



Empowering Our Decision Makers and Communities with Information and Knowledge in Agriculture

AGRICULTURE POLICY BANKS

“What we have today in Vanuatu (the Agricultural Policy Bank) 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....

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TI Vanuatu Press Release (10 October 2015) at launch of Policy Bank in Vanuatu (2015). <https://tivnews.wordpress.com/2015/10/01/increasing-access-to-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. An SPC survey of fifteen (15) Pacific countries in 2015-16 show that agriculture was a high-level priority for their economies. This was evidenced by the fact that at a minimum, an agriculture sector plan existed for each country. 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 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 decision makers all along the agriculture value chain – policy makers, processors, buyers, investors, farmers as well as Government personnel from other line Ministries. This also meant donors and partners, so vital to these countries, had little knowledge about the contents of these plans and where opportunities lay for this vital sector, nationally or regionally.

The APBs (<http://pafpnet.spc.int/policy-bank/countries>) 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. 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 a 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:

- 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

- Already there has been an increasing uptake for more complementary approaches in the region. These include Research and Extension, Agricultural Statistics, agritourism and crop standards.
- One of these includes the kava industries in Fiji and Vanuatu. Both countries 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 prompting these countries exchange kava standards, cropping methods, policies and information.

(iv) Policy Opportunities Identified

- Vanuatu an early adopter of the APB, is at an advanced 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

- 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 TV
- 10 or more social media accounts (600,000 + twitter impressions, facebook, blogs etc) which promotes the APB
- 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 14, 482 views.

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 | 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/>

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