



Pacific Islands Rural Advisory Services

Extension Excellence

for

Prosperous and Resilient Communities

INFORMATION PAPER

BACKGROUND

About 80% of the Pacific poor live in rural areas. Most depend on agriculture for their livelihood. Agricultural and rural development is the key to eradicate poverty and creating conditions for sustainable and equitable growth. The Pacific agriculture faces several new challenges ranging from limited resources with deteriorating natural resources base, climate change and increasing de-regulation of trade. Moreover, the sector is dominated by small farms often with weak bargaining powers and limited political voice. Global studies have shown that poverty is directly linked to poor access to services, including advisory services. A pluralistic and demand driven extension provision, that offers a much broader support to rural producers, is critical for agricultural development and poverty reduction in the Pacific.

Though, PICTs have a long history of organising and reforming extension services, much more needs to be done to strengthen their capacities to deal with the rapidly evolving challenges in agriculture. Commitment to pluralism is central to the discussion on extension reform as it is now widely accepted that no single actor or agency is best placed to offer the wide range of services required by the rural communities. While several new approaches are being tried by varied extension providers in the public, private and NGO sector in different countries, these experiences are not shared across due to lack of a platform for sharing and networking among extension professionals in the region.

Pacific Islands Rural Advisory Services (PIRAS), formerly known as Pacific Islands Extension Network (PIEN), was formed in response to the demand for a network of all those interested in extension and advisory services articulated in some of the recent global and regional meetings on extension organised by the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS). It is an attempt to form a network with all those who are interested and involved in agricultural extension and advisory services (from the public, private and civil society sectors) in the Pacific. PIRAS was established initially at a first ever Pacific Extension Summit was convened by SPC in 2005 in the Kingdom of Tonga and later endorsed by the Pacific Heads of Agriculture Services (HOAFS) and the Ministers of Agriculture meeting in 2009. In August 2015, with funding support from EU under the Pacific Agriculture Policy Project (PAPP), USAID through IFPRI and Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS), a third Pacific Research and Extension Forum was held in Apia where PIEN was revived and renamed to Pacific Islands Rural Advisory Services (PIRAS) and elected new Board Members and priority areas identified to strengthen the work of the Network. A few of the key priority areas identified include:

- a. **Strengthen Partnership and Linkages** - Support the inventory of current and past research projects undertaken by research institutions and Ministry of Agricultures within the region; Develop PIRAS webpage and encourage members to utilize it for information sharing and networking;
- b. **Policy Support** – Support National Extension policy dialogues and extension policy development;
- c. **Capacity development** - Work with national stakeholders and identify resource and capacity gaps (individual, institutional and systems levels); Advocate and explore opportunities to address capacity gaps;
- d. **Promote Extension Excellence** – Support capacity building of staff and institutions to be able to deliver services using new multi-stakeholder and extension approaches and the development of public-private partnerships to ensure required resources (i.e. funding, technology, training) are met when delivering these new approaches.
- e. **Leadership** – Provide institutional support at appropriate levels; advocacy and lobbying funding support for PIRAS activities.

PIRAS VISION AND MISSION

The **vision** of PIRAS is to promote “Extension Excellence for Prosperous and Resilient Communities” in the PICTs.

The **mission** of PIRAS is to provide advocacy and leadership on research and extension to meet sustainable livelihoods needs for PICTs.

PIRAS GOVERNANCE

PIRAS is governed by a Board which consists of 8 members and is composed of three seats for the three Pacific Sub-Regionals (Micronesia, Polynesia and Melanesia), one each seat representing Research Institutions, Farmers Organizations, Private Sector, Academia and International Linkages. The Land Resource Division (LRD) of the Pacific Community (SPC) serves as the Secretariat for PIRAS.

PIRAS FUNCTIONS

To achieve its mission, the functions of PIRAS include:

- a. Provide a voice and representation of PIRAS at regional and international forums to promote improved investment in RAS in the PICTs;
- b. Support and develop the synthesis of evidence-based approaches and policies for improving the effectiveness of RAS;
- c. Strengthen the network of national actors and fora in RAS through facilitating interaction and networking.
- d. In pursuance of the above functions, PIRAS shall undertake the following activities:
 - Advocate relevant issues related to agriculture and RAS in the Pacific;
 - Collect, collate, store and translate research results to meaningful form and disseminate in the region;
 - Develop and promote evidence-based best practices and policies for effective RAS in the PICTs;
 - Maintain and enhance PIRAS links with national, regional and global agencies, institutions and organisations;
 - Facilitate the flow and sharing of information among members and with other regional and global;
 - Subject to funding, PIRAS will strive to hold annual meetings to exchange lessons and experiences on RAS across the Pacific and to discuss PIRAS strategic directions.

PIRAS MEMBERSHIP

Membership is open to national RAS providers and other stakeholders in the Pacific including:

- Heads of extension services;
- Interested extension agents of government, private sector and non-governmental organisations working in the fields of agriculture, forestry, rural and community development in the Pacific;
- Farmer groups and Farmers;
- Tertiary institutions providing training in agriculture, forestry, rural and community development;
- Vocational and secondary schools teaching agriculture;
- Interested professionals at national, regional and international levels; and
- Interested organizations with similar goals.

PIRAS KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Some key achievements include:

- LRD as the Secretariat for PIRAS had promoted and successfully linked PIRAS to GFRAS and the Asia Pacific Rural Advisory Services (APIRAS) in 2010.
- Representing PIRAS at GFRAS annual events and other high-level meetings such as Global Conference of Agricultural Research for Development annual meetings;
- With funding support from EU Intra ACP PAPP, USAID through IFPRI/GFRAS, held a Research and Extension Forum in 2015. Outcomes of the forum include revival of PIRAS and identification of regional research and extension priority areas in strengthening research and extension linkages;
- Development of a Pacific Regional Extension Strategy (2015 - 2020) defining regional Extension Strategic Priority Areas (June - October 2015);
- Conducted a global and Pacific Extension Study – the study shows best practices in RAS which the Pacific can modify to their local contexts;
- PIRAS Board Meeting (October 2015) – validated the Regional Extension Strategy and Development of PIRAS Charter; and PIRAS Annual Workplan (August 2015).

PIRAS UPCOMING EVENTS

- In collaboration with FAO Regional Office for the Asia Pacific Regional Office, Asia Pacific Associations of Educators in Agriculture and Environment (APEAEN), APIRAS and GFRAS will host the APIRAS/APEAEN back to back annual meeting in August 2016 in Fiji;
- Support Policy Development for Pacific Island Countries and Territories;
- Working with APIRAS and GFRAS through funding support from IFAD to support capacity building, policy dialogues and networking amongst regional and national RAS, knowledge management and region wide RAS event.

- Needs assessment of Regional and National networks