

SECRETARIAT OF THE PACIFIC COMMUNITY

SIXTH REGIONAL MEETING OF

HEADS OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY SERVICES (HOAFS)

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A NEW REGIONAL AGRICULTURE PLANNERS FORUM

Accelerating Agriculture Livelihoods through Strategic Planning Capacity, Cooperation, and Linkages

1.0 Background

Pacific Leaders have emphasized the need for coordination, cooperation and collaboration through the *Framework for Pacific Regionalism*¹ and the *UN SIDS (2014) S.A.M.O.A pathway*² to achieve sustainable outcomes for Pacific Island Countries (PICs). This ambition is vital for agriculture. The central thesis of the *Pacific Regionalism Framework* is that deeper regionalism will help increase socio-economic and development prospects, expand market opportunities, improve service delivery and contribute to security and good governance for Pacific people and the region. The Framework promotes:

- coordination to share and apply best practices;
- cooperation through shared strategies for intervention;
- collaboration through partnerships between technical agencies

An SPC Study (2016) of agriculture and forestry priorities showed that the region has a discrete set of national agriculture and forestry policies that share many common goals. There are also many common commodities and common areas of focus in terms of needs and opportunities. At the regional level, the Pacific region has progressed a number of approaches for food security, trade, disaster risk management, financial services, youth and women's economic empowerment, all of which intersect with agriculture and forestry. Regional work on agriculture extension, agriculture statistics and agri-tourism has also been advanced.

These goals for the Pacific Agriculture & Forestry sector can be summarised as follows:

- (i) Addressing food security and nutrition
- (ii) Economic development
- (iii) Sustainability
- (iv) Effective Institutions

A clear observation from the Study was that countries emphasized the importance of planning capacity and frameworks, the need to strengthen evidence-based approaches and stronger linkages between planning, budgets, and research and extension service provision.

¹ Framework for Pacific Regionalism endorsed by Forum Leaders in 2014.

² Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States 1- 4 December, 2014, Samoa

Another telling observation was that Agricultural Ministries managed a very wide range of issues. There were core services such as extension, biosecurity focusing on a wide range of crops and livestock. Some Ministries of larger PICs also managed fisheries and forestry, all substantive areas of work. But there were also emergent issues like climate change and disaster risk management that weighed further into already limited national capacities and resources.

The evidence is that the agriculture sector continues to beset by persistent constraints. Access to affordable finance, inconsistent production and supply, reliance on imports, and the lack of interest by youths are some factors that continue to impede the growth of the sector.

It is within this overall context that a new **Regional Agriculture Planners Forum (RAPForum)** has been conceptualised. The APF concept was discussed at an SPC (Agriculture Policy Program) Steering Meeting in in 2016 and 2017 and accepted by members. Following a recent meeting of senior Agricultural Officials in Nadi (October 1, 2017), Fiji has agreed to host the first meeting of the RAPForum.

This paper revisits an *Outline* of the RAPForum.

2.0 The Objectives of the RAPForum

The Key objectives of an RAPForum is to

- (i) Strengthen the quality of planning and capacities of the agriculture sector including within national agriculture Ministries;
- (ii) To strengthen linkages to national planning, budgeting, key Government agencies, farming networks and the private sector;
- (iii) To promote regional complementary efforts, partnerships and collaborating
- (iv) To innovate and better integrate agriculture and forestry into the broader economy at national and regional levels’;
- (v) To advocate for the agriculture and forestry sector including act as a collective point for the private sector.

3.0 Responding to a Common National Priority

The need for stronger institutional capacity, better services and linkages is already documented as national sector priority for many PICs. The SPC study of National Agriculture Plans and Priorities of 15 PICs show that agriculture planning, services provision capacity, organisational capacity development and integrated or multi-sectoral approaches were noted (see Box1)

At present, there are a number of regional forums addressing subject-specific issues such as soils, biosecurity, plant health and livestock. Planners are not necessarily included in these forums. No such regional forum exists for Planning Officials and sector-wide decision makers that focus on institutional capacities, fiscal linkages and promoting strategic linkages.

The RAPForum is a regional mechanism that responds to this regional and national need to strengthen planning, services provision and capacity development. It is based on the recognition that;

- The planning capacities of each Ministry of Agriculture in PICs is vital to ensuring strategic approaches within limited funding envelopes, linking research and adoption, organising information and partnering private sector interests.
- A strategic link between MAF planners and other Ministry planning and decision making officials is needed. This includes national planning, tourism, health, education and other sectors.

4.0 Who will the RAP Forum consist of?

- Senior agriculture planning officials ;
- Senior Ministry of Finance, National Planning, Trade, Tourism, education and other officials;
- 1 rep from Pacific Island Farmers Network (PIFON)
- 1 rep from the Agricultural Researchers and Extension Network
- 1 rep from Private sector
- 1 rep from the agricultural education network (USP)
- 1 invitee from the Regional Planners Forum Caribbean
- 1 invitee from Australian/NZ agriculture research forum

5.0 What would be the role of the RAP Forum

The RFAP should ideally provide planners with a dedicated ‘space’ to discuss the various policy imperatives, responses and technical requirements to address common priorities and issues across the PICs and within the Pacific Regionalism Framework. This should cover initially;

- Strengthening the quality of planning and capacities of the agriculture sector including within national agriculture Ministries;
- Strengthening the linkages to national planning, budgeting, key Government agencies, farming networks and the private sector;
- Promoting regional complementary efforts, partnerships and collaborating staying with the national levels and at regional levels

Over time the RAP Forum is likely to evolve. The RAP Forum is ideally one that allows for more informed and evidenced based policy responses using the policy research already undertaken, drawing from experiences of other countries, regions (which is where collaboration with other similar forums will be useful), or commissioning new policy research to inform policy.

By focussing on building planning capacity, stronger links to national finances, information exchange, linking to other international policy forums the RAPForum complements HOAFS and MOAFS decision processes.

6.0 Other Examples

An agriculture planner's forum already exists in the Caribbean. Another good example of a very mature and successful RPF is FANRPAN in South Africa that was catalysed by the CTA (as was CaRAPN).

7.0 Way Forward

The RFP is yet another tangible step to promoting complementary approaches in the agriculture and forestry sector. This is significant together with:

- the establishment of the two new regional portals for policy (Agriculture Policy Bank) and research (PAIS);
- the release of the Pacific Agriculture and Forestry Policy Compendium ;
- a new regional Compact/Agreement for sharing of agricultural information at the national and regional levels;

Officials are asked to **note t**he RAP concept and support. The first meeting of the RAP Forum will be held in Fiji (by December 2017) in conjunction with a policy training/learning event.