



15th SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting
20–24 March 2023



Original: English/

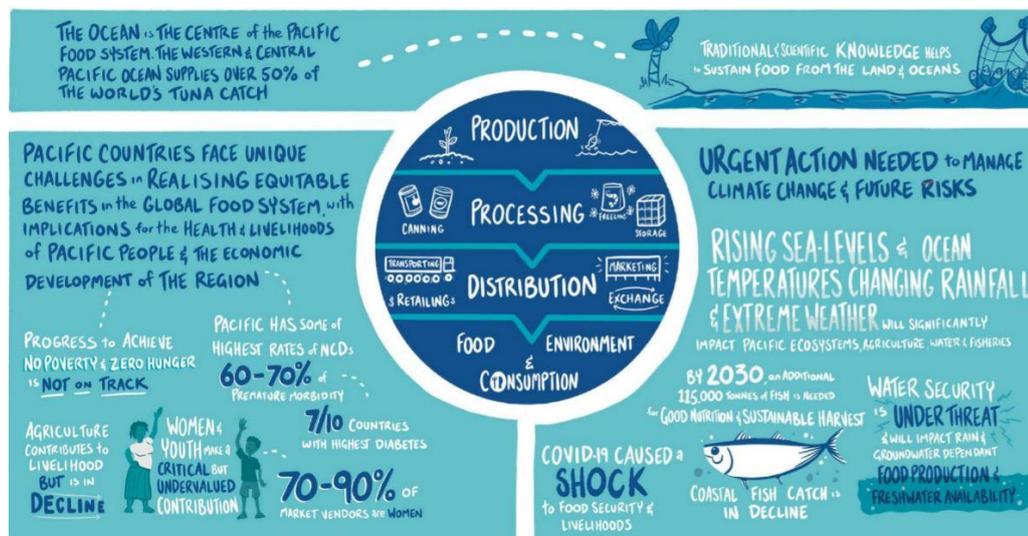
Information Paper 5

Update of SPC Flagship Food Systems Programme

Food Systems Programme, The Pacific Community

Purpose

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide an update by way of a summary account of the developments to date regarding SPC's Food Systems flagship. Providing an update to Heads of Fisheries is important as the marine and fisheries sectors are key stakeholders in food systems. This is also an opportunity to both (i) provide an update on key global, regional and internal developments; and to (ii) garner support on integrated approaches to support member countries to address food systems challenges and opportunities that falls in the ambits of marine and fisheries sectors.



Background

2. Within the global food system, the Pacific has a unique position. Unique in that 50 – 70 percent of our people are dependent on the land and ocean resources for the livelihoods. We recognise that over 50% of the global tuna catch comes from our region's sustainably managed tuna fisheries; and in terms of crop diversity, the Pacific Community's Centre for Pacific Crops and Trees (CePACT), houses over 2,000 varieties of the region's staple crops taro, yam, sweet potato, banana, cassava, and breadfruit. The taro collection is particularly unique, being the largest collection of taro diversity globally – over 1,000 varieties.
3. Yet, despite the proximity and access to land and sea (both central to Pacific diets and culture), the region faces high levels of disease, premature disability, and death. The latter is particularly linked to two forms of malnutrition - over-nutrition and under-nutrition. Non-Communicable diseases (NCDs) account for around 70-75 percent of all deaths in the region¹. These problems

¹ Source: World Health Organisation (WHO)

are linked to challenges in maintaining adequate and effective food systems that ensure the availability of sufficient, safe, and nutritious food for everyone.

4. In addition to the health crisis, the biggest threat by far to the region is climate change. Changes to the frequency and impact of climate hazards such as cyclones, floods, droughts, and storm surges have long-term impacts on food production. In the case of fisheries, climate change has seen increased sea temperatures and current flows, which will bring shifts in the distribution of marine fish stocks, with some areas benefiting while others lose out. To minimise and manage further losses, and in line with resilient and food systems principles, there is a need to re-organise and promote shorter supply chains.
5. Doing this means that great attention needs to be given to biodiversity. It plays a critical role in ensuring sustainable food security required to achieve nutritional outcomes and in many areas of the Pacific, agricultural and food systems are being rapidly degraded, and their biodiversity lost. There is the breakdown of traditional shifting agro-forestry systems and poor agricultural practices that impact coastal ecosystems & environments and fisheries resources.
6. In addition to environmental factors above, there are also several socioeconomic and political factors that further undermine Pacific food security and impacts the broader food system. These include: increasing populations in some countries; land tenure and land access issues and for fisheries, fishing grounds and rights; and labour and mobility. The smorgasbord of issues and linkages across sectors demonstrates the complexity of a food system. All this point to the Pacific's food security and food systems being under threat and that this will have more drastic impacts on our region if not addressed now, and in a holistic and integrated fashion.

The interface of blue and aquatic foods

7. Much of the advocacy, and background work in bringing together food systems has been taking place the last 2+ years (since 2019). Then 2021 saw a culmination of “big ticket items” at national, regional, and global levels, that brought together food systems, and the diverse stakeholders and sectors and disciplines. This includes the national and regional dialogues that culminated in the UN Food Systems Summit. This has catalysed momentum and commitment to applying a food systems approach to bring together sectors and different areas of expertise, that has propelled food systems as a Key Focus Area in the SPC Strategic Plan 2022-2031, and the creation of a dedicated food systems flagship² programme within SPC.
8. As part of this work, SPC is now developing a Theory of Change for Food Systems. This will further elaborate on the Strategic Plan to identify ways the programme will work to promote change for greatest returns and results. The Theory of Change will clearly define SPC's long-term goals and then maps backward to identify necessary preconditions will support national pathways and contribute to the achievement of regional policy frameworks and the 2030 agenda, the SPC strategic plan and the *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent*, while advocating for large ocean states in global food systems conversations.

² Flagship: in SPC this is in reference to an integrated programming and one with scale and resourcing to support holistic outcomes where all SPC programmes can contribute to.

9. SPC continues to build the evidence base and had commissioned a rapid regional analysis of national pathways (prepared in lead up to the UN Food Systems Summit, UNFSS). This allowed SPC to build a regional understanding of where members' national priorities align and diverge, to encourage development partners and other actors to channel food systems support. Of note what that only 6 of the 12 National Food Systems pathways prepared by PICTs included fisheries and blue foods as priorities. Of those that did address this, actions included opening new fishing environments both near (coastal) and offshore, diversifying blue food products, drawing upon traditional fisher ecological knowledge, and blue food financing and policies were key actions. Ensuring a more prominent place in food systems for oceans and fisheries is vital to ensure that both blue and green aspects of food systems were addressed.³
10. Complementary to this (and ongoing) is the collaboration with the University of Wollongong (UOW). The UOW and SPC have developed and continue to improve a range of regional Food Systems Databases including the Pacific Nutrient Database - a tool to facilitate the analysis of poverty, nutrition, and food security in the Pacific region; the Pacific Food Trade Database - which provides an evidence-based for food policy analysis and interpretation of trade flows among countries since 1995, and will be publicly available on the Pacific Data Hub in Quarter 2 2023; and the Pacific Food Consumption Database, which includes consumption estimates across all foods included in Household Income and Expenditure Surveys for 12 PICs. Captured in these databases are estimates of imports and exports for 18 PICTs and consumption estimates for 12 PICs, including nutrient composition of fish and other seafood. The UOW and SPC have further collaborated on identifying opportunities for strengthening regional and national food system governance, as well as on new approaches to food system analysis such as the recent national assessment of the Solomon Islands food system with FAO. Significant research on improving local food environments, including seafood acquisition and consumption, has conducted through this partnership, will progress through continued partnership.
11. Post the Food Summit, SPC on behalf of our members joined the Aquatic/Blue Foods Coalition of the UNFSS. This is the platform to raise international awareness about the under-recognised contributions of the Pacific region to global food systems, and of aquatic/blue foods to food systems solutions. It is a great opportunity to elevate Pacific voices calling for urgent action to address key challenges at the food – oceans – climate nexus; and to leverage support and cooperation for Pacific projects and opportunities to accelerate implementation of sustainable blue food priority objectives of members. As it currently stands, SPC has been invited to co-chair and this is being considered. It is also very important that there is Pacific country representation/participation in the Coalition and encourage Fisheries contacts to be engaged so that the region and our issues are on the global agenda at and through various platforms like the Coalition (meetings).
12. Last week was the Pacific Week of Agriculture⁴ (PWA) which included the Heads of Agriculture & Forestry, and Ministers of Agriculture and Forestry Meetings. A side event on Food Systems organised by SPC and Government of Australia partners was held and well attended. Key topical

³ https://www.spc.int/sites/default/files/resources/2022-04/EVIDENCE_BRIEF_UNFSS_V3_eVersion.pdf

⁴ The first 3 days of the PWA were series of side events.

issues on coastal food systems and blue foods came across strongly, and the governance aspects of cross sectoral/cross Ministerial engagement.

13. As the Pacific's own scientific and technical organisation, SPC brings research and expertise in competence across many elements of the food system, both Blue (from oceans and water) and Green (from public health and NCDs, agriculture and land resources, water, fisheries science, and statistics). Further, the access to line Ministries and Ministerial and/or Heads of Ministry Meetings like HOAFS, is an asset to build on so that integrated programming in Food Systems and other areas are explored and discussed with key decision makers and other stakeholders, placing ownership and accountability at the heart of such deliberations.

Conclusion

14. Marine ecosystems and fisheries are at the centre of Pacific Food Systems, and fundamental for the health and prosperity of Pacific peoples and nations. Our challenge is to harness the still-untapped potential of locally grown, sourced, and value-added blue and aquatic foods to meet nutrition needs, support economic development and maintain the health of blue ecosystems.