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PACIFIC AGRICULTURE POLICY BANKS

PART 1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Agriculture and fisheries is the lifeblood of Pacific countries. Just two years ago, little was known publicly about what a country Government's plans and priorities were for these vital sectors, the extent of public support and where one might engage. This all changed with the development of "*Agriculture Policy Banks*" (APBs).

Today the APBs covering fifteen countries enables online access - by anyone to key agricultural information; policies, commodity plans, statistics and the operations of Agricultural Ministries. The benefits are already immense; Nationally, there is raised awareness and more inclusive engagement and fostering complementary regional approaches for common commodities.

PART 2 PROJECT INFORMATION

Background

The Pacific region comprises over twelve million people who rely on agriculture and fisheries for food security, incomes and societal development. Inherent challenges from being small, relatively isolated and narrow resource-based mean their national Governments and external aid remain key drivers of growth. A survey of fifteen (15) Pacific countries in 2014 show that agriculture was a high-level priority for their economies. This was evidenced by two issues. *One*, there was, at a minimum, an agriculture sector plan that set out the goals and plans for the sector. The larger the country or sector, the greater the range and specificity of plans. *Second*, there was an existing national process around these documents that usually culminated in a Cabinet or Ministerial approval which triggered that vital link to national budget allocation processes.

The 2014 Survey however uncovered a simple - yet significant finding that led to the creation of these new *Agricultural Policy Banks* (APBs). The finding was that, despite this necessary high-level ambition for agriculture across all Pacific countries, sector plans and priorities were not easily accessible by anyone outside Agricultural Ministries. This included key stakeholders who played vital roles in agriculture starting with farmers (or farmer networks), processors, buyers, investors as well as Government personnel from other line Ministries. This also meant donors and partners, so vital to





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these countries, had little knowledge about the contents of these plans and where opportunities lay for this vital sector, nationally or regionally.

The APBs (www.spc.int/pafpnet/policy-bank) were created by SPC in 2015 –rolled out with a program of capacity training to manage content and communication. APBs are essentially online repositories of key National Agriculture information for 15 countries (*Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu*) that constitute 3 sub-regional groupings. At a minimum, they contain national-level agriculture policies and plans, commodity or industry plans, statistics, and the operations of Ministries of Agriculture. The first national APB was launched in Vanuatu in August 2015 in tandem with its new sector plan. A similar pattern followed in Solomon Islands, Samoa and Tonga. It has already enhanced better transparency and an easier way to engage with stakeholders in those countries. And the benefits have gone further. Policy gaps have been strengthened and collaboration among countries fostered. Donors have been able to access this information easily to design its funding support. The momentum has also prompted at 4 Pacific states to establish or reenergise its Agriculture websites linking into the APB contents.

Agriculture is at the centre of **SDG 2 - achieving food security and improving health and nutrition**. This is an ongoing national dialogue. The APBs are helping countries contribute to this dialogue better – nationally and regionally, by making agriculture information more visible and accessible.

Today there are over *one hundred* sector or commodity plans for the region available *online*. This is a remarkable collaborative effort in a relatively short period considering less than five policies were available online in 2014. There is more to be done. But the steps to date have been very significant in changing behaviour and taking positive actions to grow the sector.

Purpose

The Pacific Agriculture Policy Banks provide a platform to;

- (i) Provide easy public access to the contents of policies, plans, advice and extent of public support for the agriculture sector;
- (ii) Serve as tool to engage farmers, business, investors, media and development partners to influence policy, pool resources and to build a stronger collaborative effort
- (iii) Foster complementary efforts among countries at a regional level where there are similar commodities of interest, markets or industries;
- (iv) Promote learning and reduce duplication among policy makers, investors and development partners
- (v) Promote awareness and visibility of the sector nationally, regionally and globally

The Policy Banks provide a standard template that is easy for each national government to use, but that is also adaptable to suit the specific needs of each country. Standard inclusions include:





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- Policy Hierarchy Chart which outlines policy linkages (up to SDG level) and identifies responsible ministries;
- Key Sector and Sub-Sector Policies and Strategies;
- Policy Summaries – translated into key local languages to further extend the audience reach; and
- Statistics
- Key Commodities
- Selected relevant legislation.

Results and impact generated

Significant results have been achieved over just two years of the life of APBs.

(i) Strengthened awareness of the sector, its plans and priorities.

- A survey of key policy makers and key agricultural stakeholders in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu in 2015-16 before and after the launch of the APBs showed that over 60 percent of respondents could not access information or was simply unaware of agriculture information existed before the APBs. After the launch, 95 percent stated that policies were now easier to access – the remaining 5% attributing the lack of internet connectivity.

(ii) Access facilitates further donor support

- The APBs are already being used by donors and development partners to guide their bilateral investments in the agriculture sector, eg – EU budget support to *Vanuatu and Fiji*; International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) investment in *Vanuatu*.

(iii) Complementary Approaches across countries

- Fiji and Vanuatu export kava to the European Union, USA and South East Asia. Collectively kava exports are worth over USD 40 million per year benefitting over 30,000 people. The APBs are already helping these countries exchange kava standards, cropping methods, policies and information.

(iv) Policy Opportunities Identified

- Vanuatu an early adopter of the APB, is at an advance stage of developing a new agritourism policy. Despite agritourism being identified as a priority at the national level, it was clear that this was a policy gap that was not covered adequately by its current plans and funding. The New Zealand Government quickly showed its support for the design of this new policy (2016) and is also committed to funding implementation

(v) South-South Cooperation - Agriculture Research and Extension





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- The APBs are a first for the Pacific. It has also quickly caught the attention of the Caribbean. Already this has helped facilitate south-south learnings exchange for agricultural researchers and extension officers from both regions covering common crops such as yams, cassava, taro, coconuts and breadfruit. The APB was useful here in identifying the common needs of the Pacific quickly and thereby prioritising selection and project focus of the participants.

(vi) Visibility of the Sector

- Agriculture overall has an image problem. The APBs are part of the solution in helping inform communities and youths through the media of key agriculture information.

Community Empowerment

Over seventy percent of the Pacific's population live in rural communities. There are also large diasporas of Pacific communities in Australia, New Zealand and the United States of America.

Today, the APBs simply provide an easily accessible tool to media, farming networks business investors and governments to quickly communicate information to the larger populace. The APBs assist this in two ways;

- (i) It provides summaries, easy to read formats of long policy documents in English and in local languages.
- (ii) An adoption phase goes hand in hand with a capacity management training where there are targeted sessions for media, youths, business and policy makers.

The Pacific is a region with a youth bulge. In some Pacific Melanesian states, over 30 percent of youths are unemployed. Empowering youths with agriculture information in the APBs is a key strategy for the APB outreach. Linking farmer and media networks also is key. Over eight country awareness sessions using the APBs have been conducted over the last two years to raise awareness of its contents and what the Governments plans are for the sector. This training has helped produce;

- at least five talkback shows through radio and television
- 10 or more social media accounts (600,000 + twitter impressions, facebook, blogs etc)
- 15 or more local media and regional newspaper coverage
- 2 regional magazine feature article
- 2 videos
- As the APBs awareness campaigns rollout, so has traffic on the repository. At the end of 2016, there were more than 15,000 views

Ability to replicate the model





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The online Policy Banks are not only a first for the agriculture sector but also for any of the large productive sectors in the Pacific. Globally, the Pacific APBs have already been shared with the Caribbean who have indicated a strong desire to adopt a similar online tool.

However, its biggest success in this short period is the heightened awareness at the national level to make more public information easily accessible. The APB has prompted the re-energising of agricultural websites for Tonga ([link](#)), Vanuatu ([link](#)), Samoa ([link](#)), Fiji ([link](#)).

Already the element of the APB is being replicated in a new e-library of Agriculture research reports compiled by SPC. Like the APB, the context is the same --- there is a wealth of research reports in the region already out there although not easily accessible.

Sustainability of project

The APBs was developed under the EU -supported Agriculture Policy Program (APP), which started in July 2014 and ends in May 2018. Countries and partners have already realised the benefits of being part of this transparency initiative, and participating countries have already committed to continuing to make information available.

Some of the key elements for sustainability are already in place. National Agricultural websites are in place or being revamped with the same ambition and will continue to link with the APB. In addition, the APB is being hosted at SPC, a 70 year old regional institution owned by Pacific countries. It is envisaged that this site will continue to be managed by SPC, along with other databases for many years. This is also necessary given the existence of microstates in the region with smaller sectors.

The APP is still at a mid-point. There are still several initiatives planned to further embed sustainability of the APB and ensuring it ends up not only as a one-stop shop for key information but also as a tool for building better planning capacity and complementary approaches within the region and globally.

ICTs are a cornerstone of the modern agriculture sector, used to support industry good practice for the delivery of better and more efficient services to stakeholders. The Agriculture Policy Bank project has looked at ways to build knowledge management capacity to ensure that the 15 target Pacific countries understand the need to have access to and use of policies, research and market information for more informed decision making in the long term.

An agriculture policy bank engagement plan has been developed to provide in-country Ministry of Agriculture officers with an easy-to-use, practical guide to better engage current and potential APB stakeholders, targeting key policy users. The survey results and related workshop insights indicate a desire to prioritise the use of mediums such as radio, mobile phone SMS and workshops for any Outreach Plan activities.

Partnerships





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The European Union and the Pacific Community (SPC) have worked in partnership to develop these Agriculture Policy Banks within a broader program for stronger policy capacity and knowledge management across the region. Our key partners are:

- Pacific Countries – who provide the content and information on the APBs
- FAO and SPC Land Resources Division – who are providing regional approaches (eg forestry, organics, market access)
- Australia ACIAR and PHAMA – market access information, research reports
- Caribbean (IICA, CARDI) – providing related policy plans, documents for the Caribbean
- CTA – provide knowledge management training for countries
- World Bank and UNDP – technical support for new sector policies

Promotion of WSIS values in society

The APBs embodies the key WSIS values relating to information accessibility and transparency

During the launch of the APB in Vanuatu (2015) **Transparency International (TI)** released the following:

“What we have today in Vanuatu is a step forward in a positive direction; accessibility is a key factor for national productivity. As an online library, this agricultural resource site is accessible to everyone. This is a good start in the government as it shows some progress to address a long time issue in the public sector; the difficulty to accessing information. TIV released a National Integrity System (NIS) report in 2014 and one issue identified in this report is the lack of easy access to information as well as information dissemination.....Where there is accessibility there is transparency...” – TI I Vanuatu Press Release (10 October 2015) Source: Vanuatu Government Promotes Access to Agricultural Information
<https://tivnews.wordpress.com/2015/10/01/increasing-access-to-information/>

The above demonstrates that the APBs are a key step in ensuring that stakeholders are engaged in designing, implementing and adopting plans and policies. The policy bank is built for the people of the Pacific – it is people-centred with all key stakeholders collaborating in a regional partnership to make the policy bank a one-stop hub for agriculture information.

For more information:

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