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STRENGTHENING THE ENABLING ENVIRONMENT TO ENHANCE FOOD SYSTEMS IN THE PACIFIC

December 2024

SDGs:



Countries: Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu

Project Code: TCP/SAP/3808

FAO Contribution: USD 244 000

Duration: 16 November 2021-31 December 2023

Contact Info: FAO Subregional Office for the Pacific Islands
SAP-SRC@fao.org

Implementing Partners

National ministries responsible for agriculture, fisheries, livestock, health, education and trade; National Statistics Office; National Disaster Management Office.

Beneficiaries

National and regional food systems policy makers and programme developers.

Country Programming Framework (CPF) Outputs

CPF 2018–2022

Output 1: Evidence-based recommendations developed and promoted to incentivize the production and consumption of safe and healthy food;

Output 2: Sustainable and climate smart practices promoted to help build resilient agriculture, fisheries and forestry production systems;

Output 3: Food control and business practices identified and promoted to facilitate efficient agri-food value chains which provide safe, nutritious and affordable food.



BACKGROUND

The Pacific Islands, classified as Small Island Developing States (SIDS), face significant challenges in maintaining resilient food systems. These systems are fragile due to a growing reliance on imported food, limited arable land, geographical remoteness and susceptibility to climate related disasters. Over the years, agricultural production in the region has steadily declined and has not returned to per capita levels seen in the mid-1990s. Limited processing and storage capacities, high transportation costs linked to fuel dependency and substantial food losses further compound these challenges.

The region has also experienced a dietary transition from traditional staples to imported, processed foods that are high in salt, sugar and fat but low in essential micronutrients such as vitamin A and iron.

This shift, combined with reduced physical activity, has driven a rapid rise in overweight, obesity and related non communicable diseases (NCD), making them the leading cause of death and morbidity in most Pacific SIDS. At the same time, undernutrition, including stunting, wasting and micronutrient deficiencies, persists, particularly among women of reproductive age and children under five, with stunting affecting almost one third of children in some Pacific countries. This "triple burden" of malnutrition, undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and obesity, poses a severe threat to public health and economic productivity, with projections indicating significant reductions in the labour force due to NCD-related mortality by 2040.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these vulnerabilities, exposing the fragility of food systems in the region. Border closures, travel restrictions and economic disruptions to tourism, remittances and trade compounded food insecurity and malnutrition. Recognizing these pressing issues, the 2019 meeting of Pacific Ministers of Agriculture and Forestry supported efforts by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to explore opportunities for food systems transformation in the region. This aligned with the objectives of the 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit, which aimed to energize global efforts towards more inclusive, sustainable and healthier food systems that support the achievement of the SDGs. National and regional dialogues were critical in ensuring that the unique challenges of Pacific SIDS were included in the global conversation, with a focus on leaving no one behind by addressing the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized populations.

To address these challenges, this Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) was designed to provide technical assistance to support Pacific countries and the region in developing and implementing transformational food systems pathways. It focused on fostering an enabling policy environment, enhancing inter-institutional coordination and promoting a comprehensive food systems approach to food security and nutrition. By engaging national and regional beneficiaries, including policymakers and programme developers, in multi sectoral dialogues, the project planned to equip them with strategic reports and roadmaps to support long-term, sustainable action on food systems transformation.

IMPACT

The project made significant contributions to promoting improved and resilient food security and nutrition across the Pacific Islands. By supporting countries in developing comprehensive food systems pathways and aligning them with national and regional strategies, the project strengthened the capacity of Pacific Island Countries to address key challenges in food production, distribution, and access. This work was fundamental in promoting sustainable development and enhancing the resilience of food systems, particularly in the face of climate change and other external pressures. The project, designed with a whole systems approach, addressed regional development needs and promoted a unified strategy for food systems coordination at both national and regional levels. High-level consultations involving ministers and heads of agriculture and forestry promoted regional dialogue, laying the groundwork for long-term improvements in food security and empowering communities to achieve greater self sufficiency and well-being.

ACHIEVEMENT OF RESULTS

The project focused on enhancing regional and national actions for sustainable food systems within established planning frameworks. At the outset, no institutionalized mechanisms for food systems coordination existed at either the national or regional levels for the participating countries. By the end of the project, foundational progress was achieved, including the development of an analytical report outlining options for a regional food systems coordination platform. This report was presented to Pacific countries, providing a basis for decision-making. Further work is necessary to address resource considerations for operationalizing the platform, with these issues slated for discussion at the next Ministers of agriculture and forestry meeting. Additionally, some countries received targeted support to develop their food systems pathways, ensuring alignment with national priorities and regional strategies. In Samoa, a costed implementation plan and performance monitoring framework were completed.



These documents were designed to align with the Samoa Food Systems Pathway (SFSP) 2030 and the Agriculture and Fisheries Sector Plan (AFSP) 2022-2027, ensuring coherence with the government’s planning and budgeting processes. This alignment strengthens resource allocation at the sector level and provides a structured framework to monitor progress in food and nutrition security, agricultural development and climate resilience. In other countries, progress was varied. Preliminary planning and reviews were conducted in Nauru and Vanuatu, but competing national priorities delayed finalization of the outputs. Similarly, planned activities for the Cook Islands and Niue were postponed, with development now scheduled to commence in 2024, supported by additional funding sources. At the regional level, a significant milestone was the presentation of a report outlining options for a regional multi-sectoral food systems platform. This work culminated in a session during the 2023 Ministers of Agriculture and Forestry Meeting, where evidence-based recommendations were presented.

Following deliberations, the Ministers endorsed the establishment of a technical coordination hub to support Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) in advancing their food systems transformation agendas. This hub will provide a regional mechanism for addressing food systems challenges and ensuring sustained collaboration. Furthermore, the approval of a new TCP focusing on nutrition-sensitive food systems will address a critical gap identified in the region, aligning with broader efforts to integrate nutrition into food systems planning. However, the development of concept notes on other specific gaps was not completed due to competing priorities. The achievements of this project demonstrate meaningful progress in establishing foundational frameworks for sustainable food systems across the Pacific.

Nonetheless, the challenges encountered underline the importance of continued resource mobilization and stakeholder engagement.

IMPLEMENTATION OF WORK PLAN AND BUDGET

The implementation of the workplan and budget reflected both progress and challenges in achieving the project's objectives. Key activities were undertaken to support the development of food systems pathways and enhance regional coordination mechanisms, with resources allocated to analytical studies, national planning processes and stakeholder consultations. In Samoa, the planned activities were successfully implemented, including the development of a costed implementation plan and performance monitoring framework. These outputs demonstrated effective alignment with national strategies and optimal use of allocated funds. However, in several other countries, such as Cook Island, Nauru, Niue and Vanuatu, progress was hindered by competing government priorities, delays in securing consultancy support and limited institutional capacity, leading to underutilization of planned budgets for certain activities. Regional-level initiatives, such as the preparation and presentation of a coordination platform report, were effectively delivered within budget, achieving key milestones such as ministerial endorsements for further action. Despite these successes, delays in some activities and the inability to complete planned outputs in specific countries highlight the need for improved resource mobilization, adaptive planning, and flexibility in addressing unforeseen challenges to ensure the efficient use of funds and timely delivery of outputs.

FOLLOW-UP FOR GOVERNMENT ATTENTION

For countries with pending pathways, governments will receive support through alternative funding sources.

SUSTAINABILITY

1. Capacity development

The sustainability of capacity-building efforts in food systems planning is being advanced through the ongoing adaptation of the costed implementation plan and Performance Monitoring Framework (PFM) into government planning and monitoring processes. Preliminary work carried out in the Cook Islands, Nauru and Vanuatu serves as a foundation for scaling up implementation efforts in the coming year. In parallel, the regional coordination mechanism developed collaboratively with the Pacific Community and in consultation with multiple partners, will be further refined for ministerial approval by May 2025.

National pathway documents, where completed, were embedded into country-level planning and monitoring frameworks; however, these efforts were constrained to countries where consultants could be hired. Moving forward, technical and financial support will be critical to ensuring the integration of these tools across additional countries and to solidifying regional coordination. These measures aim to institutionalize food systems planning and monitoring processes and ensure their sustainability within government structures and practices.

2. Gender equality

Sustainability efforts in food systems have been strengthened by mainstreaming the needs of both women and men into policy-level documents, ensuring gender-responsive approaches are embedded in planning and implementation. By addressing the unique roles and challenges faced by women and men within food systems, these policies promote equitable access to resources, opportunities and decision-making processes. This inclusive approach not only enhances the effectiveness and resilience of food systems but also supports long-term sustainability by recognizing and leveraging the contributions of all genders in achieving food security and economic development.

3. Environmental sustainability

Environmental sustainability was integrated into food systems through the mainstreaming of environmental considerations in policy-level documents. By addressing the interconnectedness of food systems with natural resources and ecosystems, these policies ensure that sustainability principles are embedded in planning and implementation. This approach promotes practices that protect biodiversity, enhance resource efficiency and mitigate environmental impacts, contributing to the long-term resilience and sustainability of food systems while supporting broader environmental goals.

4. Human Rights-based Approach (HRBA) – in particular Right to Food and Decent Work

A human rights-based approach, with a particular focus on the right to food, was mainstreamed into food systems through its inclusion in policy-level documents. This ensures that planning and implementation prioritize equitable access to adequate, safe and nutritious food for all, aligning with fundamental human rights principles. By addressing systemic barriers and empowering marginalized groups, these policies uphold dignity, participation and accountability, reinforcing the commitment to achieving sustainable and inclusive food systems that leave no one behind.

5. Economic sustainability

Economic sustainability was prioritized in food systems through the integration of economic considerations into policy-level documents. By addressing the need for resilient and inclusive economic practices, these policies ensure that food systems contribute to long-term economic growth, job creation, and livelihood stability. All beneficiaries working on food systems will benefit from the high-level strategic documents developed under this project, which provide a framework for promoting fair value chains, market access, and investment opportunities. This approach supports sustainable economic development while fostering equitable benefits across all stakeholders in the food systems.



ACHIEVEMENT OF RESULTS - LOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Expected Impact	Improved and resilient food security and nutrition for the Pacific Islands		
Outcome	Strengthened regional and national actions on sustainable food systems approach within the national and regional planning frameworks		
	Indicator	Multi-sectoral mechanisms for sustainable food systems in place and operational at national and regional level.	
	Baseline	No institutions with institutionalized food systems chain mechanisms at national (for participating countries) and regional level.	
	End Target	One formal mechanism is established and operational by project end.	
	Comments and follow-up action to be taken	Under this project, work on food systems planning and coordination was undertaken to support Pacific countries in addressing key challenges. An analytical report outlining options for a food systems coordination platform was developed and presented to the Pacific countries, providing a basis for informed decision-making. However, further work is needed to address concerns regarding the resources required to operationalise the platform. These considerations will be presented at the next Ministers of Agriculture and Forestry Meeting for further deliberation. Additionally, some countries received targeted support to advance the development of their food systems pathways, ensuring alignment with national priorities and regional strategies.	
Output 1	Pacific Islands development and completion of national food systems pathway supported		
	Indicators	Target	Achieved
	At least five completed national food systems pathway documents.	Five food systems pathway documents ready to be implemented for the five selected countries.	Partially
Baseline	0 final pathways for the five selected countries		
Comments	Cook Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Samoa and Vanuatu were earmarked for the development and revision of food systems pathway documents. In Samoa, a costed implementation plan and a PFM were successfully completed and submitted to the government. In contrast, preliminary planning and reviews were conducted for Nauru and Vanuatu, but these activities could not be completed due to competing priorities and challenges in securing consultancy support.		
Activity 1.1	Technical assistance to carry out national dialogues for Cook Islands and Niue		
	Achieved	No	
	Comments	Due to competing commitments within the countries, work on this activity was not conducted. While initial communications with the respective governments were initiated, progress was delayed due to other national priorities. It was agreed that work for these two countries will begin in 2024, supported by funding from the Food Systems Hub and other sources.	

Development of six country food systems pathway documents	
Achieved	Partially
Activity 1.2	<p>Cook Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Samoa and Vanuatu were earmarked for the development and revision of food systems pathway documents.</p> <p>In Samoa, support was provided to develop a costed implementation plan and a PFM. The PFM for the SFSP 2030 was built by mapping relevant performance indicators from the current AFSP 2022–2027 to ensure coherence and alignment. The approach included a review of the AFSP’s objectives, targets and performance indicators to understand its framework for assessing progress in the agriculture sector. This was complemented by an assessment of the SFSP to identify actions related to food and nutrition security, agriculture development and climate resilience. A systematic process was used to align and select relevant AFSP indicators with SFSP Action Pathways at the national level, ensuring that progress and outcomes related to food and nutrition security, agricultural development and climate resilience could be effectively measured. While not all indicators had established baselines or targets, baseline values were extracted from the AFSP where available, and targets were set based on the desired outcomes of the SFSP. Indicators were categorized into specific action areas, such as climate-resilient agricultural practices and social protection measures, ensuring alignment with SFSP pathways. A structured table documented these indicators, baselines and targets, forming the foundation of the PFM. This framework is designed to serve as a tool for policymakers, government agencies and development partners to track progress, make informed decisions and drive the transformation of Samoa’s food system.</p> <p>The Costing the Pathway Action Plan was also developed for Samoa and aligned with both the SFSP PFM and the AFSP’s 2022–2027 Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF). This alignment ensured coherence with the government’s planning and budgeting processes and strengthened resource allocation at the sector level. The costing process involved confirming the SFSP 2030 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) with stakeholders, assessing existing cost estimates for the agreed KPIs within the AFSP MTEF, and revising these to reflect updated requirements, such as personnel, equipment, technology and training. Potential funding sources were identified, including government budgets, donor contributions, grants, public–private partnerships and cost-sharing opportunities with stakeholders. Final consultations with key food systems stakeholders validated resource requirements, the budget and the monitoring and evaluation framework. Both the PFM and the costed implementation plan were finalized and submitted to the government for approval.</p> <p>In the Cook Islands and Niue, national dialogues did not take place as planned under Activity 1.1, resulting in the deferral of pathway document development to the following year.</p> <p>For Nauru, Palau and Vanuatu, costed implementation plans and monitoring frameworks were planned. However, due to competing government priorities and challenges in recruiting national consultants, these tasks could not be completed. In Nauru and Vanuatu, preparatory processes were initiated, and initial planning was conducted. However, these efforts faced delays due to government commitments and consultancy challenges, leaving finalized documents unavailable at the time of writing.</p>
Comments	

Output 2	Strengthened regional support and coordination to the Food Systems related actions at both national and regional levels		
	Indicators	Target	Achieved
	One report with regional actions to address FS in the Pacific.	One report.	Yes
Baseline	0		
Comments	A report outlining suggested options for regional food systems coordination in the Pacific was developed and presented to Pacific countries.		
Activity 2.1	Development of an analysis report of all national pathways to identify key focus areas for regional actions		
	Achieved	No	
	Comments	By the time of project implementation, this work had already been undertaken under another FAO funding source. The report included an analysis of all pathways, highlighting key areas of similarity and identifying specific areas of focus for the Pacific region.	
Activity 2.2	Review existing regional platforms and forums to identify/propose a suitable platform for a regional multi-sectoral group to review Food Systems matters at the regional level		
	Achieved	Yes	
	Comments	At the request of Pacific Island countries, an analytical review was conducted to assess existing regional food systems platforms and propose options for establishing a suitable platform for a regional multi-sectoral group to address food systems matters. The review was carried out through a desk study of available information on existing platforms and one-on-one consultations with a diverse range of stakeholders, including government representatives, Non-governmental Organizations, private sector actors and development partners. Additional internal consultations were held with FAO and Pacific Community staff to refine and finalize the report. The completed review was submitted to the Pacific Heads of Agriculture and Forestry. The report provided several options for the platform's structure, membership, operational framework and financial infrastructure to support its establishment and sustainability.	
Activity 2.3	Pacific Agriculture and Forestry Ministerial session on Food Systems Analysis		
	Achieved	Yes	
	Comments	A session and accompanying paper were planned and presented at the 2023 Ministers of Agriculture and Forestry Meeting, offering evidence-based considerations and recommendations for Pacific Ministers to support and catalyse PICTs efforts in developing and implementing national food systems transformation pathways. Following deliberations, the ministers endorsed the establishment of a regional technical coordination committee or hub to advance and inform food systems transformation agendas across PICTs. The meeting was attended by representatives from 22 countries, including all of FAO's Pacific member countries.	
Output 3	Project document and concept note focusing on addressing key gaps in Food Systems on the region drafted		
	Indicators	Target	Achieved
	One project document drafted; One concept note drafted	One; three.	Partially
Baseline	0		
Comments	This work was conducted internally and resulted in the development of a TCP project focused on food systems.		
Activity 3.1	Draft project document on one specific food systems gap		
	Achieved	Partially	
	Comments	A TCP was developed internally and approved, focusing on nutrition-sensitive food systems.	
Activity 3.2	Draft concept notes developed and resources mobilized on 3 specific gaps in relation to the report developed under Activity 2.1		
	Achieved	No	
	Comments	These were not developed due to competing priorities and activities.	

Partnerships and Outreach

For more information, please contact: Reporting@fao.org

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Viale delle Terme di Caracalla

00153 Rome, Italy



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