

PACIFIC DIALOGUE ON THREATS TO AGRICULTURE AND THEIR MITIGATION

Nadi, Fiji.
06-08 June 2023

Summary Report

The Pacific Dialogue brought together more than 40 early to mid-career researchers and practitioners from Pacific Nations (including Papua New Guinea and Timor Leste) and Australia and New Zealand.

The key workshop goals were to:

- Understand the impact of risks to agriculture from climate change, biosecurity challenges and other physical, social and economic factors.
- Examine knowledge, infrastructural and financial impediments to developing research and action programs to adapt to risks.
- Build networks between scientists in Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICT) and Australian and New Zealand to promote future scientific cooperation.

Workshop discussions were guided by keynote presentations from experienced scientists from the Pacific and Australia. Key issues raised by Dr Audrey Aumua included climate change, population growth and migration, barriers to learning, self-reliance, the balance between blue and green economies, the food-nutrition -health nexus and linkages with the growing burden of non-communicable diseases, sustainable nutrition, the need to weave traditional methods with new technologies, the need for greater engagement of international research with the Pacific and the need for agricultural research and policy linkages.

These key issues were further addressed by other speakers who also introduced potential solutions, their social context and whether they should be incremental or transformational. Sustainability of agricultural production systems in the region was a key focus of all discussions.

On the third day of the Dialogue time was taken to consider collaboration, future networking, capacity building and potential new project areas.

Participants considered that understanding threats from the perspective of whether they were slow onset, shocks, trends and their predictability and variability was important in terms of their mitigation and adaptation to them.

Participants also noted that there exist untapped opportunities to improve sustainability in the region based on eco-tourism in forested areas, and waste-water and solid decomposable waste management to improve the circularity of the economy.

Some key messages arising from the discussions included:

- Good natural resource management practices are key to sustainable development but have to be considered in terms of the Pacific context rather than imported.
- Climate change-related issues need to be investigated and managed via a transdisciplinary approach.
- Water management and water storage are often overlooked. Lack of storage will be of increasing concern for agriculture as droughts become more frequent.
- Low nutrient soils and high fertilizer costs are impediments to nutritious food production. Soil health, plant nutrition and quality and carbon farming could be improved by local composting and waste management programs.
- Nutrition and crop diversification go hand-in-hand but depend on an understanding of cultural/local settings, income security, market diversification and improving the understanding of diet/health linkages from an early age.
- Many Pacific-based nutritional solutions need to recognise that “farmers are fishermen and fishermen are farmers.”
- Land tenure issues may provide impediments to increased local production of nutritious food.
- Markets can be used to improve access to nutritious local food but must be built on transparency, trust, knowledge sharing and fair pricing.
- Given the influence of churches in the region they could be used to help drive home messages about nutrition, diet and health.
- Improved knowledge exchange between researchers, farmers, community and policymakers is the key to innovation.
- Research should balance component technology development, with research that integrates approached and disciplines to provide technology packages for systems improvement/
- Traditional knowledge has to be recognized and integrated with new ideas.
- Understanding local physical and cultural issues is critical to establishing timelines for development and change.

The Crawford Fund will use the Dialogue outputs to consider appropriate capacity building for the Pacific. Participants will collaborate to consider using the Dialogue findings to develop research projects of interest to regional organizations, governments and funding agencies.