

PACIFIC COMMUNITY

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

SPC LAND RESOURCES DIVISION – DIRECTOR’S REPORT

(Paper prepared by the Secretariat)

Purpose

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide a summary account of the 2017 **Special Heads of Agriculture and Forestry Services (HoAFS)** meeting and the first-ever **Joint FAO and SPC Pacific Ministers of Agriculture and Forestry Meeting**. The paper will provide responses to some of the key threats and weaknesses in the Pacific and inform the distinguished members on our collective response plans.

Background

2. The idea to launch the Pacific Week of Agriculture (PWA) originated at the Caribbean Week of Agriculture in 2014, which was attended by a number of representatives from the Pacific Region. PWA aims to better acknowledge the importance of agriculture and rural life to the economic, social and environmental stability of the region and provide a forum for diverse industry, science and social interactions amongst Pacific Island Countries and Territories and their trading partners.
3. The Government of Vanuatu, in collaboration with the Pacific Community (SPC) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO-UN) hosted the first ever PWA in Port Vila, Vanuatu in October 2017. The attendees at the 2017 PWA were agriculture stakeholders mainly from the Pacific Region and included farmers and farmers’ organizations; private sector; research and development and donor representatives and representatives from the Vanuatu Government and other government agencies.
4. The 2017 PWA in Vanuatu focused on Culture, Resilience, Opportunities, Products and Sustainability (CROPS) with themes ranging from agri-tourism and farmers’ knowledge to the importance of women and youth in research and their linkages to food markets. The PWA and its side events highlighted the potential of SPC to harness existing pathways for development and leverage these to greater visibility and joint action such as the joint SPC-ACIAR forum on agricultural research and the “*Linking Farmers to Markets*” agri-tourism workshop.
5. The Land Resources Division (LRD) of SPC used the PWA event as the platform to host a special **HoAFS** meeting and, with FAO, the Joint FAO and SPC Pacific Ministers of Agriculture and Forestry Meeting. The objective of the HoAFS was to reconnect with Leaders from the Pacific Region, identify critical concerns and map thematic areas for sustainable development. Specifically, the HoAFS meeting aimed to:
 - Re-energise engagement and partnerships with stakeholders,
 - Share information on progress and results of recent and current action, and

- Establish new initiatives and highlight emerging partnerships.
6. The Joint FAO and SPC Pacific Ministers of Agriculture and Forestry Meeting emphasized the strategic roles of both FAO and SPC, and their various partner agencies in their contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of member countries. We are mindful of achieving economies of scale (integrating across countries), and economies of scope (targeting the focus), the critical role of adapting existing knowledge where ever possible, and of finding multiple ways to share and propagate knowledge developed from the vast legacy of policy, research and development work that has been undertaken.
 7. At the Joint FAO and SPC Pacific Ministers of Agriculture and Forestry Meeting, all member countries welcomed the Government of Samoa's offer to host the PWA in Apia in 2019, which enables momentum to continue in building connections and capabilities, and to share knowledge within the Pacific agriculture and forestry communities.

Recount of the Pacific HoAFS (2017)

Main threats, weaknesses

8. Critical to the existence of the Pacific Region and its livelihood is the threat of climate change. Recent and predicted climate variability - including rising temperatures, an increase in extreme hot days and warm nights, more extreme rainfall events, increasing intensity of tropical cyclones and rising sea levels - promise negative lasting impacts that will exacerbate food and nutrition insecurity, unless collective action is taken.
9. Ecological principles tell us that changing climates will alter the distribution, incidence and intensity of animal and plant pests and diseases. There is already evidence of the retreat of montane and cloud forests with increasing temperatures, and loss of conifers and other trees, which are vulnerable to increased fire frequency¹. These impacts create new ecological niches that allow the establishment and spread of pests and diseases into new geographical areas, often in the absence of naturally occurring biological control agents. Without research to anticipate and measure changes and in the absence of vigilant biosecurity management mechanisms, invasive species will destructively advance from one region to another, and disrupt traditional uses of plants as well as affect domestic economies and international trade.
10. Complex issues relating to ecosystems' change and loss of habitat have the potential to threaten the web of life, as well as animal production systems and human health. There are examples of rapid change, such as pathogens which affect pollinator insect species, or coral bleaching. Any changes which increase the difficulty and expense of local food production, such as Taro Leaf Blight or the uncontrolled Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle, will worsen problems already in evidence through increased consumption of imported and refined foods. Importation of refined foods and decreased appreciation of traditional food systems is damaging the health of many. This issue was reported in the *Pacific Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD) Roadmap*² and re-iterated in 2016 by Pacific Leaders and health professionals at the Pacific NCD Summit³. At its most recent Pacific Health meeting⁴, Ministers recognized the robust commitment over the last ten years to the prevention and control of NCDs in

¹ Thomson & Thaman (2016) "Native forests, plantation forests and trees outside forests: their vulnerability and roles in mitigating and building resilience to climate change." Ch 8 in "Vulnerability of Pacific Island agriculture and forestry to climate change." Ed. Taylor M, McGregor A and Dawson B. publ. Pacific Community.

² NCD Roadmap Report, Jul 2014. Background document on preventing and controlling NCDs in the Pacific.

³ Pacific NCD Summit Report 2016. Pacific Community, Noumea, New Caledonia.

⁴ Pacific Health Ministers Meeting, Rarotonga, Cook Islands, August, 2017.

Pacific Island Countries and Territories and advocated for multi-sectoral, integrated approaches to manage the NCD pandemic.

11. Linked to the transformation caused by climate change and the NCD pandemic is the inability of the Pacific to produce sufficient and quality food to feed its people. Climate change⁵ and population pressure⁶ are a leading cause of ecosystems' degradation, loss in biodiversity and erosion of the production potential of farmland. This calls for improved mechanisms to quantify and map these changes and work with communities to build lasting land use plans. Population drift, both overseas and into urban centers, contributes to the shortage in labor to engage in food systems activities. This trend is particularly evident amongst youth, with consequent cultural disconnection, and social dislocation. This increases the trend towards food importation seen in many member countries.
12. From the dialogue at the HoAFS 2017, LRD has sought to better support the specific needs of atoll nations, particularly by on-going work on composting and micronutrient management. LRD continues to respond to loss in crop biodiversity by introducing climate-resilient food crop varieties from the Pacific into the prevailing food production systems and supporting the conservation and distribution of genetic diversity of annual and perennial crops, and trees for future use. LRD has also been more effectively targeting economic empowerment of women and inclusion of youth by promoting and seeking support for gender based and youth-specific initiatives, which complement and support FAO's emphasis on family farming. Further, LRD has recognized and is working to improve emergency response to mobilize land management skills and food resources in the face of crisis. For example, through better invasive species incursion responses, seed and plantlet supply after cyclones and supplementing technical assistance of member governments. In the next few paragraphs, we provide an account of some of the most important responses since 2017.

Key responses of LRD since 2017

13. Genetic Resources and Climate Change: The Centre for Pacific Crops and Trees (CePaCT) is LRD's flagship program. CePaCT conserves the genetic diversity of 17 different Pacific crops and supports safe access to plant genetic resource (PGR) in the region. These crops are integral for food security and hold the diversity to adapt to climate change impacts including drought, waterlogging, and salinity. 131 accessions of eight crops - banana, cassava, giant taro, swamp taro, taro, *Xanthosoma* (cocoyam), sweet potato, yam) are known to have climate smart traits. The centre includes a tree seed program that stocks indigenous tree species for regeneration and access. With strategic and financial support of DFAT, MFAT, Landcare and the Crop Trust, CePaCT is transforming into a Centre of Excellence (CoE) that can rely on plant genetic resource initiatives, such as national collections, breeding and distribution networks. LRD is leveraging resources to enhance seed systems work in the region – mainly supported by Landcare, linking CePaCT with stakeholders to increase capacities in access, uptake and utilisation of climate smart food and trees crops.
14. Mitigation and REDD+: through GIZ, LRD continues to support members' capacities in REDD+ readiness for conservation and equitable distribution of benefits. The REDD+ process continues to generate many benefits for members' forest management with improved information systems and emphasis on functional regeneration, sustainable forest management and attention to avoided deforestation. Under an ACIAR funded sustainable landscapes project, LRD contributes to developing a geospatial data tool to i) allow visualization of agricultural, forestry, climatic and land use, and ii) collect agricultural, forestry and land use data. The primary users of this tool are extension officers in

⁵ See Lough J., Gupta AS, Power SB, Grose MR and McGree S (2016) "Observed and projected changes in surface climate of tropical Pacific Islands", Chapter 2 in "Vulnerability of Pacific Island agriculture and forestry to climate change." Ed. Taylor M, McGregor A and Dawson B. publ. Pacific Community.

⁶ http://www.spc.int/DigitalLibrary/Doc/SDD/Pocket_Summary/Pocket_Statistical_Summary_18.pdf

Fiji and Tonga. We continue to maintain a strategic focus on agroforestry training, to assist in tree contributions to food security, and community-driven land use planning, which complements many regional programs such as the GEF-funded Ridge to Reef (R2R) to achieve enduring land use decisions that enable better forest and catchment protection.

15. With the recruitment of an Animal Health Technician, the Division has been providing trainings on Para-Veterinarian and Livestock value chain analysis and conceptualizing the *One Health* approach. Addressing this nexus, LRD aims to provide an integrated pathway to long-term healthy living, specifically for women and youth. The Pacific Heads of Health endorsed the One-Health approach in April 2019. As part of its Animal Health and Production work, the Division also aims to revitalize its relationship with the Pacific Heads of Veterinary and Animal Production Services (PHOVAPS) and provides assistance to the World Animal Health Information System (WAHIS) PICTs focal points. Recently, the Division has been working with the French OCTs on specific animal diseases. We expect that these collaborative efforts will unlock opportunities for innovative partnerships. A four-year project on “*Improving small ruminant production and supply in Fiji and Samoa*” funded by ACIAR and implemented by the University of New England was launched in June 2019. The project aims to address the constraints of on-farm productivity with the purpose of informing policy at national – regional level.
16. Adaptation to CC in Atoll Countries: Atoll food systems are highly vulnerable to climate change and natural disasters that threaten livelihoods and food and nutrition security. Climate change challenges are prompting greater focus on building resilient agriculture and food systems of atoll communities. The Division is building the conceptual framework for a ‘*Centre of Excellence*’ for Atoll countries that will support the vision of the HOAFS that, in 2010, recommended the establishment of a CoE for regenerative food systems in Kiribati. The program builds on the Atoll Soil Health work supported by ACIAR and CSIRO. It includes supporting farmers’ groups, targeted composting using climate smart crop varieties, and draws on traditional knowledge such as the deep pit approach. This is where pits are dug to the water table and under rainfed conditions have the potential to rehabilitate and diversify atoll production systems, improve diet diversity for nutrition and provide incomes via market linkages and value chain approaches.
17. Biosecurity and Climate Change⁷: Transboundary crop / livestock / fisheries pests and diseases are major threats to food security and livelihoods in the PICTS. There is considerable evidence that Climate Change exacerbates these threats, threatening the effectiveness of the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) pathway for climate resilience. LRD has been stepping up its fight against climate-induced threats by improving biosecurity operations, with support from NZ-MFAT, strengthening systems and building more resilient production and food systems. Together with ACIAR and CSIRO, the Division has been improving the design and implementation of the Plant Health Clinics, creating awareness around the potential impact of these pests and has supported the development of the app ‘*Pacific Pests and Pathogens*’ to assist Extension Officers in the diagnosis of diseases and provision of solutions for domestic and export vegetables. With FAO, the LRD division has been working on a Pacific Initiative to enhance the resilience and food security through managing climate induced transboundary plant, animal pests and invasive exotic aquatic species threats. The Concept Note, once approved will pave the way for full program formulation.
18. Non-Communicable Diseases: Producers and consumers have the right to quality & healthy foods through certified production systems and value chains that contribute to healthier living. CePaCT has been the precursor to healthy food which has linked to new investments that can reduce the burden of NCDs. In conjunction with other divisions at SPC, LRD is stepping up its response to NCDs by

⁷ Biosecurity is the strategic and integrated approach that encompasses the policy and regulatory frameworks to analyse and manage risks in animal and plant life and health, food safety and biosafety in all terrestrial and aquatic production systems.

developing a conducive environment for healthy food systems, promoting nutrient rich local food crop varieties and applying principles of regenerative and organic agriculture.

19. Emergency Response: Coconut based livelihoods in the Solomon Islands (SIs) are under immense pressure from the highly invasive variant of the Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle Guam Biotype, *Oryctes rhinoceros*, (CRB-G). This beetle can destroy two major tree crop industries vital for the livelihoods of smallholder farmers: the coconut and palm oil industries. CRB-G causes severe devastation, leaving behind dead palms and coconuts as it invades new territories. LRD has been working with the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL) of the Solomon Islands and other partners in the country's Biosecurity Operational Plan to manage existing infestations of CRB-G and stop them from spreading to new plantations and islands. This project funded by NZ and DFAT and in close collaboration with Ag Research, assisted MAL to contain, manage and suppress the population and spread of CRB-G in Solomon Islands. The positive outcomes from this emergency support have encouraged New Zealand and Australia to provide additional support for a regional response plan. The new project will see a greater involvement of the Pacific Plant Protection Organization (PPPO) and provide the requisite programmatic and institutional lessons for staging other rapid response support mechanisms to the region under threat of new disease outbreaks.
20. SPS and Trade: With the financial support of the Standards Trade and Development Facility (STDF), a study, which was implemented by KALANG Consultancy Services in close collaboration with SPC, looked at the feasibility of an SPS Platform for the Pacific. The purpose was to analyze and propose options to create a regional SPS Service Support Platform for the benefit of Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs). Based on this preliminary work and analysis, the intent is to formulate a project proposal for a regional SPS Service Support Platform.
21. Under the EDF-11 facility, the *Pacific Regional Integration Support Program* (PRISE) will unlock opportunities for the Council of Regional Organizations in the Pacific (CROP) -coordinated support in promoting regional trade. LRD's engagement will be in building capacities at regional and country level in Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary Standards and Biosecurity Systems and Processes and in progressing commodities with high trade potential (such as Coconuts, Cocoa and Kava). The EDF 11 will encompass 15 Pacific nations and establish strong synergies with the EDF-11 PROTÉGÉ program running in the French speaking territories and other trade-facilitated initiatives in the Pacific (PHAMA+; PACER+).
22. The EU funded *Coconut Investment Development Project* (CIDP) invested specifically in coconut derived value chains and products by strengthening and supporting Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in selected countries in the Pacific. Given the strategic value of the *Tree of Life* in the Pacific, this project is an enabler to other potential investments that will contribute to reviving the coconut industry in the Pacific. ACIAR approved earlier this year the project: '*Safeguarding and deploying coconut genetic resources in the Pacific*' that will strengthen the conservation and utilization of coconut diversity and address biotic stress to this diversity in the region.
23. Involvement of Women and Youth: In 2018, LRD/Pacific Organic and Ethical Trade Community (POETCom) was successful in obtaining funding for the project '*Building Prosperity for Women Producers, Processors and Women Owned Businesses*' in the North Pacific and in Kiribati. This project has the objective of building prosperity through organic value chains by addressing existing barriers to women's economic engagement in agriculture and by creating targeted opportunities to participate in the high-value-added niche of organic products. LRD is also working with stakeholders in Melanesia in developing a "youth at work" operational mechanism to supporting food security. Under the umbrella of an FAO Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), LRD will be promoting activities that integrate youth, gender equality and women's empowerment.

24. The EU ACP has approved an international commodities project with a Pacific component that will unlock and blend resources. The International Trade Centre (ITC) in partnership with SPC will be executing the project. It will follow the *alliances for action* modality the ITC has utilized in the Caribbean Intra ACP coconut project to support value chain development, with flexibility to adapt to Pacific requirements. The project will create an understanding of the market and possible buyers (local and international) who will invest and work on product development; economic and social/environmental feasibility of the value chains and their profitability for farmers, and mapping a model of implementation.

Conclusion

25. LRD is aware of the urgency of its mission and seeks to deliver effective expert scientific advice for development, building capacity and services to support the national capabilities in alignment with Country needs. We seek to maximize the benefits of limited funding to ensure that in-country lessons will be shared regionally. Through the business planning process, LRD re-focused its resources and built inclusive relationships to guide work in the four thematic areas of plant genetic resources, forest and landscape management, resilient agricultural systems, diversification of livelihood strategies and access to markets.