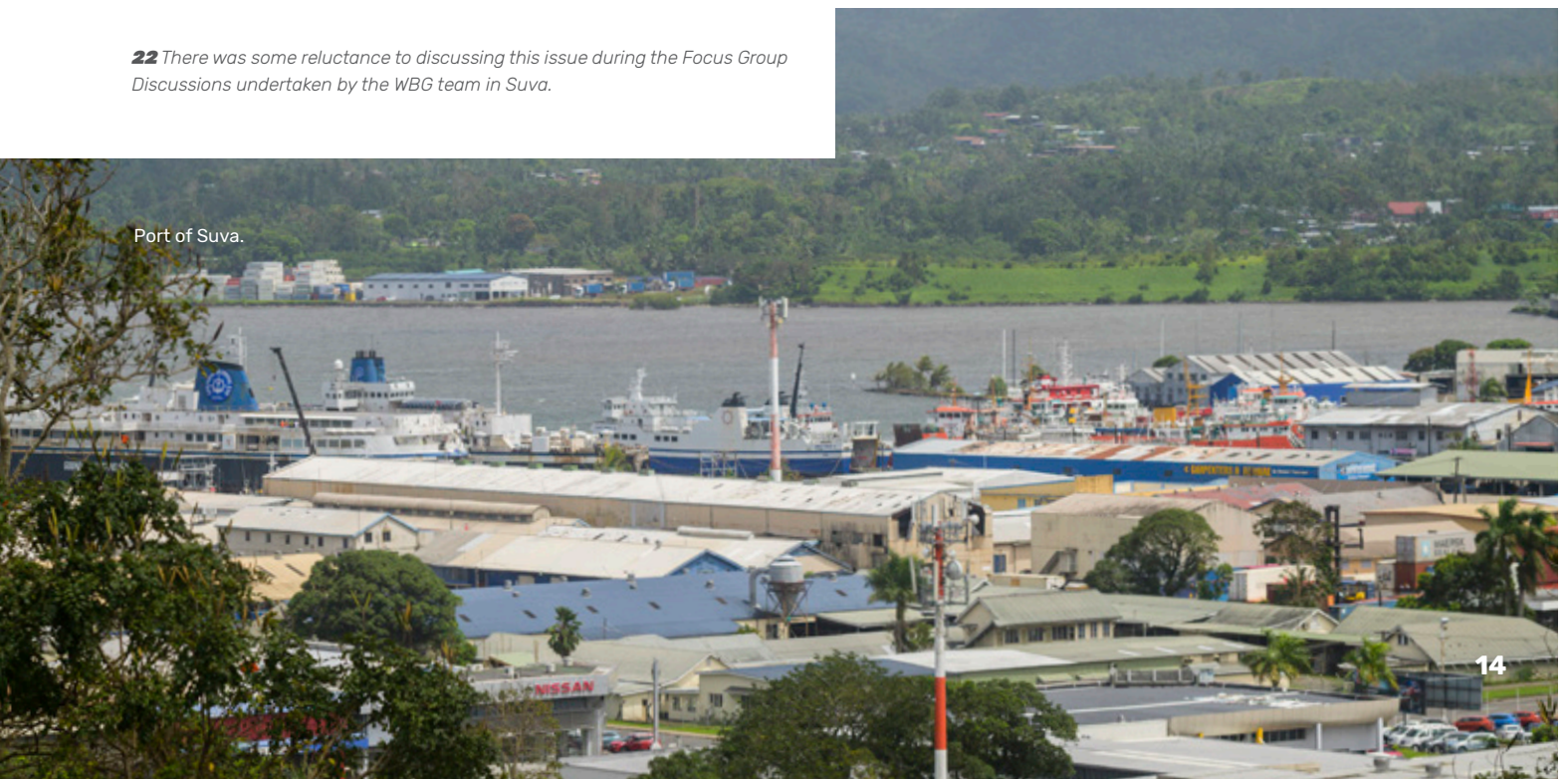
Other findings

■ **Over 90% of both men and women respondents (traders and freight forwarders) report that they have never paid speed money/bribes in the last year to facilitate processing of shipments.** About 1% of traders and 3% of freight forwarders pay up to half the time or less. Less than 1% of both men and women traders respectively declined to answer this question.²²

■ **All the trader interviewees, regardless of gender, that physically go to the borders feel safe in Fiji.** The majority of freight forwarders going to the border also feel safe. There is reportedly very few concerns of intimidation, verbal or physical harassment at the borders.

²² There was some reluctance to discussing this issue during the Focus Group Discussions undertaken by the WBG team in Suva.

Port of Suva.





Anabel Ali, Fiji Fish Marketing

4 Recommendations based on survey responses

The survey results demonstrate that there are opportunities to improve private sector confidence in the government's trade facilitation efforts. For example, improvements can be made to tackle the perceived lack of consistency in implementation of border process and procedures, the difficulty in understanding and finding information on border processes and procedures, and the inadequate formal grievance processes and consultation processes on changes that affect traders and freight forwarders.

The following recommendations can help address the most pressing issues identified from this survey:

1. Improve access to and the quality of information on border related processes and procedures. The surveys highlight that access to information is a key obstacle to both men and women traders and, to some degree also, freight forwarders. It also shows that more women than men find official rules and regulations difficult to understand. Several actions can be taken to mitigate this problem:

(i) Address the information asymmetry that women face by providing select activities (e.g., workshops, consultations, training, publications, helplines) on official regulations that are convenient to attend and specifically targeted at smaller, women-led firms, both during regular work hours and online. The benefits of participating in such activities must be communicated clearly as they are likely to compete with the other time commitments and responsibilities that traders might have.

(ii) Information dissemination through a wider range of media could enhance the reach to women traders and freight forwarders even more. Increasing content regarding changes to rules and regulations, as well as the details of them, not only on the front page of the Fiji Revenue & customs Service (FRCS) website, but also on websites of other border agencies, could be beneficial. Dissemination efforts should to the extent possible also target the private sector beyond respective industry associations.

(iii) Ensure that the language in all publicly available material, including processes and procedures, in particular, are clearly written, in layman's terms, and easy to understand. Dedicate an entity (e.g., communications team, NTFC Secretariat, etc.) to review the language before publishing.

(iv) Work with trade/industry associations to increase participation in these entities as a means for women

traders, in particular, to access up-to-date information and build networks. An important and expected finding of the survey is that trade associations are male-dominated. Having a greater representation of women in these associations is ideal, however, given the fact that there are more male traders than female traders, these trade associations might always be male-dominated by default. This could still raise barriers for women in terms of being influential or active in these trade associations. A follow-on recommendation to adding more women members to trade/industry associations is the creation of women-only clubs or associations that complement their membership in these trade associations.

(v) Make consultations processes more inclusive and regular by strategically targeting different sized firms and sectors. It is critical that a wider set of traders, including women, is reached through a variety of communication channels.

(vi) Demonstrate how the government takes feedback from the private sector into consideration by arranging meaningful two-way communication and disclosing minutes/comments from such interactions through official sources.

2. Strengthen the role of the National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC) and traders' knowledge of and participation in the Committee. A large majority of traders and, to a less extent, freight forwarders are not aware of the NTFC's existence, resulting in a weaker Committee and a less inclusive platform for dialogue. Suggested actions by the NTFC could include:

(i) Implementation of a strategic communications campaign both to **(i)** highlight the role of the Committee as an important national public-private platform for all traders and **(ii)** formalize the role of the NTFC in helping to increase access to and the quality of information related to trade.

(ii) In promoting the existence of the NTFC, it may be beneficial to promote more female representation in the NTFC to reflect that women freight forwarders' and traders' views are considered by the NTFC.

(iii) Consideration to include representatives of the Ministry for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation in the NTFC to ensure that measures taken to facilitate trade are in line with Fiji's commitment to gender equality as mainstreamed in the National Development Plan 2017-2036 and the Women's Plan of Action 2010-2019.

(iv) Since the NTFC is expected to facilitate “stakeholders’ consultation with balanced private and public sector participation,”²³ increased dissemination efforts on the NTFC’s existence to the broader trade community, including women traders, by the government could be beneficial to coordinate and gain support for trade reforms.

3. Strengthen formal grievance procedures. The survey highlights that traders have a lack of knowledge of and confidence in the existing formal grievance procedures. It is imperative that the government is responsive to the concerns of the private sector and make the procedures widely known to all traders, including women traders in particular.

4. Promote pre-declaration practises. Given the relatively low percentage of traders, in particular women traders, that either pre-declare or know whether they can pre-declare, it would be beneficial for the Government of Fiji to improve communication around pre-declaration practises – including by making requirements clearer and information more accessible.

5. Expand the Authorized Economic Operator scheme, including to women traders. The government could enhance communication about the program and AEO qualification requirements. In this, the government could consider outreach to women traders to present and gather their feedback on the AEO criteria, and to identify barriers to participation. Relevant economic operators and women, in particular, should be encouraged to join the scheme.

6. Explore reasons for detention and seizure of goods.

Roughly 10% of women and 13% of men traders have had their goods seized or detained up to 25% of the time. Traders reporting seizures or detention cite Customs (50% of women, 71% of men) and Quarantine (46% of women, 18% of men) to be the agencies holding up their goods. Freight forwarders that have had their consignments detained or seized also cite Customs and Quarantine as the main reason for hold up. The government should explore why these two agencies hold up goods and determine measures to address this if seizures are not valid.

7. Strengthen the system for on-line payment and encourage traders to pay on-line.

Only 15% of men and women traders in Fiji report that fees can be paid online all the time. Improving online payments will not just save time for the traders, it also allows officials at the border to focus more closely on enforcement issues, minimizing fraudulent behaviour. Improving online payments would also be in line with the WBG’s TFA gap assessment recommendations in Fiji.

²³ UNCTAD, *Trade Facilitation Committees around The World*. Accessed 26 September 2019.



Litia Marie Kirwin and staff at Loving Islands.



City of Suva.

Annex 1

Methodology

Questionnaire

Feedback from Focus Group Discussions in Malawi, Zambia, Fiji and Vietnam with female and male traders, and meetings with government stakeholders, civil society organizations and private sectors representatives helped the team in developing the survey questionnaire. The trader survey that was piloted in Fiji contains 56 questions, and is largely focused on areas related to the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, including, but not limited to access to information, electronic payments, seizure of goods, pre-declaration, Authorized Economic Operators and the National Trade Facilitation Committee. A simplified questionnaire (with 46 questions) is used for freight forwarders.

Master List

A master list of trading firms was created for the survey based on the complete list of active traders in 2018 that was provided by the Government of Fiji. Any individuals importing/exporting, NGOs and diplomats were removed from the list. The list provided included details of products that the respective firms were trading (by the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System (HS) Code), address of firm and names of the firms' directors.

The master list of traders contained a total of 4,700 firms of which 484 firms were considered to be "female" based on official enterprise registration records provided by FRCS. Separately, there are 1,330 firms that have women as shareholders (though the details/percentage of shares is unknown).

All 42 formally operating freight forwarders in Fiji were interviewed.²⁴ Of these, 32 were men and 10 were women representatives of firms. Data on traders and freight forwarders was provided by FRCS.

Sampling Strategy

Quota sampling was used for the survey in Fiji, ensuring that a variety of responses were collected across different firm sizes and industries for both female and male traders.

The sampling criteria for the survey included firms of any size engaged in cross-border trade (import and/or export) by Harmonized System (HS). The code list categories comprised of HS Sections:

- 1-4: animal, vegetable products, beverages, tobacco
- 5-10: mineral, chemicals, rubber, leather, wood, paper products
- 11-12: textile, footwear
- 13-15: stone, glass, precious stones, metals
- 16-21: machinery, transport equipment, medical instruments, ammunitions, artwork,

Table 2 shows the target sampling quotas for traders that was set based on the universe of traders in Fiji.

Table 2: Target sampling quota in Fiji

	Female	Male
Quotas by Establishment Size		
Large (100 or more)	63	63
Medium (20-99)	63	63
Small (5-19)	63	63
Micro (<5)	63	63
Quotas by Industry		
HS Section 1-4	50	50
HS Section 5-10	50	50
HS Section 11-12	50	50
HS Section 13-15	50	50
HS Section 16-21	50	50

²⁴ The 42 freight forwarders are located in Suva (22 firms), Nadi (12 firms), Lautoka (7 firms) as well as Rotuma (1 firm). Of the 42 freight forwarders, 12 of them are branch locations. In the freight forwarders survey each freight forwarders' experience is treated as unique, and all 42 responses are included in the analysis.

The enumerators were given lists of firms separated by gender and called from the top of the list to find owners/managers who were willing to participate in the survey. When rejected, enumerators moved to the next entry on their lists. In order to meet the quota, some large firms were intentionally targeted for interviews.

A total of 2,170 firms were contacted by phone for interviews to fill the sampling quotas. Of them, 529 firms were successfully interviewed (279 male and 250 female owned or managed firms). Interviews were conducted in English by telephone. There were five interview refusals and 1,636 wrong phone numbers, no call answers, or transfers that were unsuccessful. **Table 1** provides a breakdown of trader interviewees by gender, size and HS codes of firm.²⁵

All 42 freight forwarders in Fiji were contacted and interviewed. **Table 3** presents the breakdown of the freight forwarders by gender, firm size and the main commodity group traded.²⁶

Table 3: Breakdown of freight forwarder interviewees

Section (import)*	Women					Men					TOTAL
	Micro (1-5)	Small (6-19)	Medium (20-99)	Large (100+)	Sub-total	Micro (1-5)	Small (6-19)	Medium (20-99)	Large (100+)	Sub-total	
1-4 (agriculture)	0	0	1	0	1	1	2	2	1	6	7
5-10 (minerals)	0	4	0	1	5	2	4	5	2	13	18
11-12 (textile)	0	0	1	1	2	1	0	1	0	2	4
13-15 (stones)	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	2	3
16-21 (machinery)	0	0	0	1	1	2	0	1	2	5	6
N/A**	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	4	4
Sub-total	0	4	3	3	10	6	8	11	7	32	42

* Except for the transshippers, all firms are involved in import services but not necessarily export services. Thus, this breakdown of firms by HS Section groups is based only on the main commodity group each freight forwarder reports that he/she imports.

**N/A denotes the firms that are only involved in transshipment.

²⁵ Traders were asked to select only one main commodity group in which they import and/or export. The values in the table are derived by tallying the number of respondents that selected each of the five main commodity groups respectively. Because more traders import rather than export, the table reflects primarily the main commodity groups that respondents say they import. A small portion of the table reflects the main commodity groups selected by traders that say they only export.

²⁶ There are four male firms that are engaged in transshipment only and not engaged in import or export related services. These firm responses are not included in the analysis of release times since transshipped goods generally do not exit ports or border posts.



Vinaka
Peni Mo
Managing Director

Maria Moi, Ben's Trading Limited,
exporter of agricultural products.

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