



Evaluating alternative approaches to sector development in Pacific Island countries: a Fiji case study

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Background

An upcoming project will build on the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) Pacific Agribusiness Research in Development Initiative projects, that generated agribusiness tools, knowledge and training for various enterprises, including tilapia aquaculture.

Tilapia farming and beekeeping are important income-generating activities for smallholder farmers in Fiji and other Pacific Island countries that have unrealised potential to grow and develop into innovative high-value agribusiness industries that are inclusive and contribute significantly to local livelihoods. A key focus is evaluating gender roles in agribusiness activities supporting enterprises, value chains, farmer organisations, and collaborations. Enhancing representation and inclusivity in these roles can be vital for sustainable development.

This new ACIAR research project will support the transitioning of these sectors in Fiji through market-oriented development and sector strengthening by: 1) supporting farmer organisations to become effective agents of industry progress; 2) driving and facilitating sector development; and 3) attaining stronger financial and operational stability post-donor funding. A recent report on the gender analysis of women in Fiji's tilapia farming sector found that women significantly contribute to aquaculture across different tilapia farm types. Additionally, women involved in collective groups, managed by larger women's organisations or family units, gain empowerment and a collective voice, enhancing their influence within their sector.

Despite women's significant contributions to tilapia farming, they are often excluded from training programmes because they lack advocates in aquaculture gender issues (SPC 2018; Waqairatu-Waqainabete and Kaumaitotoya 2021). The project's goal is to strengthen farmer organisations by creating an inclusive and sustainable theory of change, and a monitoring, evaluation, and learning framework through collaboration with partners. It emphasises gender and social inclusion values and approaches in its development.

The project also seeks to grow and strengthen partnerships between key industry and government departments for continued industry growth through three development pathways.

Profitable beekeeping and tilapia businesses:

This pathway aims to achieve profitable and inclusive beekeeping and tilapia businesses serving diverse consumer markets through market-driven demonstration chains, product development, agribusiness mentoring, and group learning activities.

What are the most effective strategies for Fiji's beekeeping and tilapia industries to stimulate domestic demand and sales by aligning with the preferences of local consumers?

Development of farmer organisations:

The project focuses on establishing viable and sustainable farmer organisations that play a pivotal role in driving industry growth and development, both during and after the project's duration.

What are the most effective approaches for farmer organisations in Fiji to enhance outcomes for their members and improve their financial and operational capacity?

Optimising collaborative partnerships:

By optimising collaborations between industry stakeholders and government agencies, the project seeks to promote innovation, knowledge sharing, inclusivity and economic growth within Fiji's agricultural sector.

What are the most effective strategies for optimising collaborative partnerships within the industry to drive innovation, knowledge sharing, and economic growth in Fiji's agricultural sector?

It is clear that a holistic and inclusive approach to sustainable agribusiness and sector development requires comprehensive and meaningful gender research and development activities.

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Theory of change

The project team have developed a theory of change, a methodology for planning, participation, adaptive management, and evaluation used to promote social change with a shared vision. Our project's theory of change is the belief that empowering farmers, their enterprises, farmer organisations, and relevant stakeholders to work toward a common vision, will yield enduring agribusiness impacts. We recognise that strategic investments in research, development, capacity building, and relationships built on trust, can lead to positive outcomes in the agricultural sector, encompassing farmers, value chains, public-private partnerships, policy, and sector development.

To realise these goals, the theory of change places an emphasis on enhancing the collective capabilities of the private sector, farmer organisations, government agencies, and importantly, mechanisms for these groups to work in partnership towards a shared end goal and vision. This industry-driven, agribusiness research for development approach aims to achieve tangible changes that contribute to sustainable sector growth.

Key research outputs

The key research outputs encompass a range of areas vital for enterprise development and industry growth. These outputs include research that serves as a foundation for informed enterprise decision-making, aiding investments, product development, and sales strategies. Additionally, tools tailored for agribusiness, specifically designed to bolster productivity and profitability, aim to support beekeepers and tilapia farmers. Capacity-building initiatives form a significant part of the outputs, targeting enterprises to enhance their efficiency and profitability through standardised technical training programmes. Furthermore, efforts are directed towards

empowering farmer organisations by offering workshops on governance, grant-writing, income generation, and collaboration skills. Another pivotal focus lies in fortifying industry–government relationships within the apiculture and tilapia aquaculture sectors, achieved through the establishment of consultation committees and professional collaborations aimed at strengthening government extension officers' capabilities for industry development.

We hope to better understand and see impacts such as:

- 1 Strengthened beekeeping and tilapia enterprises.
- 2 Fit-for-purpose product development, commercial evaluation and demonstration chains.
- 3 Collaborative programmes with industry and emerging retail opportunities to understand economic viability and opportunities.
- 4 Unique selling points that are aligned with emerging market opportunities and the associated channels of engagement.
- 5 Industry baselines (farmers motivations, value chain and product profitability analysis, consumer preferences and association members evaluations).
- 6 Effective training, workshops, and peer-peer mentoring programmes to build farmer organisations' capacity.
- 7 Industry relationships and dynamics, knowledge sharing, partnerships and successful collaboration.
- 8 Coordinating and facilitating industry stakeholder capacity building activities.
- 9 Australia–Fiji industry stakeholder collaborations for industry development.

Some of the participants of the Project Development Workshop, Canberra (ACIAR), July 2023.



Key partners

Key partners include Fiji's Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Fisheries; Fiji Beekeepers Association; Fiji's Tilapia Farmers Association; Australia's Southern Cross University and University of Adelaide; Pacific Island Farmers Organisation Network; the Pacific Community; and the ACIAR (funding organisation), over a period of four years, starting in 2024.

References

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- Waqairatu-Waqainabete S. and Kaumaitotoya L. 2021. Women and the business of aquaculture: A case for women tilapia farmers in Fiji. SPC Women in Fisheries Information Bulletin 34:4–8. <https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/cpyik>

Project Development Workshop, Canberra (ACIAR), July 2023. Team photo (from left back) Dr Cooper Schouten (Southern Cross University, SCU), Theo Simos (University of Adelaide, UoA), Imraz Ali (Fiji Beekeepers Association, FBA), Mustaq Khan (FBA), Avinesh Dayal (Ministry of Agriculture, MoA), Dr Alok Kalla (Ministry of Fisheries, online), Asween Kumar (MoA), Laisiasa Cavakiqali (Tilapia Farmers Association, TFA), David Shearer (ACIAR), Craig Johns (UoA); (from left front) Katarina Senabu (TFA), Anneliese Austin (SCU), Dr Emily Grace (SCU), Salote Waqairatu (Pacific Island Farmers Organisation Network) and Jiosese Vodowaqvuka (TFA).

