

## **FINAL: Fiji's PWA Closing Statement**

Bula vinaka fellow Ministers and colleagues,

Thank you SPC, FAO and ACIAR for your support in collaborating with the Ministries of Agriculture and Forestry of Fiji to make our Pacific Week for Agriculture and Forestry happen. A BIG Vinaka Vakalevu to all you regional Ministers and your Permanent Secretaries for making the journey to Fiji, especially with the Category 5 Tropical Cyclone Kevin in the vicinity, and on Saturday!

We pray for Vanuatu that had to withstand the brunt of TWO Tropical Cyclones in extremely quick succession last week. The effects of climate change are certainly felt by all of us these days, and Resource Security is taking on new paradigm dimension redefined by pandemics like COVID-19.

The need to work together, to grow together, to transform Agriculture and Forestry, is greater now more than ever! Using science and technology to develop circular green economies is needed and the various side-events highlighted many of our issues and different ways to address them.

Climate change is the result of carbon emissions from burning fossil fuels which is exacerbated by deforestation. That's a double blow as these fossils are actually fossil forests! Hence, the recovery of our forest carbon sinks and forest biodiversity is absolutely vital in the reversal of adverse climate change effects and biodiversity loss. Recovery of forests and trees across our landscapes would also recover our natural water sources, which have been disappearing, and this directly impacts our food systems.

Trees have vital functional roles in facilitating water permeability into soils, and thereby enabling and enhancing soil health. Fiji needs the assistance of CePaCT to not only store our Forest Tree Seeds for safeguarding our forest biodiversity, but also support capacity building for tree climbing efforts to collect them.

The various Side-Events topics included very specific matters such as the Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle, the Kava Industry, Engineered Wood Products, Cocoa, Soils and the Koronivia Joint Work on Agriculture, Climate Smart Agriculture, hazardous pesticides ... many of these matters impact all of us in many ways, underlying the need for food security, One Health and Scaling up agroecology in the Pacific, where we use traditional knowledge and innovation to address food systems and climate change.

Regional agri-business trade is a vital part of establishing our circular green economy, as well as Forest Landscape Restoration and the development of thriving industries for our forest products and ecosystems, thus highlighting the importance of integrating services. And then we also have Blue Carbon. That is, the capture of carbon and storage in our mangrove forests and seagrass beds, which is a fast-growing area of development that enables new finance opportunities. Monitoring our forests and land use changes to enhance community livelihoods locally, nationally and regionally also assists to align us to international commitments.

We hope that inclusive priority engagement of youth and women in transforming our food systems through agroecology and regenerative agricultural systems will create innovative opportunities to optimise the fair sharing of benefits. This should be supported by continual evolution in our

agricultural and forestry research, and then outreach through extension services to be widely operationalised.

We need to not only modernise our operations and technology, but also to update our laws and regulations with the political will to drive these transformations! We look forward to bilateral and multi-lateral projects and partnerships to enhance ease of accessing financial support for actual transformation of the agriculture and forestry sectors.

Additionally, there needs to be more forestry issues linked to the agricultural sector in upcoming Pacific Week for Agriculture and Forestry, and any related support structures from development partners.

We look forward to continuing our excellent collaboration and to also explore new ventures with you. So, stay in touch! Vinaka vakalevu and see you again soon!