

9th REGIONAL MEETING OF PACIFIC HEADS OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY SERVICES (PHOAFS)
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Title	Multisectoral food system coordination in the Pacific Island region
Action	For consideration and decision
Author(s)	FAO and SPC

Summary

- In March 2023 at the Third Regional Meeting of Pacific Ministers and Agriculture and Forestry, FAO together with SPC was requested to review multisectoral coordination for food systems in the Pacific and explore opportunities and trade-offs for establishing a regional coordination mechanism to streamline food system initiatives.
- The information provided in this paper is the outcome of a desk research of relevant policy and academic documents, consultations with representatives from Pacific Island Countries and Territories, CROP agencies and development partners (see full list in footnote),¹ and a validation workshop with FAO and SPC technical staff.
- The objective of this working paper is to provide an update to the Pacific Heads of Agriculture and Forestry Services (PHOAFS) on the ongoing work to identify best fit approaches to strengthen the regional food system coordination through the establishment of a regional mechanism. This includes the benefits, limitations, opportunities, and threats of establishing a regional food system coordination mechanism, and the purpose, form and function of different approaches to this mechanism;
- Given the current context in the Pacific region, the **priority function** for the regional food system coordination mechanism is *Creating better and more effective action on food systems through dialogue and knowledge exchange*. This function will enable *Better funding for food systems*, and be informed by *Better food system data availability and access*. In the long term, the mechanism will also fulfill the function of *Better global food systems & stronger Pacific contribution*.
- The paper identifies an approach that would address all necessary functions of a regional food system coordination mechanism, would be a **combination of technical and political mechanisms**, noting that further work is required to refine the details of what the mechanisms will entail. The Pacific Heads of Agriculture and Forestry Services are requested to endorse the following:
 - FAO and SPC to propose, through consultations with Members and relevant stakeholders a mechanism which comprises a **combination of technical and political approaches** that would address all necessary functions of a regional food system coordination mechanism, suited to resources and capacities available in the Pacific and, use this as basis to develop a Terms of Reference for the 2025 PHOAFS.

¹ Consulted PICTs: Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, French Polynesia. PICTs invited but yet to complete the consultation: New Caledonia, Wallis & Futuna, Republic of Marshall Islands. Consulted regional organisations and development partners: PIFS, SPC, USP, SPTO, FAO, IFAD, WHO, FFA. Further consultation is expected with ILO.

Background

1. This paper addresses the March 2023 Third Regional Meeting of Pacific Ministers of Agriculture and Forestry's request for FAO and SPC to produce a paper that would inform Pacific leaders about the current state of regional food system coordination and the benefits, threats, and options to establish a regional food system coordination mechanism.
2. **The food systems of Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) are highly vulnerable to climate change and external shocks** due to their small population and land size, geographic isolation, developing economies, and their disproportionately high exposure to natural disasters.² Climate change induced exposures, such as increasing air and water temperatures, rising sea levels, and growing frequency and severity of extreme weather events, have a dire effect on food production, manufacturing, trade and consumption.² The recent global food and energy crisis further exacerbates this issue.³ Vulnerable food systems place livelihoods, food security and nutrition at risk, contributing to the non-communicable disease (NCDs) crisis in the Pacific.⁴ This makes reaching PICTs' Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) challenging.
3. **PICTs have committed to strengthening food systems** to improve social, environmental and economic outcomes. Ten PICTs – Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Nauru, Palau, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu – have already published their *National Food Systems Transformation Pathways* leading up to the United Nations Food System Summit in 2021. These Pathways were developed through country-led consultative processes, supported by FAO, SPC, the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD), the World Food Programme (WFP), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other development partners. PICTs are also supported in achieving food systems priorities through the SPC Food System Flagship.
4. **As a result of the UN Secretary General's call to action the food systems transformation agenda has been at the forefront of many development discussions in the region.** With the establishment of the UN food systems Hub and through the three UN Resident Coordinators in the Pacific, who have taken increased action to advocate for funding to support the Pacific SIDS efforts to transform their food systems, more funding has been channelled in to the region from the different pools of funds, such as the UN Joint SDGs Pooled Funds.
5. **A key challenge noted by the majority of the PICTs in their respective pathways and in past assessments was the need to strengthen coordination mechanisms for food systems through a multisectoral and multistakeholder approach at the national level.**^{5,6} This also transcends and affects regional interactions and coordination efforts. The strengthening of food systems requires coordination across multiple policy sectors, such as agriculture, fisheries, forestry, health, trade and industry, environment and climate change, finance/economy, land and rural development, indigenous affairs, gender and youth affairs, education and tourism. Moreover, governments need

² FAO. A snapshot of the status and way forward for transforming agrifood systems in the Pacific. Identifying entry points and analysing trade-offs for policymakers. Apia; 2023. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc4940en>

³ FAO, WFP. Pacific Island Countries: Impact of rising costs of food, feed, fuel, fertilizer and finance Bulletin. Apia: FAO and WFP; 2022.

⁴ FAO. SIDS Solution Forum 2021. Gender, women and youth: Implications for innovation and digitalization Pacific. 2021.

⁵ Thow AM, Ravuvu A, Iese V, Farmery A, Mauli S, Wilson D, et al. Regional Governance for Food System Transformations: Learning from the Pacific Island Region. *Sustainability*. 2022;14(12700).

⁶ Patay D, Ravuvu A, et al. Catalysing sustainable development through regional food system governance: strengthening the translation of regional food system policy guidance to national level in the Pacific Sustainable Development. 2023 <http://doi.org/10.1002/sd.2732>

to effectively engage with community and civil society organisations, the private sector and academic institutions.

- 6. The limited coordination of policy development and activities causes major barriers for PICTs to strengthen the resilience and performance of food systems.** The lack of alignment of food system related policies and initiatives often causes the duplication of efforts, reinforces siloed & standalone approaches, which lead to resource wasting and more incoherent actions, which leave lasting negative impacts on other food system priorities. Improving food system coordination is thus greatly important to ensure that PICTs reach their sustainable development goals.
- 7. The Pacific Island region is well-known for its great successes in pooling PICT resources to resolve shared problems.**^{6,7} While PICTs are characterised by greatly varying socio-cultural, economic, geographic and natural features, past food system assessments and country experiences show that they share multiple vulnerabilities, from geographic isolation to disproportionately high exposure to natural hazards, relevant to food systems.² The region has shown great achievements in regional coordination on food system-relevant policy issues, such as fisheries, environment and gender.² However, current regional guidance and support relevant to food systems are often seen and addressed in siloes, leading to duplication, and gaps.⁶⁻⁷ **Thus, improving regional coordination for food system strengthening by streamlining siloed initiatives is a potentially useful way to help PICTs to develop, finance, and implement food system initiatives on the national level.**

Purpose of this paper

8. The purpose of this paper is to outline considerations and options regarding the potential establishment of a regional food system coordination mechanism, informed by the consultations undertaken with representatives of PICTs and other regional stakeholders (see full list in footnote)⁸ and a desk research of relevant policy and academic documents. This includes:
- The current landscape of regional food system coordination in the Pacific Island region.
 - The benefits, limitations, opportunities and threats of strengthening regional food system coordination.
 - The functions or purposes a regional food system coordination mechanism could fulfill.
 - The form of a potential coordination mechanism.

The current landscape of regional food system coordination in the Pacific

9. **The Pacific Island region has great strengths in regional coordination** due to its robust regional structures that provide political and technical guidance for PICTs.^{9,10} Many of these have mandates relevant to food systems, such as those related to health/non-communicable diseases, fisheries/fisheries resources, agriculture/production and trade. **But currently food systems are not a standing agenda item**, and these issues are addressed in siloes.
- 10. Currently there is no regional technical mechanism in place in the Pacific that would coordinate regional action and support across the relevant policy sectors and stakeholders**

⁷ PIFS. 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent. Suva, Fiji: Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS); 2022.

⁸ Consulted PICTs: Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, French Polynesia. PICTs invited but yet to complete the consultation: New Caledonia, Wallis & Futuna, Republic of Marshall Islands. Consulted regional organisations and development partners: PIFS, SPC, USP, SPTO, FAO, IFAD, WHO, FFA. Further consultation is expected with ILO.

⁹ Thow AM, Ravuvu A, Iese V, Farmery A, Mauli S, Wilson D, et al. Regional Governance for Food System Transformations: Learning from the Pacific Island Region. Sustainability. 2022;14(12700).

¹⁰ Patay D, Ravuvu A, et al. Catalysing sustainable development through regional food system governance: strengthening the translation of regional food system policy guidance to national level in the Pacific Sustainable Development. 2023 <http://doi.org/10.1002/sd.2732>

under the food systems banner. The SPC Food System Flagship serves as an integrated platform to connect the food system-relevant divisions within the agency. While this Flagship provides a useful example of integrated planning for food system projects, it currently has a limited mandate for regional coordination between regional organisations, PICTs, development partners, or other relevant stakeholders. **The UN Resident Coordinators' coordination support for the region is focused on resource mobilization, advocacy and less technical.**

10. **In terms of regional monitoring and evaluation (M&E), there is substantial data collection and reporting relevant to food systems, but analysis and reporting are mainly along sectoral lines.** Regional food system coordination may help consolidate the already existing food system-relevant datasets to enable evidence-informed policy actions to accelerate PICTs' efforts to strengthen food systems. However, limited human and financial resources are recognised barriers to stronger M&E on food systems on a regional level.
11. The existing regional architecture relevant to food systems in the Pacific Island region means that any new mechanism needs to complement existing structures, with due attention paid to minimising any potential for duplication or additional burden on existing organizations and PICTs.

The benefits, threats, and options of strengthening regional food system coordination

12. **The majority of consulted PICTs and regional stakeholders indicated a need to strengthen regional food system coordination.** The benefits, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of establishing a regional food system coordination mechanism – that emerged from the consultations – are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1 The benefits, limitations, opportunities and threats of establishing a regional food system coordination mechanism

<p>BENEFITS (STRENGTHS)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Streamlined information flow between countries, government sectors and stakeholders across the food supply chain. • Improved (cost-)effectiveness by reducing duplication of regional food system initiatives. • Pooling expertise and resources, supporting the diffusion of resources and expertise across PICTs, leading to better implementation on national level, and leveraging the global reach of the UN Coordinators' mandate • Stronger networks and dialogue between PICTs and stakeholders: improved integration between PICTs, and between government sectors and stakeholders across the food supply chain. • Harmonised food system initiatives and policies. 	<p>LIMITATIONS (WEAKNESSES)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased financial and administrative burden, draining on already limited PICT resources. • Differences between PICT priorities, features, capacities, commitments to strengthen food systems. • Limited national level food system coordination might impact PICTs' ability to represent all their food system stakeholders adequately.
<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Momentum from the UN Food System Summit. • Commitments to develop/implement National Food System Transformation Pathways. • Momentum from PHOAF 2023. • Increasing donor funding targeting food systems. 	<p>THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited ownership and buy-in from PICTS initially and in the long term. • Inadequate representation of PICT priorities. • Lack of clarity in roles and coordination leading to limited benefits and impacts. • Sustainability of funding. • Slow decision making and limited action.

13. The following list of **principles** were identified to drive a potential regional food system coordination mechanism: people-centred food systems, grounded in traditional knowledge and culture, lessen the burden on countries, future looking, multisectoral, multistakeholder, and agility, flexibility and responsiveness.

14. PICT and regional stakeholders identified the following **functions and mandates** for a potential regional food system coordination mechanism:

1. Better food system data availability and access

- *Mainstreaming information flow between PICTs, regional agencies, and development partners:* Information sharing and awareness raising about existing food system initiatives and activities, and progress on implementing National Food System Pathways.
- *Needs assessment:* Facilitate the mapping of food system strengths and issues on national level at each PICTs, consolidating what we already know, and identify strengths and issues that are not known yet. The purpose is to identify shared problems, resource (e.g., expertise, financing) needs and opportunities for shared solutions (e.g., pooling resources), which will inform the agenda and work plan of the regional food system coordination mechanism.
- *Monitoring & Evaluation (& Learning):* Streamlining existing datasets to create food system specific outputs. Coordinate/streamline data collection on food system related metrics from different policy sectors and countries to inform regional agendas.

2. Better and more effective action on food systems through dialogue and knowledge exchange

- *Collaboration between countries*: PICTs to identify common interests and establish more cooperation with each other (e.g., research, projects, capacity building). PICTs to share expertise, lessons learned, best practices with each other.
- *Coordination and advocacy across policy sectors (multisectoral coordination)* regionally and nationally enabling better national level multisectoral coordination.
- *Coordination across stakeholder types (multistakeholder coordination)*: improve connections and dialogue between civil, private, government sectors and academia regionally and nationally, as well as the regional multistakeholder coordination enabling better national level multistakeholder coordination.

3. Better funding for food systems

- *Funding facilitation (increases)*: Mapping out available funding sources, streamlining funding and donor support for regional and national food system programs/projects.

4. Better global food systems & stronger Pacific contribution

- *Platform for advocacy* – coordinating Pacific contributions to the global food systems agenda.

15. **The value-add** of the regional food system coordination mechanism is that it will facilitate solving high-priority food system problems at the nexus of multiple sectors and cannot be addressed with a single-sectoral approach. Such ‘big ticket issues’/nexus problems may include the interface between climate mitigation & adaptation and food systems, the intersection of trade and nutrition, and balancing livelihoods and environmental sustainability across the value chain.

16. **The outcome** of the regional food system coordination mechanism will be that PICTs have a platform for knowledge sharing and coordinated action, are able to implement better multisectoral food system initiatives, while minimising additional burden on PICTs, regional organisations and development partners.

Proposed approach for a regional food system coordination mechanism

17. FAO and SPC representatives, and the University of Sydney research team held a 2-day meeting in February, 2024, to validate the findings of the consultations and identify a potentially feasible approach arising from this consultation. Following this meeting, further consultation was undertaken.

18. Given the current context in the Pacific region, the **priority function** for the regional food system coordination mechanism is *Creating better and more effective action on food systems through dialogue and knowledge exchange* (see function #2 above). This function will enable *Better funding for food systems* (see function #3 above), and be informed by *Better food system data availability and access* (see function #1 above). In the long term, the mechanism will also fulfill the function of *Better global food systems & stronger Pacific contribution* (see function #4 above).

19. The approach recommended to address all necessary functions of a regional food system coordination mechanism, while complementing existing regional architecture and minimising additional burden on PICTs and regional bodies, would be a **combination of technical and political mechanisms** (Table 2).

Table 2 The options for the forms of the regional food system coordination mechanism

Functions / Approach	Better data availability and access	Better & more effective action on food systems through dialogue & knowledge exchange	Better funding for food systems	Better global food systems & stronger Pacific voice
Technical mechanism	✓	✓	✓	
Political mechanism		✓	✓	✓

Next steps to detail the proposed coordination mechanism options

20. Further consultations are needed to refine details for what the proposed technical and political mechanisms will entail. Both mechanisms need to take into account participation by diverse stakeholders, current food system structures (including the SPC Food System Flagship and the UN Food System Hub structure), and resourcing. Additionally, the establishment of a coordination mechanisms should consider the limited resources available in the region and therefore mechanisms explored should not be an added burden to countries and the region, and is fit for purpose.
21. Proposed details for the coordination mechanisms should be ready in time for 2025 Pacific Heads of Agriculture and Forestry Services meeting. The proposal should touch on the proposed mechanisms: scope of work; resourcing; accountability and reporting; formality; representation; and potential options for expanding the agreed upon approaches.

For decision:

22. The recommendation arising from the consultations, desk review and core group workshop is that Pacific Heads of Agriculture and Forestry Services endorse:
- FAO and SPC propose, through consultations with Members and relevant stakeholders a mechanism which comprises a **combination of technical and political approaches** that would address all necessary functions of a regional food system coordination mechanism, suited to resources and capacities available in the Pacific and, use this as basis to develop a Terms of Reference for the 2025 PHOAFS.