

Translation of Pacific regional food systems policy guidance to national level



KEY MESSAGES

- The Pacific region is a leader in regional food systems governance, but translation to national level has proved challenging.
- Strengthened regional food system governance could improve dialogue among member states and regional organisations, build ownership of the regional food systems agenda among countries and territories, and facilitate coordination among stakeholders.
- Improved national multisectoral food systems coordination structures could ensure that PICTs can take advantage of the improved regional food system governance.

CONTEXT

Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) have committed to strengthening food systems to improve social, environmental and economic outcomes. Aligned with this commitment, there have been major advances in regional food system governance over the last decade, particularly related to environment, health and fisheries. However, the translation of regional policy guidance to the national level is often slow and difficult.

The aim of this policy brief is to provide insights into how regional and national food systems governance and the translation of regional food system policy guidance to national level can be strengthened. The research summarized in this policy brief was informed by 73 key informant interviews in the region between October 2021 and October 2022.

STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES IN FOOD SYSTEM GOVERNANCE

The research found both strengths and challenges for food systems governance in the Pacific Island region. The policy making process, including agenda setting, planning, and decision making, is strong at both the national and regional levels. However, policy making often does not start with the evaluation of a current situation that needs to be resolved, but with the perceived need or to respond to funding opportunities from development partners. Additionally, the dialogue between PICTs and regional organisations is variable and sometimes weaker than optimal. This is important because a strong connection between national and regional levels is necessary to ensure that regional food system policy guidance reflects PICT's priorities. A stronger dialogue could also help regional organisations assist PICTs in improving policy implementation.



Image: Market in Port Vila, Vanuatu. ANCORS. Eleanor McNeill, 2022

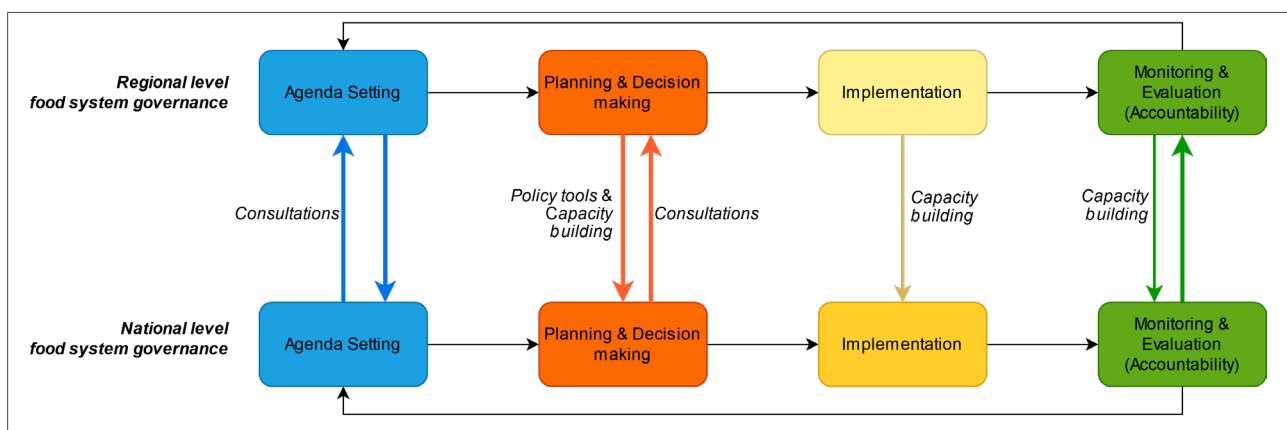


Figure 1. Regional-national food system governance in an ideal case in the Pacific island region.

THE IDEAL FOOD SYSTEM GOVERNANCE

In Figure 1, we summarise insights from the research participants regarding what a more ideal connection between governance functions at regional and national levels would look like. Regional policy making (agenda setting and planning) should be informed by PICT priorities and input, while the accepted regional agendas, policy guidance and tools should have a role in shaping national policy making. In some policy fields, such as fisheries, regional implementation helps pool resources, while in others, such as crop and livestock cultivation, focusing on national level implementation is more feasible. Regional monitoring and evaluation should be based on national level data, and should inform policy making and enable accountability mechanisms. Regional level organisations should support national level governance at all functions with capacity building.

OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE: BETTER REGIONAL-NATIONAL DIALOGUE AND COORDINATION

Strengthening regional and national food system governance structures would help to connect and improve decision making and implementation. Stronger structures would make dialogue between member states and regional organisations more robust, and facilitate coordination among relevant regional stakeholders. This way regional food system policy guidance would better reflect PICTs'

priorities and policy context and improve regional policy coherence. This regional structure could also help channel donor funds for multisectoral food system programs in PICTs.

Experience with existing regional governance platforms provides insights on how an improved regional food system governance structure could work. Such structures may include a formal or informal regional forum or a designated joint governance body. Participants could include PICT delegations, representatives of regional organisations, development partners, civil society organisations, and selected private companies. Multiple delegates with different sectoral backgrounds from each member state could facilitate information flow and accountability. The convening agency will require multisectoral food system expertise, legitimacy to represent PICTs interests, and adequate financial and human resources. SPC's Food System Flagship provides a useful example of recent efforts to improve multisectoral coordination.

The establishment or improvement of national level, multisectoral food system governance structures would be necessary to take advantage of the strengthened regional food system governance structure. To help break down food system silos, this structure may sit above sectoral agencies, for example, under the Prime Minister's Office.

SOURCES

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ABOUT

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