

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

PACIFIC COMMUNITY

SIXTH REGIONAL MEETING OF
HEADS OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY SERVICES (HOAFS)
(Apia, Samoa, 01-02 October 2019)

PACIFIC SEEDS FOR LIFE PROGRAMME (PS4L)

Brief Concept Note

(Paper prepared by the Secretariat)

1. Programme/Project Summary	
Programme/Project title:	Pacific Seeds For Life Programme (PS4L)
Beneficiaries:	Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs)
2. Context	
<p>Pacific Leaders in the 49th Pacific Leaders Forum (Nauru, 2018) recognised climate change as ‘the single greatest threat to sustainable livelihoods, food security and wellbeing of Pacific people’¹. The Leaders also acknowledged that non-communicable diseases (NCDs) is the leading cause of deaths (70%)² with unhealthy diets being the highest risk factor for cardiovascular disease and diabetes induced deaths in the Pacific and commit to tackling NCDs through a holistic approach at the national level linking to regional and international efforts. Agriculture plays an important role for food and nutritional security of the vast majority of the Pacific communities. With the threats from climate change and the burden of NCDs, there is a need to create sustainable resilient food systems.</p> <p>Seeds³ play a crucial role in building sustainable resilient food systems as well as supporting healthy ecosystems. Sustainable access to and availability of diverse quality seeds that are adaptable to local conditions are pre-requisites for better yield and agriculture productivity that in turn supports sustainable livelihoods and food security of farmers and communities. In a fragmented region as the Pacific, the availability and access to a diversity of quality seeds and crops vary significantly between and among countries. A recent assessment of the status of seed systems in the region revealed a number of issues: lack of national seed policies to support investment in seed development; heavy reliance on imported seeds that are often not suitable for the Pacific environment and climate; a narrow plant genetic resources base which is not resilient to both biotic and abiotic factors; limited seeds stocks arising from lack of technical knowledge and skills on seed production, processing and storage; limited capacities and resources in some countries as compared to others; reluctance of some countries to share resources and plant materials; and lastly, poor linkages among relevant institutions and communities both at regional and national level⁴.</p>	

¹ PIFs Communiqué (2018): <https://www.un.org/humansecurity/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/49th-Pacific-Islands-Forum-Communiqu%C3%A9.pdf>

² SPC (2011): <http://www.spc.int/resource-centre/>

³ Herein refer to all plant genetic resources (PGR) or all food crops in its various forms of seeds, clonally propagated (vegetative) crops and open pollinated varieties (OPVs).

⁴ SPC/USAID Food security vulnerability and climate change adaption assessment: <http://ccprojects.gsd.spc.int/countries/>

The SPC Land Resources Division's (LRD) Pacific Seeds for Life program (PS4L) aims to strengthen seed systems in PICTs by creating the enabling environment for seed development and exchange on the upstream through to capacity development on seed research and downstream to improved adoption and use at the community and farmer level through efficient seed networks. The programme will build on existing capabilities, gaps and future needs, the fragmented nature of the region and its economies of scale. The long-term impact will be a resilient, food and nutrition secured Pacific.

The PS4L program will lay the solid foundation that will leverage additional technical and financial support from other donors and institutions. A number of partnerships within the SPC-LRD that supports the PS4L include: DFAT's⁵ support to SPC in transforming CePaCT into a Centre of Excellence through attaining a critical Quality Management System (QMS) and Standard Operation Procedures (SOPs) to improve quality and quantity of services; the FAO⁶ support through the International Treaty's⁷ Benefit Sharing Fund (BSF) focusing on enhancing technologies for improved use of PGRFA⁸; the IAEA⁹ support to CePaCT in alternative crop breeding methodologies for identification of resilient and high performance crop diversity; SPC's innovative support through the launch of the PS4L program including development of seed policies and seed centres in selected PICTs; LandCare, New Zealand and SPC partnership to support seed development and soil health; ACIAR¹⁰ support on soil health, PGR conservation strategies, and pests and diseases; and, last but not the least, IFAD's¹¹ support to strengthen the capacity of extension services networks in PICTs through the Pacific Islands Rural Advisory Services Network (PIRAS) housed in LRD.

3. Theory of Change

Goal. The long-term impact of the program is 'agricultural production systems in Pacific Island Countries and Territories are sustainable and hazard resilient contributing to enhanced livelihoods and food and nutrition security'. The program will contribute to increased availability, access to and utilisation of diverse resilient & high nutritional crop varieties through improved knowledge and skills on the development and operationalisation of effective seed systems.

Outcome 1. Countries have strengthened enabling policies for effective seed systems: This will be achieved through the development of seed strategies taking into consideration existing systems, lessons learnt and best practices to guide regional and national seed programmes that are inclusive for women and youth and sustainable financing to support operationalising effective and robust seed systems in countries.

Outcome2. Increased awareness and capacity on seed systems development: The PS4L will create more awareness programs and understanding on the importance of diverse and quality seed to support resilient food production systems, improving agriculture production efficiency and to enhance food and nutrition security. Technical trainings will be facilitated to build knowledge and skills of stakeholders on the conservation and development of diverse portfolio of plant genetic resources.

Outcome 3. Strengthened regional and national seed networks: Establishment and formalising of seed networks will enable effective distribution and utilisation of resilient & highly nutritional crop varieties from national genebanks/research stations including CePaCT at the regional level.

⁵ Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (<https://dfat.gov.au/>)

⁶ Food and Agriculture Organisation (<http://www.fao.org/home/en/>)

⁷ International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources For Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA) (<http://www.fao.org/plant-treaty/en/>)

⁸ PGRFA – Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

⁹ International Atomic Energy Agency (<https://www.iaea.org/>)

¹⁰ Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (<https://www.aciar.gov.au/>)

¹¹ International Fund for Agriculture Development (<https://www.ifad.org/>)

4. Readiness

The 49th Pacific Leaders Forum (Nauru, 2018) sets forth the high-level platform for the prioritisation of issues around building resilient food systems in the face of climate change and the increasing incidence on NCDs in the region. These priorities call for increased strategic interventions and engagements at all levels. The Pacific Heads of Agriculture and Forestry Services Meeting (HOAFS) and Joint FAO – SPC Pacific Ministers of Agriculture and Forestry Services (MOAFS) meeting held in Vanuatu, 2017 reiterated strengthening the work of the SPC LRD's Centre for Pacific Crops and Trees (CePaCT) to support food and nutrition security in the region through its services of effective conservation and use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture (PGRFA). CePaCT conserves over 2000 accessions of 17 different crops inclusive of important collections of aroids (taro, giant swamp taro, giant taro and cocoyam), banana, breadfruit, sweet potato and yam in its facilities in Suva, Fiji. The Centre has been championing the distribution of this crop diversity to the region and beyond. More than 7000 accessions (>80,000 plant samples) of 15 crops have been distributed to over 50 countries in the past 15 years. CePaCT's mandate has expanded to include forest trees in recognition of the importance of trees to resilience building and food production systems. CePaCT offers the key platform of lessons learnt and best practices from which this PS4L program will build on. In addition, the PS4L will build on the lessons learnt under the SPC innovation funds pilot activities, which have identified a range of needs and priorities being articulated into a Pacific Seeds Systems Roadmap to guide regional collaboration on strengthening seeds systems in the Pacific.

5. Scope of Work and Management/Implementation Arrangements

The program will endeavour to carry out the following activities:

1. **Institutional support.** Interventions will involve provision of technical support on the inventory and review of seed supply chains; gap/value chain analysis and development of regional and national seed policies/framework.
2. **Capacity development.** The programme will involve awareness programs on the importance of seed systems to resilience, livelihoods and food and nutrition security; assess and prioritise knowledge gaps; develop training guides and provide targeted trainings for researchers, extensionists and farmers; strengthen breeding programmes linking to national seed centres.
3. **Coordination and partnerships:** the programme will also focus on strengthening seed networks at regional and national levels to drive seed systems development in the region. It will aim to revive and formalise a governance structure for the Pacific Agricultural Plant Genetic Resources Network (PAPGREN) and strengthen its linkages to other relevant networks at the regional, national and community levels.
4. **Development of seed centres** The PS4L will provide technical support to national and community-based seed development centres with a strong focus on women and youth and strengthening the linkages between the formal and informal seed systems.

The Integrated Program is to be implemented by a multi-disciplinary team of skilled professional specialists within the four Pillars of LRD inclusive of Genetic Resources (Pillar 1), Sustainable Landscapes and Forests (Pillar 2), Sustainable Agriculture (Pillar 3) and, Markets for Livelihoods (Pillar 4). The strong nexus will be established between the team of the genetic resources pillar on the one hand and the team of the sustainable agriculture pillar. The program will pursue a hub-spoke genetic resources operational strategy, strengthening and/or putting in place hubs for genetic resources conservation and use in the Pacific Region and provide the necessary capacity to ensure the cost-effectiveness of these centres. Key linkages with other SPC Divisions including the Public Health Division and others will be leveraged to ensure wider impacts.

At the national level, the project will collaborate with research institutions, extension services, farmer organizations, education and representatives from the private sector with interest in seed development. Local Governments and policy makers will be also involved in the consultations to ensure strong buy in at the policy level. Indirect stakeholders include men and women farmers, indigenous communities and youth in rural area of selected countries, as well as other actors in the agricultural sector. At the regional levels, the programme will leverage linkages to PAPGREN and PIRAS to support scaling and advocacy efforts.

6. What evidence is there that SPC is best positioned to do this?

The LRD PS4L long term goal of building resilient and secured food systems contributes well to SPC's overarching vision and mission, its goals and key objectives of Pacific people having healthy and long lives. In addition, these all feed into meeting regional priorities set out by the Pacific Leaders in the recent 49th Pacific Leaders Forum in 2018. On the global level, these priorities contribute strongly to four Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 1, 13, 15 & 17)¹².

The SPC LRD PS4L will capitalise on LRD's long-term goal of Food and Nutrition Security and Resilient Communities in the Pacific underscored by the value-chain approach provided under its four Pillars structure of (1) Genetic Resources, (2) Sustainable Forests and Landscapes, (3) Sustainable Agriculture and (4) Markets and Livelihoods. The model offers a flexible mechanism that allows for improved integration of projects and programs across the four pillars. LRD aspires that the PS4L program will enhance the impact of the Centre for Pacific Crops and Trees (CePaCT) specifically at the community level to ensure the proper conservation and utilization of the crop varieties held by the centre. PS4L will also link to the SPC Public Health Division (PHD) and others to provide a more holistic approach for greater and long lasting impacts.

¹² UN SDGs, 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015): <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>

