

8th Regional Meeting of the Pacific Heads of Agriculture and Forestry Services
Partner Statement from the Civil Society Organisations
Thursday, 9 March

HOAFs - Malo e lelei, ni sa bula vinaka, and bonjour Ladies and Gentlemen.

My name is Drew Havea, I am a Board Member of the Pacific Organic & Ethical Trade Community (PoetCom). I am speaking on behalf of the civil society forum which comprises the following organisations and their members – the Pacific Islands Non-Government Organisations (PIANGO), Pacific Farmers Organisation (PIFON), PoetCom, and our business representatives of the Pacific Islands Private Sector Organisation (PIPSO).

We wish to acknowledge the collaborative effort of the Government of Fiji, the Pacific Community (SPC), and FAO for the Pacific Week of Agriculture and HOAFs and MOAFs, and in recognising the contribution of civil society and private sector in agriculture and forestry. The theme “Growing Together: Transforming Pacific Agriculture and Forestry” truly captures the importance of inclusivity and why we as different constituents need to be working a lot better together to truly transform agriculture and forestry, and ultimately our unique Pacific food system.

The role of farmer organisations, private sector and civil society collectives is important in discussing socio-economic development as well as regionalism in the broadest sense; and particularly so as we consider issues before agriculture and forestry. Views of our members, is important to capture as Governments set policy. We recognise that a great part is understanding the full spectrum of private sector and community development vulnerabilities and needs, which include contributions to the broader economy.

Partnership, collaboration is touted as the way to meet balanced outcomes in social, economic and environmental sustainability and this has been a fundamental feature of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG17). This is also a key feature of the *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent* - setting out a long-term vision for our region and outlining steps to achieve this vision to protect and secure our Pacific people, place and prospects. Amidst the important stakeholders are farmer organisations, civil society and business & employers and their institutions, representing this diverse body of folks and interests.

As we take the path of COVID recovery, and confront climate change, NCDs and food system challenges, the CSOs representatives collective (PIFON, POETCOM, PIANGO and PIPSO) hereby reaffirms its support to the HOAFs and MOAFs. As community and industry groups we can foster and bring together our members’ expert counsels of business & community leaders; to contribute to public discourse and governance in the interest of the Pacific people.

The side events earlier this week reinforced the many messages and complexity of issues confronting us as we navigate climate change and post pandemic recovery. And some of our members were present and/or participated and the feedback from those side events has captured lots of concerns and issues raised by farmer organisations, civil society and private sector. This included but wasn’t limited to: human resource and human capital challenges confronting the agriculture, agrifoods sector; access to resources - financial and technical; natural disasters and managing risks.

Going forward, we would like to see more of farmer organisations, CSOs and private sector as part of the programme, and the booths/displays so we can widely promote, showcase our fresh produce and value added products (and services); and leverage off each other.

Reflecting on past HOAFS meeting, we are glad to see progress despite challenges. We note the investments on Food security & health and nutrition, and food systems; climate change mitigation and farmers empowerment. We acknowledge SPC's Food Systems Flagship programme because we see the CSO forum and our constituents using this flagship to engage more actively to benefit our members, our communities and region because food systems needs our collective action to address production and farmers issues, diets and health, indigenous food systems and climate change.

As you consider the packed agenda before you, be assured that civil society/private sector are committed to working with you as partners in development, at country level and at the regional level. Vinaka vakalevu, merci beaucoup, and malo 'aupito.