

Pathways for food system change in Solomon Islands

KEY MESSAGES

- Solomon Islands’ strong connection to traditional systems, in combination with development partnerships, creates an opportunity to enable sustainable, affordable and healthy diets for the whole population, as well as improve livelihoods opportunities
- Rural areas must be prioritized alongside urban areas, and strong connections forged between them for national prosperity
- Three key ‘themes’ to guide pathways for food system change may be recognized:
 - (i) Strengthen and connect rural food systems;
 - (ii) Strengthen the policy environment and national and provincial levels; and
 - (iii) Advocate for food environments that make healthy food more accessible, affordable and convenient
- The pathways identified recognize areas of strength that are already being supported and that do not need to be ‘transformed’ as much as they need to be strengthened to continue their positive trajectory

CONTEXT

Transformation of food systems to be healthier and more sustainable is needed to meet numerous development challenges, including achieving the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. Successful pathways for food system change will need to engage governments and other stakeholders at local, national, and regional levels, across multiple sectors. More effective cross-sectoral governance institutions will be critical to develop and implement coherent and complementary food systems policies.

In Solomon Islands, the food system is influenced by processes and events happening within the country, as well as processes and events in the broader landscape that impact on the production, distribution and consumption of food, such as extreme weather events, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Solomon Islands’ strong connection to traditional systems, in combination with development partnerships, creates a unique opportunity to undertake actions that simultaneously provide

sustainable, affordable and healthy diets for the whole population, as well as good livelihood opportunities. Three key ‘themes’ have been identified as a result of consultations and analysis to guide pathways for food system change in Solomon Islands. These pathways are centred on different scales (provincial, national inward looking and national outward-looking) but overlap and interact in important ways. Rural areas must be prioritized with urban areas, and strong connections forged between rural and urban areas as these are critical to national prosperity. The pathways recognize areas of strength that are already being supported and that do not need to be ‘transformed’ as much as they need to be strengthened to continue their positive trajectory.

Below we summarize the three broad pathways and headline recommended actions. These recommendations and the implementation mechanisms within them, are given more context in terms of issues and what is already being done in the tables below.

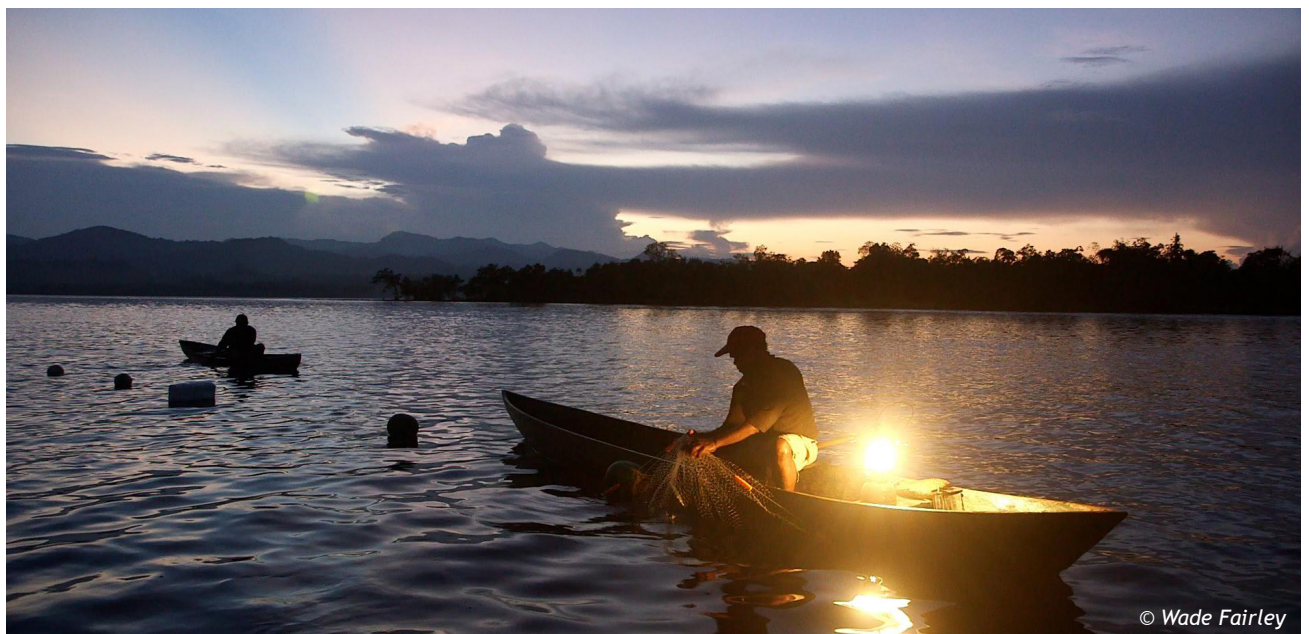


Image: Lantern fishing, Solomon Islands.

PATHWAY ONE: STRENGTHEN & CONNECT RURAL FOOD SYSTEMS

Food production largely happens at village level in Solomon Islands. Governance over productive spaces is generally held at the local level, for example, more than 90 percent of inshore coastal areas (land and sea) are tribally owned through customary land tenure as recognised in the Solomon Islands National Constitution. Local governance and practices have deep cultural foundations; building connections between these institutions and ways of life, and initiatives and projects originating at

provincial and national levels, will be critical to sustained progress. Collaboration among national and provincial governments, in partnership with private sector and civil society, is important to effectively respond to growing food demand and adapt to the changing climate (FAO, 2019). This collaboration is also needed to support integration across sectors to better interface with local informal institutions. Key recommendations are to:

- Investigate and establish opportunities to increase

Table 1. Pathway one and recommended actions (in blue).

EXISTING SUPPORT STRUCTURES (policies, programs, people)	IMPLEMENTATION MECHANISMS (national level)	IMPLEMENTATION MECHANISMS (provincial level)
INCREASE COMMUNITY LEVEL PRODUCTION OF FOODS THAT HAVE MULTIPLE BENEFITS FOR NUTRITION, ENVIRONMENT, & LIVELIHOODS		
ISSUES ADDRESSED: Domestic food production/ Poverty & unemployment/ Job creation, innovation, value chains for export & domestic markets		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural development, rural training centres • Local kaikai programs • Pacific food revolution • Village institutions (e.g. Churches) • The 93% of households who grow food • Kastom Garden Association • MCILI set of relevant policy activities • Supply of & access to inputs for production & processing e.g., like improved seeds, seedlings & livestock breeds • Introduction of resilient, niche & highland crops • Targets for import substitution (rice, chicken, pork, beef, eggs, wheat) • CBRM of fisheries to safeguard sustainable supply 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting women's roles in production • Mobilise rural youth in food production through making food production sector more 'attractive' • Policy to enable village life & rural food distribution activities • Cooperative structures for domestic distribution of foods necessary for population dietary needs • Incentives & inputs to favour sustainable food production that contributes to meeting national population dietary needs • National work plans to support achievable provincial activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agribusiness/ enterprise opportunities for rural women & youths beyond copra, kava, palm e.g. Poultry • Promote village structures that function as cooperatives to support domestic food distribution • Ongoing support for extension officers, including for traditional foods for domestic consumption • Start-up grants, information materials • Education & advocacy for growing & consuming underutilised indigenous foods • Training on hygienic fish-handling & processing • Provincial government to inform national work plans
TRADE-OFFS & LIMITATIONS: Trade-offs between value adding, income generation & food affordability / Cash crop vs. subsistence farming / Import substitution doesn't include replacing unhealthy foods with local healthy food		
INCENTIVISE FOOD PROCESSING & VALUE ADDING FOR NATIONAL CONSUMPTION		
ISSUES ADDRESSED: Inequality in availability of, & access, to local foods/ Disconnect between urban consumption & rural food systems		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MCILI initiatives to support food SMEs in processing & innovation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review feasibility for value-added or minimally processed foods on scale for urban markets (e.g. Chicken cuts, dried fruits & nuts, root flours) • Improving transport & storage of domestically-produced value-added food at markets, • Create stronger connections across the supply chain between value added foods & the retail market • Gendered approach • Different approaches for rural & urban areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market analysis for feasibility for value-added or minimally processed foods on scale for urban markets • Improve communication across the supply chain for key domestic commodities • Increased investment in entrepreneurship & food product development, preferencing inclusion of women & youth • Identify promising areas & activities for innovation for new products (fish, fruit, vegetables)
TRADE-OFFS & LIMITATIONS: Trade-offs between value adding, income generation & food affordability		
CONNECTING PRODUCERS IN RURAL AREAS WITH DEMAND FOR PRODUCTS IN URBAN AREAS		
ISSUES ADDRESSED: Wealth creation/ Urban food demand		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job creation, innovation, value chains for export & domestic • Backward linkages through public food procurement • Both of the above are priorities of MCILI & also Trade Framework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create business development opportunities for value-added food products • Support cooperative development centred on coordinating domestic value adding • Adopt policies in public food procurement that preference local food systems • Market information systems • Improving transport & storage of domestically-produced food to increase sellers' access to markets • Enhance government support for private sector e.g., support for financing /access to credit & training • Potential to bring together existing private sectors support - which is currently very commodity-specific 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preferencing of agribusiness/enterprise opportunities for rural women & youths in food value adding • Ensure loans available at village level

community level production of foods for domestic markets that have multiple benefits for nutrition, environment, and livelihoods

- Incentivise opportunities for food processing and value adding for national consumption.

- Facilitate pathways that inform and connect producers in rural areas with demand for products in urban areas, including promote entrepreneurship, with preferential opportunities for women and youths

PATHWAY TWO: STRENGTHEN THE NATIONAL POLICY ENVIRONMENT

While there are logical arguments for taking an analytical systems approach to food related challenges that span dimensions of health, culture, environment and livelihoods, implementing ‘food systems’ national policy to affect substantial on-ground change is challenging. Agencies already struggling with resourcing and capacity issues cannot simply be expected to add another level of accountability to their obligations. What is needed is a reframing of the role and centrality of food in the economy and culture of Solomon Islands. Our analysis highlights strengths in existing policy, but also that there have been substantial challenges in moving to a multi-sectoral approach to food systems. Elevation of food policy to a cross-ministerial level, with oversight by a central agency, would be ideal for ensuring the various dimensions of food are equally addressed, creating greater integration across the value chain.

Integration of policies and activities with the NGO sector will be important to better interface with local processes. The objectives of all initiatives should be drawn from national, provincial and local ambitions and plans rather than those of external actors. Key recommendations are to:

- Promote and strengthen the National Food Council to progress ‘food system’ approaches e.g., actions from UNFSS dialogue, the (draft) National Food Security, Food Safety and Nutrition Policy and all other food-related policies to be integrated under the National Food Council
- Invest in institutional and individual capacity for cross-sectoral engagement, negotiation, management and leadership
- Promote ‘food system change’ as a lens for opportunities to improve health, environment and development

Table 2. Pathway two and recommended actions (in blue).

EXISTING SUPPORT STRUCTURES (policies, programs, people)	IMPLEMENTATION MECHANISMS (national level)	IMPLEMENTATION MECHANISMS (provincial level)
NATIONAL FOOD COUNCIL TO PROGRESS ‘FOOD SYSTEM’ APPROACH E.G., ACTIONS FROM UNFSS DIALOGUE		
ISSUES ADDRESSED: Interaction between food sectors / Capacity for cross-sectoral engagement on food systems issues		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi-sectoral engagement in UNFSS national dialogue • Revision & adoption of the National Food Safety & Nutrition Policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Food Council to oversee implementation of UNFSS recommendations & coordination between sectors, including consistency of incentives for sustainability, nutrition & livelihoods • Engage leaders & champions in the food system movement (e.g., Jimmy Rodgers) • Adopt accountability framework for food systems aligned to UNFSS, SDG’s & National Development Strategy • Determine funding envelope to achieve these • Build political will for creating the structures & expectations of inter-ministerial cooperation on food system action for rural & urban areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provincial associations/ communities to connect with National Food Council through formal feedback mechanisms, such as provincial visits & annual combined dialogue that brings together national & provincial government actors & community leaders • Provincial leaders to decide on local mechanisms for cross-sectoral engagement. • Provincial leaders to continue calls for greater attention on food & health
TRADE-OFFS & LIMITATIONS: Ongoing exclusion of provincial partners, or development of mechanisms that do not benefit provinces		
INVEST IN INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY FOR CROSS-SECTORAL ENGAGEMENT (AT DIFFERENT SCALES)		
ISSUES ADDRESSED: Commitment to implementation / Involvement of provincial partners / Capacity for cross-sectoral engagement on food systems issues		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing capacity development activities by MAL & SINU • Structure for devolution to provincial level established in some policies e.g. Fisheries Management Policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support strategic capacity development of leadership, provincial directors & middle management to engage & negotiate across sectors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build capacity of extension workers & provincial leaders on food systems concepts to achieve multiple objectives
TRADE-OFFS & LIMITATIONS: Capacity development limited to urban/peri-urban areas		
PROMOTE FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR HEALTH, ENVIRONMENT & DEVELOPMENT		
ISSUES ADDRESSED: Involvement of provincial partners in food system dialogue / Visibility of informal actors & their roles		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local kaikai programs • Pacific food revolution • Kastom Garden Assoc. • Mothers Union • The 93 percent of people who grow food 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Food Council to frame food systems as an opportunity for integrated & coherent policies across sectors • Ensuring that framing encompasses livelihoods, nutrition & environmental aspects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication of food systems concept to villages through radio, entertainment or other means
TRADE-OFFS & LIMITATIONS: Food treated primarily as a commodity within policy		

PATHWAY THREE: ADVOCATE FOR FOOD ENVIRONMENTS THAT MAKE HEALTHY FOOD MORE ACCESSIBLE, AFFORDABLE AND CONVENIENT

Most people in Solomon Islands produce their own healthy foods, however, not enough healthy foods such as fruit and non-starchy vegetables is being produced per capita to meet recommended dietary intakes. In addition, there is an ongoing shift away from consumption of local foods and toward unhealthy imported foods. There are many drivers for this dietary transition, including gaps in local food storage and preservation, as well as convenience and relative price that would make them preferable. While advocating for healthy foods and living is necessary, it is not sufficient on its own to affect change.

Understanding and improving local food environments will need to be part of any pathway for moving toward healthier and more sustainable diets. Key recommendations are to:

- Promote local production knowledge and the critical role of traditional agriculture and local food system practices to Solomon Islands
- Promote local Solomon Islands foods to stimulate domestic demand
- Address food price and access to make healthy food more accessible, affordable and convenient

Table 3. Pathway Three and recommended actions (in blue).

EXISTING SUPPORT STRUCTURES (policies, programs, people)	IMPLEMENTATION MECHANISMS (national level)	IMPLEMENTATION MECHANISMS (provincial level)
PROMOTE THE CRITICAL ROLE OF LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS TO SOLOMON ISLANDS / PROMOTE LOCAL SOLOMON ISLANDS FOODS		
ISSUES ADDRESSED: Stimulating demand for local food		
Ministry of Health and Medical Services & Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development efforts towards education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop information materials, extension services on crops suitable for intensive subsistence farming rather than cash crops • Marketing that promotes food sovereignty & that showcases Solomon Islands foods & national identity • Promote resilient, niche & highland crops • Introduce to national school curriculum • Food cultural events to showcase Solomon cuisine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop information materials, extension services based on local expertise for subsistence farming in villages • Cultural promotion & preservation • Diversity of crops in village gardens • Communal approach to food system action that develops people & products
ADDRESS PRICES & CONVENIENCE		
ISSUES ADDRESSED: Food access & affordability		
Market places & agencies exist which are oriented to fresh local food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop Ward markets for urban communities • Scale-up - the sup sup garden programme with support from MAL officers • HCC to support Market vendors association & Fishers associations 	Provincial government to support collaborative community development activities for affordable & convenient healthy food

REFERENCES

- Farmery, A. et al. 2022. National assessment of the Solomon Islands food system.

ABOUT

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