PACIFIC MINISTERS OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY MEETING (PMAFM)

Third Meeting
Nadi, Fiji, 10 March 2023
Informing and catalyzing national food systems transformation in Pacific Island Countries

The objective of this Ministerial decision paper is to:

- **provide** evidence based considerations and recommendations that Pacific Ministers can consider for contributing to informing and catalysing Pacific Island Countries and Territories' (PICTs) efforts over the development and implementation of their respective national food systems transformation Pathways.

Summary/short description/key points

FAO prepared this paper to address the August 2021 Seventh Regional Meeting of Pacific Heads of Agriculture and Forestry Services' request for FAO and SPC to produce a technical paper to illuminate the implementation of the *Outcomes of the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit* in the Pacific context. The objective is therefore to provide a suggested list of evidence based considerations and recommendations for the decisions of Pacific Ministers so that these can contribute to informing and catalysing PICTs' efforts over the development and implementation of their respective national food systems transformation Pathways.

The suggested considerations and recommendations are based on FAO's policy and programming cooperation with PICTs and development partners, and a desk review of documented discussions by the international community, including PICTs, prior to, during and after the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit.

The suggested considerations and recommendations cover the following issues that can contribute to informing and catalysing the development and implementation of national food systems transformation pathways in PICTs:

- Goals for national food systems transformation
- Approaches to national food systems transformation
- Costing accounting for national food systems transformation
- Monitoring, evaluating and reporting on national food systems transformation
- Stakeholders who should be involved in the development and implementation of national food systems transformation pathways
- Trade-offs for national food systems transformation

Recommendation: *At this PWAF, Ministers should consider endorsing and empowering a relevant international agency that will explore the creation of a regional technical*

coordination committee/hub to inform and catalyse the food systems transformation agendas in PICTs. With support from the international community, the regional committee/hub could be led by governments with a relevant technical international agency providing secretariat services. FAO would be willing to explore options for the creation of the committee/hub, as well as, providing the secretariat services to the committee if requested by PICT Ministers.

BACKGROUND

1. This paper addresses the August 2021 Seventh Regional Meeting of Pacific Heads of Agriculture and Forestry Services' request for FAO and SPC to produce a paper that would illuminate for Pacific leaders, the implementation of the *Outcomes of the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit* within the Pacific context.

2. The objective is therefore to provide a suggested list of evidence based considerations and recommendations that can contribute to informing and catalysing PICTs' efforts over the development and implementation of their respective national food systems transformation Pathways.

3. PICTs' agrifood systems are uniquely vulnerable to climate change and external shocks linked to the region's small population and land size, geographic isolation, and developing economies. This context has a dire effect on food production, manufacturing, trade and consumption, for example, PICTs depend largely on imported food, and diet related diseases are prevalent.

4. The recent disruption of global supply chains linked to the war in Ukraine, which created the so called '5F crisis': price volatility for food, fuel, fertiliser, feed and finance in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbates the fragility of PICTs' food systems.

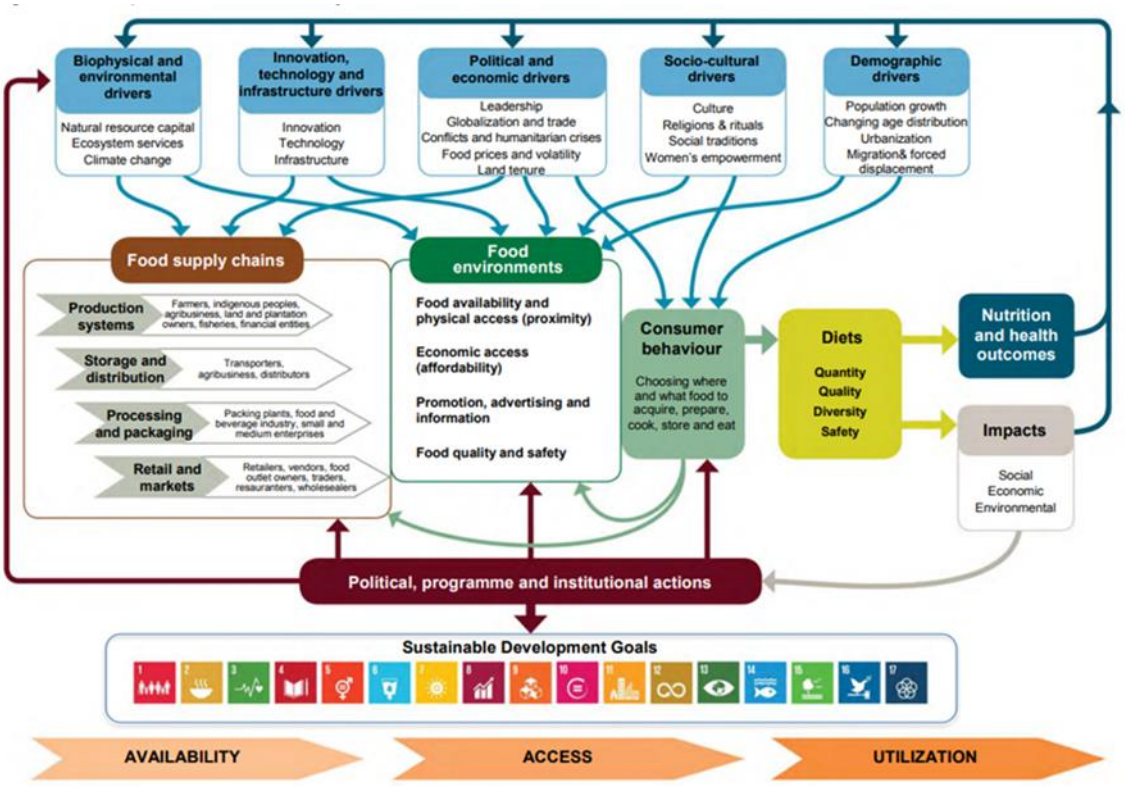
5. The 2021 global agenda to transform national food systems has been widely embraced by PICTs, with their governments leading the development and implementation of national food systems transformation pathways. The United Nations, for example via FAO, WFP, IFAD, UNEP, and other partners, such as SPC, are collaborating with PICTs to advance the food systems transformation agenda.

THE GOALS OF NATIONAL FOOD SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION

6. This paper does not recommend that PICTs should transform their national food systems to achieve a particular goal, because this should be a country specific decision. However, there is broad agreement that key among the goals should be to 1) protect and improve livelihoods; 2) provide healthy and affordable diets; 3) be inclusive for all stakeholders, particularly the most vulnerable; 4) be environmentally sustainable; and 5) resilient to climate change and

food system shocks.[1] In support for the national food system transformation, a recent ACIAR funded research in collaboration with SPC suggests that a Pacific regional approach to food systems should be "*rooted in values, meeting multiple objectives, balancing tensions between different priorities and imperatives, and generating meaningful support and resources for countries*." [2]

7. *FAO's and SPC's reviews of the current Pathways developed by PICTs revealed that almost all of the countries have, among other goals, a particular interest to transform their national food systems so that they contribute to improving diets and nutrition.[3] This is hardly surprising considering that more than half of the total deaths in PICTs is attributable to diet related diseases.[4] On this basis, this paper presents the following diagram proposed by the High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security (CWFS), the United Nations body for assessing the science related to world food security and nutrition. The diagram depicts the conceptualization of a food systems transformation that is aimed at improving diets and nutrition.[5]*



[1] Ruben R, Cavatassi R, Lipper L, Smaling E, Winters P. Towards food systems transformation—five paradigm shifts for healthy, inclusive and sustainable food systems. Food Security. 2021;13(6):1423-30

[2] Thow, A. M., et al. (2022). "Regional Governance for Food System Transformations: Learning from the Pacific Island Region." Sustainability 14(19).

[3] SPC (2022). UNFSS Pacific Country Food System Pathways Analysis. Evidence brief. Noumea, SPC.

[4] WHO Noncommunicable Diseases Progress Monitor 2017 https://www.who.int/nmh/publications/ncd-progress-monitor-2017/

[5] HLPE. 2017. Nutrition and food systems. A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome

8. *A key message in the HLPE's diagram is that countries that want to transform their national food systems for improved diets and nutrition should address several drivers of the food systems; and improve not only the supply chains, but also the food environments, consumer behaviour, dietary diversity and food safety. A recent FAO report provides an overview of the current approaches to achieve transformation in these aspects in PICTs.*[6]

9. ***Consideration:*** *This paper recommends that PICTs consider achieving a set of comprehensive goals in multiple dimensions to make the food systems more efficient, resilient, inclusive and sustainable, as illustrated by the conceptual diagram prepared by HLPE.*

SUCCESSFUL APPROACHES TO FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION

10. Transforming food systems is a popular subject with countless and varied approaches. Unfortunately, all of them are contested because of their associated drawbacks. For example, in developing countries where low food production is a problem, the approach tends to be on increasing production, but the feedback is that this approach often neglects other areas of the food systems.[7] A recent FAO report provides an overview of the trade-offs in approaches to strengthening food systems in PICTs.[6] The use of a comprehensive approach is widely recommended, but "comprehensive" is not undebatable. However, some examples for opportunities to strengthen food systems in a comprehensive manner in PICTs were revealed by an ACIAR funded research in collaboration with SPC in the case of Vanuatu and Solomon Islands.[8-9] These studies, another paper published as part of this ACIAR project focusing on regional food system governance, and a recent FAO report confirmed that multi-sectoral coordination is necessary on national and regional levels to implement any food system approach that aims to be comprehensive.[6,10]

11. As examples, some countries might choose an approach that transforms four areas of their food systems: 1) production, 2) processing, 3) distribution and 4) consumption.[11] Conversely, others might use an approach that would transform six domains: 1) reinvent agriculture, 2) transform food environments for healthy diets, 3) mitigate climate change, 4) productively engage the private sector, 5) influence public policy priorities, and 6) establish true cost accounting of food.[12] This paper recalls that during the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit, all countries agreed on a "comprehensive" approach that would ensure 1) access to safe and nutritious food for all; 2) shift to sustainable consumption patterns; 3) boost nature-positive

[6] FAO. 2023. A Snapshot of the Status and Way forward for Transforming Agri-Food Systems in the Pacific: Identifying entry points and Analysing trade-offs for policy makers. Apia, FAO.
[7] FAO 2018
[8] Reeve, E., et al. (2022). "Strengthening Food Systems Governance to Achieve Multiple Objectives: A Comparative Instrumentation Analysis of Food Systems Policies in Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands." Sustainability 14(10).
[9] Farrell, P., et al. (2023) Fruit and Non-Starchy Vegetable Acquisition and Supply in Solomon Islands: Identifying Opportunities for Improved Food System Outcomes. Sustainability 2023, 15, 1742. https://doi.org/10.3390/su15021742
[10] Thow, A. M., et al. (2022). "Regional Governance for Food System Transformations: Learning from the Pacific Island Region." Sustainability 14(19).
[11] https://sustainablefoodcenter.org/latest/blog/what-makes-up-a-food-system-breaking-it-down-into-4-parts#:~:text=Production%2C%20processing%2C%20distribution%2C%20and,variety%20of%20inputs%20and%20outputs
[12] Kennedy et al. (2020)

production; 4) advance equitable livelihoods; and 5) build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress.[13]

12. *FAO's and SPC's reviews of the current Pathways developed by PICTs revealed that the applied approaches are comprehensive relative to the context of PICTs. However, there is room to expand the orientation of this "comprehensive approach" from a heavy focus on food value chains to a broader "food systems approach". This paper therefore suggests that PICTs should consider the food systems approach.*

13. ***Consideration:*** *A food systems approach considers the food system in its totality, taking into account all the elements, their relationships and related effects. It is not confined to one single sector, sub-system (e.g. value chain, market). As such, the food systems approach addresses the limitations of many traditional approaches to improving food security and nutrition, which tend to be sectoral with either a narrowly defined focus that leads to technical fixes, which are subjected to the scope of one ministry or public agency.[14] This paper suggests that in order for the food systems to work, PICTs should also welcome multi-sectoral coordination mechanisms both at national and regional levels.*

COST ACCOUNTING FOR NATIONAL FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION

14. There is broad consensus that costing the transformation of national food systems is indispensable for success.

15. In discussing the costing of food systems transformation, it's important to also view "cost" from the perspective of what the current systems is costing humanity, because this would suggest that we are talking about a significant investment to undo the financially and socially unaffordable consequences from the expensive current food systems. For example, *"the current food systems produce around a third of global greenhouse gas emissions, while agriculture is the largest user of land and water, accounting for 70 percent of water use. Reducing the emissions of "hidden" environmental, health, and poverty costs estimated at almost US$12 trillion per year, compared to US$10 trillion in market value".*[15] The foregoing is only reflective of transforming food systems from the vantage point of addressing its unintended consequences.[16]

16. Because data is scarce, the best estimate that this paper identified is global and doesn't provide details on PICTs' specificities. Following the UN Food Systems Summit, it was estimated *that around* ***USD$ 1.3 trillion*** *of investment is needed each year from now until*

[13] https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit/action-tracks
[14] FAO, 2018.
[15] https://clim-eat.org/the-price-tag-for-transforming-food-systems-under-climate-change-2/
[16] FAO. 2023. A Snapshot of the Status and Way forward for Transforming Agri-Food Systems in the Pacific: Identifying entry points and Analysing trade-offs for policy makers. Apia, FAO.

2030 [actually up to 2050] to put the way we produce, distribute, and consume food on a more resilient and equitable footing.[17]

17. The disaggregation of the estimate by geography suggests that if Action 1.1 is excluded, USD 165 billion will be need in sub-Saharan Africa, USD 120 billion in South Asia, and *USD 109 billion in Southeast Asia and the Pacific* (Thornton, et al, 2022). Although this cost is massively high, it will pay off, for example, in the Pacific, by saving the cost to posterity, deaths related to diet diseases or when food loss and waste are addressed.

18. Although each PICT will decide over how to prioritize its investment, this paper recalls that at the UN Food Systems Summit in 2021, all countries agreed that the national food systems transformation agenda needs to invest in the following five action tracks:[18]

- **Action Track 1:** Ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all
- **Action Track 2:** Shift to sustainable consumption patterns
- **Action Track 3:** Boost nature-positive production
- **Action Track 4:** Advance equitable livelihoods
- **Action Track 5:** Build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress

19. ***Consideration:*** *This paper doesn't offer a specific costing or an associated methodology for PICTs, but it suggests that the leadership of PICTs should consider setting up or requesting relevant technical agencies, like FAO, to explore and develop costings for each national food systems transformation pathway. This is important because FAO's review of the current pathways in PICTs reveals that none of them at the time of preparing this paper has established the costings associated with their pathways.*

MONITORING, EVALUATING AND REPORTING ON NATIONAL FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION PROCESSES

20. Prior to the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit, countries and various advocates argued that mechanisms for measuring and reporting on concrete results were needed to support the processes. This paper builds on the argument to emphasize that there is need for PICTs to put in place a smart and cost efficient monitoring, evaluation and reporting system to support the implementation of national food systems transformation in each country, but under a Pacific regional hub for cost-efficiency.[19]

21. The objective of the proposed system has to be relative to the characteristics of each PICT's pathway, but overall, the system should aim at measuring and reporting on the performance of the prioritized food systems drivers and activities to deliver progress.

[17] Philip Thornton, Yuling Chang, Ana Maria Loboguerrero, Bruce Campbell (2022). DISCUSSION STARTER. The price tag for transforming food systems under climate change. How transforming food systems under climate change will cost trillions, but inaction will cost more.

[18] https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit/action-tracks

[19] Thow, A. M., et al. (2022). "Regional Governance for Food System Transformations: Learning from the Pacific Island Region." Sustainability 14(19).

22. The monitoring, evaluation and reporting system will ensure that clear targets, trade-offs and potential unintended consequences are identified; guidance and opportunity for adjustments, and accountability for actors including governments, civil society, private sector, producers, consumers, are provided.

23. In order for the monitoring, evaluation and reporting system to be successful in informing national food systems transformation, PICTs might need to consider that it is technical, independent and based on proven mechanisms and practices.

24. Every monitoring, evaluation and reporting systems has to be specific to the targets of particular national food systems pathways, for example, the indicators for pathways that are aimed at improved diets and nutrition would be different from those that are aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions, boosting exports, reducing food loos and waste, etc.

25. For the purpose of demonstration, this paper presents the following scenarios[20]:

- ***Pathways aimed at improving diets, nutrition, and health:*** *indicators could include diet quality, food security, food environments, and policy affecting food environments.*
- ***Pathways aimed at improving environment and climate change:*** *indicators could include land use, greenhouse emissions, water use, pollution, biosphere integrity.*
- ***Pathways aimed at improving livelihoods, equity and reducing poverty:*** *indicators could include poverty and income, employment, social production, human rights, etc…*
- ***Pathways aimed at improving resilience and sustainability:*** *indicators could include exposure to shocks, resilience capacities, agrobiodiversity, food security and stability, food systems sustainability index, etc…*
- ***Pathways aimed at improving food systems governance:*** *indicators could include shared vision, strategic planning and policies, effective implementation, accountability, etc…*

26. ***Consideration:*** *FAO's and SPC's reviews of the existing pathways developed by PICTs reveals that there is room for the governments to put in place robust monitoring, evaluation and reporting systems. In order to ensure cost efficiency, and considering the size of PICTs, this paper doesn't recommend the creation of country-based national monitoring, evaluation and reporting systems, but rather a Pacific regional system with detailed attention to national specificities.*

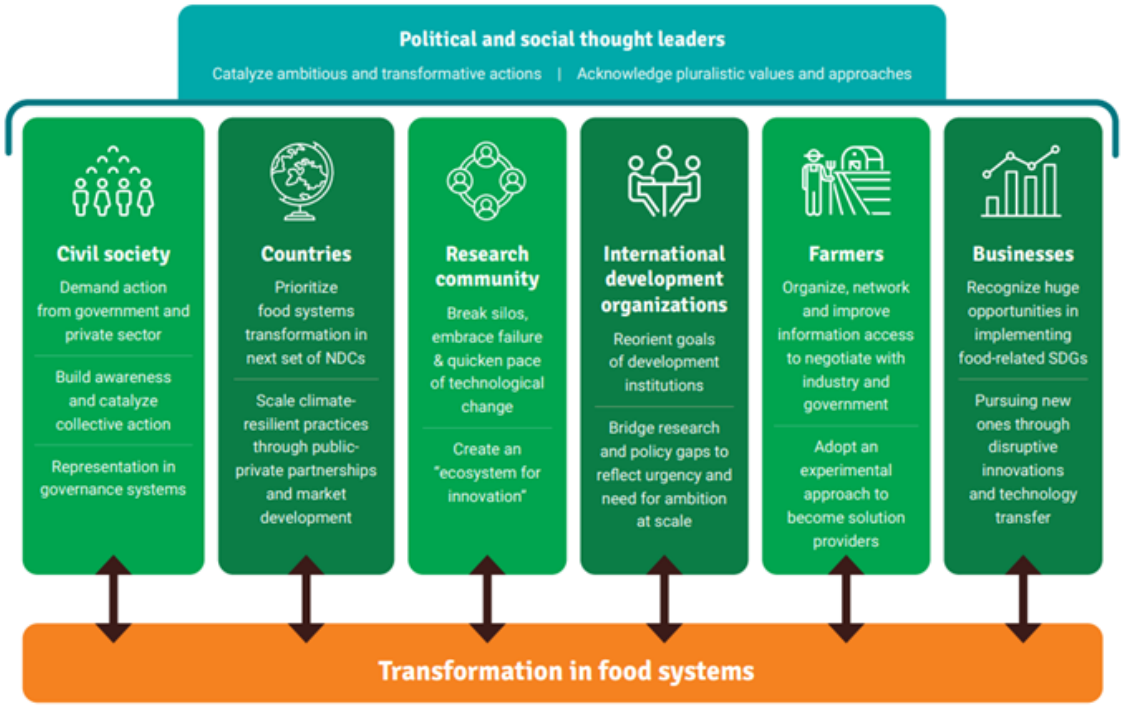
[20] Fanzo et al. (2021).

WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN NATIONAL FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION?

27. This paper cannot suggest a comprehensive list of stakeholders who need to be involved in the transformation of national food systems largely because each context has its specific actors. However, the HLPE on Food Security and Nutrition of the CWFS, points out a set of drivers for food systems transformation, and these include biophysical and environmental drivers; innovation, technology and infrastructure drivers; political and economic drivers; socio-cultural drivers; and demographic drivers.[21] These drivers indicate that stakeholders may come from a variety of sectors. A recent FAO report provides some suggestions on these sectors.[22]

28. ***Consideration:*** *On the combined basis of this list and the food systems and comprehensive approaches introduced in clauses 12 and 13 above, this paper proposes with emphases that PICTs should consider a coordination group of actors that is inclusive relative to the Pacific context, as much as possible to drive their national and regional food systems transformation processes.*

The following mapping of relevant stakeholders reflects the need for inclusivity: [23]



[21] HLPE. 2017. Nutrition and food systems. A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome

[22] FAO. 2023. A Snapshot of the Status and Way forward for Transforming Agri-Food Systems in the Pacific: Identifying entry points and Analysing trade-offs for policy makers. Apia, FAO.

[23] Adapted from Steiner et al. (2020)

TRADE-OFFS

29. Research shows that agriculture production is a major contributor to climate change. For example, food systems produce around a third of global greenhouse gas emissions, while agriculture is the largest user of land and water, accounting for 70 percent of water use.[24] This partly explains why for many countries - particularly developed countries - their agendas to transform national food systems are focused on reducing the contribution that their national food systems make to climate change.

30. PICTs are already confronting climate change threats, so the food systems transformation agenda might need to factor in the potential trade-offs. Just as every crisis comes with an opportunity, every success comes with a cost.

31. A recent FAO report provides an overview of the trade-offs in agrifood system transformation in PICTs.[25] However, the currently available food systems data does not allow a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis on each food system strengthening approach in country level.

32. This paper would not advise PICTs that they will achieve their food systems transformation agendas without paying a cost, and in some cases, very significantly too. For example, increasing the production of crops is likely to come at the painful expense of maintaining virgin lands (if horizontal), for many PICTs in which land is gradually being captured by sea level rise, or losing quality views and flow of quality air (if vertical). Increasing livestock production would also likely come at the expense of maintaining land and water quality.

33. ***Consideration:*** *In order to provide an economic assessment of cost-benefits of different approaches to food systems transformation, PICTs would need to commission a project specifically dedicated to this subject.*

CONCLUSIONS

34. This paper applauds Pacific Ministers for their indisputably unparalleled leadership in relentlessly advancing their people's agendas for the sustainable transformation of their national food systems, and ensuring that PICTs are not left behind in the implementation of this global agenda. This is the right thing to do during these challenging times.

35. PICTs already demonstrate excellent practices in pursuing this national food systems transformation agenda, for example, the designation of national focal points, country based

[24] Kennedy, et al. (2020). Transforming Food Systems: The Missing Pieces Needed to Make Them Work. Oxford. Oxford University Press.
[25] FAO. 2023. A Snapshot of the Status and Way forward for Transforming Agri-Food Systems in the Pacific: Identifying entry points and Analysing trade-offs for policy makers. Apia, FAO.

specificities but with willingness to share successes with each other, extensive advocacy, etc. These should be the basis for continued success.

36. PICTs are already investing in the transformation of their national food systems, which demonstrates political commitment and ownership of the agenda. This should be continued by ensuring that the food systems transformation agenda is factored into future national budgets. The political and budgetary commitments demonstrated by PICTs constitute a very strong ground that should attract bilateral and multilateral partnerships to support national food systems transformation in PICTs.

MINISTERS ARE INVITED TO ENDORSE THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

37. On the basis of documented evidence, this paper proposes that the creation of a regional technical coordination committee /hub, supported by donors, led by governments with secretariat services from a relevant technical international agency will inform and catalyse the food systems transformation agendas in PICTs. However, the modality of such a committee/hub needs to be carefully explored by considering the costs vs benefits. Ministers are therefore encouraged, during this PWAF, to name and empower a relevant technical agency to carefully explore the creation of the committee/hub and report back to Ministers no longer than half a year. FAO would be willing to provide this critical service if requested by PICT Ministers.

38. At this PWAF, if PICT Ministers appoint an agency to explore the creation of a technical coordination committee/hub, key among the tasks of the appointed agency would include the development of a Terms of Reference (ToR) for the committee/hub. Taking reference from the UN Food Systems coordination hub's ToR, the Pacific coordination committee's ToR would among others, empower the Committee/hub to facilitate the overall development and implementation of national Pathways, for example, by ensuring adaptation to the changing contexts, national specificities, inclusive and multi-sectoral participation, establishing true costing, monitoring, evaluation and reporting, and identifying and addressing trade-offs. Recognizing that national food systems transformation is a complex and long term agenda, PICTs would need to prioritize the work of the committee/hub with long term commitments to ensure its relevance.

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