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Author(s):	Franck Magron, Celine Muron

Summary/short description/key points:

Following the COVID-19 pandemic and associated travel bans, SPC is experimenting with alternate ways of providing coastal fisheries and aquaculture technical support to fisheries agencies, such as video conferencing and the development of on-line courses and videos. This Working Paper reflects on the last year's experiences and proposes the way forward with the guidance and feedback of Pacific Island fisheries agencies.

The associated Information Paper provides case studies that are complementary to this Working paper.

Outcomes and recommendations:

Participants are invited to provide feedback on the proposed video conferencing and on-line training options.

Scientific and technical support in a COVID-19 context

Background

1. Traditionally a lot of the technical support and knowledge transfer was conducted through in-person meetings and on-the-job and training workshops conducted either in country or at SPC headquarters. National staff usually enjoyed participating to the trainings and gave positive feedback. Yet some were not necessarily in position to apply the new skills acquired afterward or changed jobs without being able to transfer their expertise to the new staff and periodical training/retraining was necessary.
2. The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting travel bans have forced SPC staff and members to change the way we handle technical support through an extraordinary and rapid adoption of video conferencing, and the increased development of on-demand training modules and videos. 2020 and into 2021 has been the year of experimentation, trials of technologies and new workshop formats. We sometimes faced technical and organisational hurdles due to the various time zones, bandwidth limitations and hardware issues, but the change also created opportunities to improve the way we work together for better support and long-term benefit to Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs).

Alternatives to travel for scientific and technical support

3. Video conferencing is a good alternative to in-person meetings, especially during the pandemic crisis, and its usage exploded last year. Yet we also observed an increase in requests to participate in on-line meetings and video conferences, gradually replacing other means of communication such as emails and other written communications. As a result, a lot more time has been spent in virtual meetings than before, at the detriment of other activities. “Zoom fatigue”, a tiredness associated with overusing virtual platforms of communication, has escalated, so a balance must be found so that online platforms remain beneficial and do not impair other activities.
4. For training and workshops run through video-conferencing, several online applications have been tested to increase remote interactions, assess trainees or get feedback from participants. [Slido](https://www.slido.com)¹ quizzes are used during trainings for additional engagement and polls to get feedback on courses; [Miro](https://miro.com)² and [Conceptboard](https://conceptboard.com)³ are used for brainstorming and to facilitate open discussions on selected topics though the use of virtual sticky notes. There are numerous other tools and we welcome your feedback on what you like or dislike of the ones you have been exposed to during the past year or so.
5. On-line training is increasingly available in the academic world, but it is not yet widely used in fisheries and aquaculture in the Pacific region. The development of on-demand training modules, using on-line learning platforms such as [Moodle](https://moodle.com)⁴, generally take more time than delivering a traditional in-person training, but provides ongoing access to the course when

¹ <https://www.slido.com>

² <https://miro.com>

³ <https://conceptboard.com>

⁴ <https://moodle.com>

needed, for a refresher or when new staff arrive and require training. On-demand courses are not time-bound and can be followed at any time, but national staff must be given the opportunity to allocate time to follow and complete the modules. Several courses are in development for legislative drafting, conducting landing surveys and using QGIS.

6. Training and awareness videos have been produced by FAME since the 1990s and distributed on VHS tapes, then DVDs and now on streaming platforms (YouTube). The format has changed, with shorter videos and simple messages for general audiences and adapted to country-specific contexts. These videos can be used as part of trainings, workshops or events. With travel restrictions, the choice of filming locations is limited but video production still continues.
7. Your feedback, comments and priority topics for the production of on-line training modules and videos will guide the further development of training courses and awareness materials that have benefit to the largest audiences in the region.
8. Finally, we are conscious that not everything can be done remotely, especially for field surveys and community work, but local experts and senior country staff may be in a position to reduce the impacts of the pandemic-related travel restrictions with the remote assistance from SPC experts at the time of survey preparation and data analysis.
9. The development and change process is iterative, so your feedback on the accumulated experiences of using video conferencing and on-line training, your priorities for the development of on-demand training modules and videos, as well as alternate solutions to cope with the limitations of remote assistance, are sought for the medium and long-term technical support to Pacific Island fisheries and aquaculture agencies.

Questions for discussion

10. How can we improve the video conferencing experience in support of coastal fisheries and aquaculture training (Zoom vs Teams; number of locations; number of days; number of hours per day for a training workshop and for practical exercises in between Zoom sessions); tools for interactive sessions?
11. What format should be favoured to maximise and improve long term impact of training (short videos; on-demand training courses; country or sub-regional remote training workshops) and what are the priority topics for the development of coastal fisheries and aquaculture courses and awareness videos?
12. What are some of the alternative solutions to provide coastal fisheries and aquaculture related technical support for activities that can't be done remotely, such as field and community work?