TOPIC: THE CHALLENGES OF FOOD SECURITY AND BIODIVERSITY TO AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture has been part of our Pacific Societies over many years and since then; our people have no issue with food security and biodiversity conservation. In rural development, agriculture becomes the major driving force behind various economic and development issues. In the Solomon Islands, more than 80% of the population engaged in agriculture sector and a major income generating activity for most people who are unemployed and living in the rural areas. In most countries nowadays, agriculture is declining due to global trade liberalization and western influence. In order to maintain our food security and the biodiversity of our natural resources and in agriculture, these challenges need to be addressed.

FOOD SECURITY AS a CHALLENGES TOWARDS AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Recently, I have just done a presentation on the changing roles of women in food security and agriculture in Fiji. And from what I have found in research is that the issue of Food security is the fundamental for health and development in the Pacific Islands. Likewise in the Solomon Islands, the country is experiencing a lot of changes in its economy. And of course, some of the challenges that have been faced by the Government are to restore Law and Order in the communities in order to attract investors to operate within the country.

Food security, by definition refers to the situation where a family at any household level has the ability to secure or access a regularly established food basket that provides for a healthy and nutritious meal for the family. The challenge of Food security can only be a problem if more farmers are not diversifying in their crop production. That is, if they continue to monopolies in their farming system, for instance, based on one type of crop or plant, when faced with issues like climate change or global economic crisis, they are more likely to suffer.

Moreover, Food security is also one way of eliminating Poverty in our communities. But that would have to take a lot of cooperation and mindset changes for that to be possible. Women in rural and urban areas play a significant role in contributing towards food security and agriculture. Over the past years and in our traditional societies, they have provided for the family and
community’s consumption as a whole. Without food security, people’s livelihood will also be affected and people will become poor, health affected and has no social, economic and financial security as well.

**BIODIVERSITY AS A CHALLENGE TO AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

The concept of biodiversity refers to the variety of different types of living and non-living organisms within the environment. It has become an issue in the Pacific Islands due to the ignorance and lack of knowledge of some people within our societies. In the Solomon, recently more people are now aware of the importance of biodiversity not only in land but on the marine environment as well. Although, rural development is important and to make that happen, one of the factors that could contribute significantly to this is agriculture, biodiversity is affected when, there are plantations or large-scale farming going on that may cause degradation to the habitats of some rare species of plants and organisms.

To add on, biodiversity is a challenge for any agriculture or rural development when new plants or animal’s species are introduced to control pests or diseases. A very good example of this is the cane frogs found common on Guadalcanal Island during the world war two to control the mosquitoes. Instead, it has become an invasive species threatening the existence and habitat of native frogs in the Solomon Islands. Additionally, because it is poisonous, it also places a risk to the health of people who have contact with it. Similarly is the giant African snail that is becoming a risk to the agricultural system in the Solomon Islands. This invasive species has been introduced through the logging companies that have operated in the country. The impacts this invasive species have caused to the biodiversity of the agricultural systems and native species is that, it destroys the vital cash crops of people and is a threat to the native land snails in the Country.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The suggested recommendation that could be taken is for the Government to recognize the role of women in Food security and Agriculture and to help local farmers in diversifying in their crops. Additionally, the Government should also provide education and training for women farmers, to enable them to maintain the vital role they play in agriculture, although it has been invincible in the past years. Another is for the educated youths to go back to their various
communities and involve in agricultural activities in the rural areas. Furthermore, the Government should also prioritize agriculture and provide technical assistance and expertise to rural people and encourage them in farming activities. But more importantly is for the government to move a step further and register all the lands in the country to make it easier for investors to invest in the country.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Solomon Islands are rich in resources such as land and the ocean but the challenges that prohibit the growth of agriculture and rural development in the country are the food security and biodiversity protection. Solomon Islands are also going through a change in the consumption and lifestyles influenced by western cultures. However, some of these influences may bring wealth to the country and people but it also degrades the country’s culture and greed to some people. With many environmental non-government organizations present in the country, more awareness about the issues of protecting the biodiversity of the environment which also maintains the food security of the people in any household level is becoming known to communities. This is also important for the country as, it requires the collaboration of different stakeholders in order to bring the country forward for a better Solomon Islands for all citizens.