Food systems thinking is essential to holistically address the food and nutrition security challenges faced by Pacific countries and territories.

Food systems are complex, and the flow of information and evidence is critical to improve knowledge of food system dynamics and outcomes.

The SPC Food Systems Briefs series is designed to accelerate the flow of quantitative information to policy makers.

**KEY MESSAGES**

**CONTEXT**

**FOOD AND NUTRITION IN THE PACIFIC**

Food is at the core of health and sustainability challenges. Food consumption is a key determinant of human health, wellbeing and development, and food production and supply are both drivers and subjects of environmental change. The United Nations defines food security as that circumstance when all people, at all times, have the physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy life.

The term food and nutrition security (FNS) captures the importance of not just averting hunger, but also providing nutritious food that help sustain healthy people. A focus on addressing nutrition as well as hunger is particularly important to the Pacific region where malnutrition takes many forms, including over-consumption of energy dense food.

**FOOD SYSTEMS IN THE PACIFIC**

FNS is a complex concept, both analytically and practically in terms of policy implementation. There are many human, biophysical, social, economic, political and cultural factors associated with food value chains and consumption. Choices people make about food are complex and deeply embedded in history, contemporary culture and are constrained by availability and affordability.
To emphasize these linkages and the outcomes that flow from them, the FNS challenge needs to be addressed using the language of ‘food systems’. In simple terms, a food system is the set of interacting elements and outcomes that describe the production, processing, trade, and consumption of food. These elements and outcomes are interconnected and influenced by a range of external drivers, such as urbanization and land degradation (see figure). A food system framing helps us make those connections across the range of challenges and emphasizes the need to address dysfunction across the whole system if progress is to be made in achieving FNS.

By many reckonings, food systems in the Pacific region are not performing as they should. Per capita agricultural and coastal fisheries production are declining and malnutrition and poor quality diets are now a leading contributor to the burden of disease. Most PICTs are increasingly reliant on imported shelf-stable foods that bring both opportunities and costs in terms of FNS.

As in other regions, the literature on the Pacific Food System is fragmented and sectoral. As examples: strong voices have most usually articulated the NCD crisis as a public health issue; fisheries are framed as an economic and sustainability challenge; and connections drawn between climate change and public health outcomes are weak. As a related problem, the evidence base is sparse and delays in the translation of research hamper policy and action.

THE SPC FOOD SYSTEMS BRIEF SERIES

SPC and its partners are working hard on many fronts to build an evidence base for decision-making in the region. This series of evidence briefs is designed to improve the flow of information to policy makers and other stakeholders to achieve FNS in the Pacific region. The briefs are designed to provide snippets of analysis and short data summaries.

Sup Sup Garden in Malaita, Solomon Islands. Wade Fairley, 2012.

SOURCES

- Pacific Community Statistics for Development Division, SPC Food Security: sdd.spc.int/topic/food-security

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