

EIGHTH REGIONAL MEETING OF
PACIFIC HEADS OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY SERVICES (HOAFS)
(Nadi, Fiji, 09 March 2023)

INFORMATION PAPER – UPDATE OF SPC FLAGSHIP FOOD SYSTEMS PROGRAMME

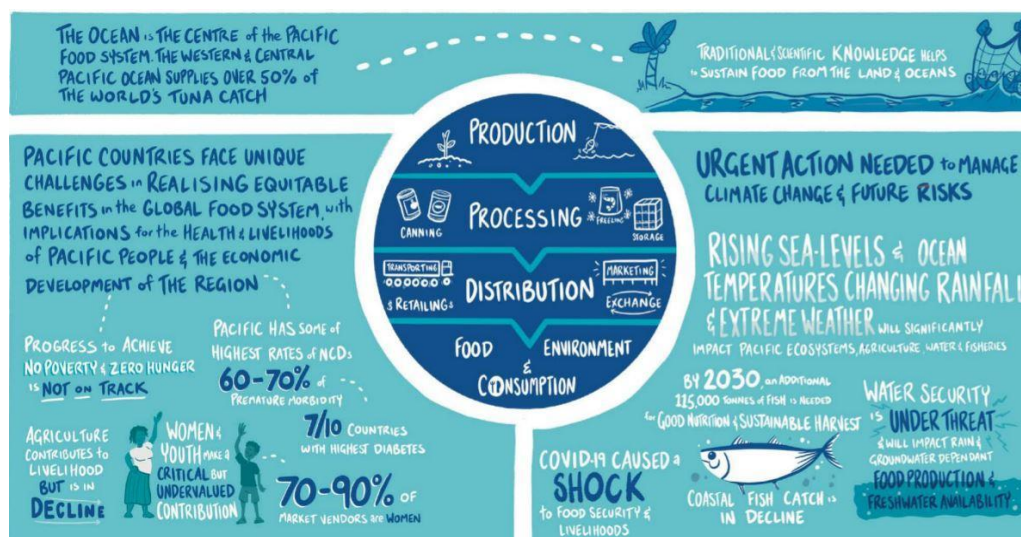
Purpose

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide an update by way of a summary account of the developments to date regarding the development of SPC's Food Systems flagship. Providing an update to PHOAFs is important as agriculture and forestry sectors are key stakeholders in food systems. Specifically, the paper will provide an update on progress since the Global Food Systems Summit, held in September 2021; and internal developments to advance an integrated approach to supporting member countries to address food systems challenges and opportunities.

Background

2. Within the global food system, the Pacific has a unique position. Unique in that 50 – 70 percent of our people are dependent on the land and ocean resources for the livelihoods. Over 50% of the global tuna catch comes from our region's sustainably managed tuna fisheries; and in terms of crop diversity, the Pacific Community's Centre for Pacific Crops and Trees, houses over 2,000 accessions of the region's staple crops taro, yam, sweet potato, banana, cassava, and breadfruit. The taro collection is particularly unique, being the largest collection of taro diversity globally – over 1,000 accessions.
3. The Pacific region is also in a unique position given that despite the proximity and access to land and sea (both central to Pacific diets and culture), the region faces high levels of disease, premature disability, and death. The latter is particularly linked to two forms of malnutrition - over-nutrition and under-nutrition. Non-Communicable diseases (NCDs) account for around 70-75% of all deaths in the region¹. These problems are linked to challenges in maintaining adequate and effective food systems that ensure the availability of sufficient, safe, and nutritious food for everyone.

¹ Source: World Health Organisation (WHO)



Source: SPC Evidence Brief: Pacific Food Systems

4. The biggest threat to the region is climate change. Changes to the frequency and impact of climate hazards such as cyclones, floods, droughts, and storm surges have long-term impacts on food production. In the case of fisheries, climate change has seen increased sea temperatures and current flows, which will bring shifts in the distribution of marine fish stocks, with some areas benefiting while others lose out. To minimise and manage further losses, and in line with resilient and food systems principles, a need to re-organise and promote shorter supply chains.
5. Biodiversity plays a critical role in ensuring sustainable food security required to achieve nutritional outcomes and in many areas of the Pacific, agricultural and food systems are being rapidly degraded, and their biodiversity lost. There is the breakdown of traditional shifting agro-forestry systems. Food production is declining in most Pacific Island countries and territories, with low growth in food crop production (staple crops, fruits, and vegetables), and static or decreasing yields. This has been largely due to lower soil fertility, increasing soil erosion due to poor agricultural practices that impact on coastal ecosystems and fisheries resources; and increase in pests, diseases, and invasive species with long-term debilitating impacts on local food sources.
6. In addition to environmental factors above, there are also several socioeconomic and political factors that further undermine Pacific food security and impacts the broader food system. These include:
 - increasing populations in some countries.
 - poorly performing economies in most countries.
 - land tenure and land access issues.
 - labour and mobility.
 - high urbanisation rates (especially in Micronesia and Polynesia); and
 - violations of human rights and social issues confronting communities.

7. The smorgasbord of issues and linkages across sectors demonstrates the complexity of a food system. In a linear process, these directly involve production, processing, transport, and consumption; but the broader elements encompass governance and economics of food production, its sustainability, the degree to which we waste food, how food production affects the natural environment, and the impact of food on individual and population health. All this point to the Pacific's food security and food systems being under threat and that this will have more drastic impacts on our region if not addressed now, and in a holistic and integrated fashion.
8. As the Pacific's own scientific and technical organisation, SPC brings research and expertise in multiple areas related to food production, consumption, trade, and policy. This includes work in health, climate and oceans science, disaster resilience, agriculture and forestry, fisheries and aquaculture, water, energy, culture, human rights, youth, gender, and statistics.

The Forward Agenda

9. Much of the advocacy, and background work in bringing together food systems has been taking place the last 2+ years (since 2019). Then 2021 saw a culmination of "big ticket items" at national, regional, and global levels, that brought together food systems, and the diverse stakeholders and sectors and disciplines. This has catalysed momentum and commitment to applying a food systems approach to bring together sectors and different areas of expertise, that has propelled food systems as a Key Focus Area in the SPC Strategic Plan 2022-2031, and the creation of a dedicated food systems flagship² programme within SPC.

The 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit & the Oceans Conference

10. The UN Food Systems summit, held in September 2021, served as a historical opportunity to empower all people to leverage the power of food systems to deliver progress on all 17 Sustainable Development Goals, each of which relies to some degree on healthier, more sustainable, and equitable food systems.
11. At the request of the Pacific Ambassadors to the United Nations, SPC supported our members to engage in the Food Systems dialogue process. SPC developed a series of evidence briefs on Pacific Food Systems to support a strong, evidence-based Pacific voice in the Food Systems space. SPC facilitated a regional food systems dialogue in May 2021, convened by Minister of Health, Kingdom of Tonga, in partnership with UN agencies and also participated in a number of national food systems dialogues.

² Flagship: in SPC this is in reference to an integrated programming and one with scale and resourcing to support holistic outcomes where all SPC programmes can contribute to.

12. Countries took these dialogue outcomes to the UN Food Systems Summit in September 2021. These commitments have also been articulated in **national food systems pathways**. These pathways were intended to serve as points of reference across government and for all stakeholders in coming years to advance cross sectoral food systems work.
13. As part of our efforts to continuously build the evidence base, SPC has commissioned a rapid regional analysis of these national pathways. This allows us to build a regional understanding of where members' national priorities align and diverge, to encourage development partners and other actors to channel food systems support.
14. Post the Food Summit, SPC on behalf of our members has joined the Aquatic/Blue Foods Coalition of the UNFSS. This is the platform to raise international awareness about the under-recognised contributions of the Pacific region to global food systems, and of aquatic/blue foods to food systems solutions. It is a great opportunity to elevate Pacific voices calling for urgent action to address key challenges at the food – oceans – climate nexus; and to leverage support and cooperation for Pacific projects and opportunities to accelerate implementation of sustainable blue food priority objectives of members. As similar platforms emerge that is specific to Agriculture and Forestry, SPC will endeavour to also join its ranks to advocate as above.

Food Systems and the SPC Strategic Plan

15. The SPC Strategic Plan was endorsed by members at its governing Conference December 2021. The Strategic Plan defines the organisational focus and aspirations to the year 2031. Of the seven (7) key focus areas, one is on Food Systems (KFA 3). The Strategic Plan is also very clear in drawing on and building on interdisciplinary approaches and integrated programming.
16. As a regional technical agency, SPC has the combined competence across many elements of the food system, both Blue (from oceans and water) and Green (from public health and NCDs, agriculture and land resources, water, fisheries science, and statistics). Further, the access to line Ministries and Ministerial and/or Heads of Ministry Meetings like HOAFS, is an asset to build on so that integrated programming in Food Systems and other areas are explored and discussed with key decision makers and other stakeholders, placing ownership and accountability at the heart of such deliberations.
17. Integrated programming in SPC – including the Food Systems programme - in SPC is grounded in culture, gender and social inclusion, rights-based methodologies, data and evidence, and monitoring, evaluation, and learning. It connects to other cutting-edge initiatives across the organisation, including the Pacific Community Centre for Ocean Science (PCCOS), the Pacific Data Hub, and Pacific Centre for Crops and Trees (CePaCT). All these are key regional public goods and centres of expertise can be further leveraged through interdisciplinary ways of working that enhance SPC's impact with member countries.

18. In July, SPC recruited a Food Systems Programme Lead, responsible for the leadership and coordination of the Food Systems for Health, Resilience and Prosperity Integrated Programme. The role drives the development and implementation of an integrated, cross-organisational work programme, harnessing SPC's capability across multiple divisions. This Programme Lead is situated within SPC's Land Resources Division but works across the organisation with what will be a robust and dynamic reporting mechanism. Supporting the Lead is an internal Food Systems Taskforce that has representation from across all SPC's programmes/divisions.
19. As part of this work, SPC is now developing a Theory of Change for Food Systems. This will further elaborate on the Strategic Plan to identify ways the programme will work to **promote** change for greatest returns and results. The Theory of Change will clearly define SPC's long-term goals and then maps backward to identify necessary preconditions that will support national pathways and contribute to the achievement of regional policy frameworks and the 2030 agenda, the SPC strategic plan and the 2050 Strategy, while advocating for large ocean states in global food systems conversations.

The 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent

20. The *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent* was endorsed by Leaders in July this year. However, discussions and consultations have been over a multi-year period and involving Pacific Island countries. The Strategy represents the ongoing commitment of the region to work together to build on its shared stewardship of the Pacific Ocean, our natural resources & environment, cultures, and livelihoods. The Strategy thematic areas include Political Leadership and Regionalism; People-Centred Development; Peace and Security; Resource and Economic Development; Climate Change and Disasters; Ocean and Environment; and Technology and Connectivity. Food Systems cuts across all the thematic areas, but ultimately would largely centre around Resource and Economic Development (food production, livelihoods, supply chains etc.); Climate Change and Disasters (biodiversity, resilience) and Ocean and Environment (fisheries, land resources, planetary health).
21. Underpinning the 2050 Strategy is *inclusivity* and the acknowledgement that efforts will require the contribution of all stakeholders. A key constituent group is youth and under-represented groups in food systems, is crucial how we harvest this youth demographic to be both a beneficiary and an empowered collective to participate in national and regional initiatives.

Conclusion

22. Agriculture and forestry (with oceans and fisheries) are at the centre of Pacific Food Systems, and fundamental for the health and prosperity of Pacific peoples and nations. Our challenge is to harness the still-untapped potential of locally grown, sourced, and value-added foods to meet nutrition needs, support economic development and maintain the health of blue ecosystems

Recommendations:

23. This information paper recommends that the Heads note the paper and update provided.