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Policy development process in the Pacific region

Case studies of Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu



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ABBREVIATIONS

COM	Councils of Ministers
CROP	Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific
DCO	Development Committee of Officials
DSPPAC	Department of Strategic Policy Planning and Aid Co-ordination [Vanuatu]
FFA	Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency
FAME	Fisheries, Aquaculture, and Marine Ecosystems Division [SPC]
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN
GDP	Gross domestic product
MAL	Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock [Solomon Islands]
MALFFB	Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Forestry, Fisheries and Biosecurity [Vanuatu]
MFMR	Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources [Solomon Islands]
NSDP	National Strategy Development Plans
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PDH	Pacific Data Hub
PDP	Pacific Islands Development Program
PPA	Pacific Power Association
PASO	Pacific Aviation Safety Office
PSD	Pacific Statistics and Data Initiative [Project]
SPC	The Pacific Community
SDD	Statistics for Development Division [SPC]
SPL	Strategy, Performance and Learning Unit [SPC]
SPREP	Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme
USP	The University of the South Pacific

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

This study examines the policy development process and data uptake in the Pacific region, focusing on the three countries of Fiji, Vanuatu, and Solomon Islands. The study has used food security as a sample sector to map how policy processes are initiated, formulated, implemented and monitored across the three countries. This study is not intended to assess the status of food security in these countries, but rather to review and verify the steps in the policy development and evaluation processes, including the authorities and key actors involved, and the resources utilised in these processes.

As part of the Improving Access to Pacific Statistics and Data (PSD) initiative, this study will shed some light towards achieving the PSD's overarching goal, to improve evidence-informed decision-making in the Pacific region, as prescribed in the business case theory of change. Funded by the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) and co-managed by the Pacific Community (SPC) Statistics for Development Division (SDD) and the Information Services Division (ISD), the Pacific Data Hub (PDH), a key component of the project, plays a crucial role in achieving this goal. The PDH provides a central, sustainable and accessible platform for cataloguing and/or hosting Pacific data as well as enabling the use of data for evidence-based policy- and decision-making.

ICT developments have allowed some of the smallest and most isolated countries in the Pacific region to consolidate and store a variety of information in one space. However, the connecting and centralising of data and information for evidence-based decision-making is limited in the region, due to the lack of resources and infrastructure to assess and collect the data and evidence, and the complexity and sensitivity of the data itself and the data sources, both commercially and politically. The PDH, as a repository platform that allows the accessing of quality and timely information, may pave the way to addressing these data and policy gaps.

This study aims to support the PSD project's activities. Building on the findings, the project will provide a basis for improving current efforts and knowledge sharing of data and evidence resources in the region's policy-making arena. SPC, as the leading regional development organisation with well-established connections with its member country governments and other regional actors, could potentially bring the countries and key stakeholders together for better evidence-informed policy in the region. Overall, this study will contribute to strengthening the role of the PSD and the PDH, consistent with SPC's strategic organisational objectives of strengthening engagement and collaboration with SPC members and partners; strengthening technical and scientific knowledge and expertise; addressing members' development priorities through multi-disciplinary approaches; improving planning, prioritisation, evaluation, learning and innovation; and enhancing the capabilities of Pacific people, systems and processes.

1.2 Objective

The main goal of this study is to build institutional knowledge on current Pacific policy development steps, and to provide recommendations for improving the practical aspects of evidence and data uptake in policy analysis and development, with the support of SPC and the PDH. Note that this study is not intended to assess the status of food security in the pilot countries, but to map out the decision-making processes in terms of food security policy as a sector case.

To achieve this objective, the study has been guided by the following high-level question:

- What is the policy development process in the three case study countries of Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, and how can PSD and PDH contribute to improving the process and data uptake?

And the following support questions:

- What are the policy development steps in the agriculture/fisheries (food security) sectors, and how effective is the process in terms of data uptake?
- Who is the final decision-maker? What is the level of authority of policy-makers?
- What government agencies are involved in policy development and monitoring of food security?
- Do key stakeholders in national, regional and international food security, and producers and users of food data, share experiences and knowledge to support the decision-making process and to implement programmes?
- How effective are the linkages in terms of monitoring and implementing the food security policies within the different policy levels?
- With reference to countries' commitments to achieving the SDG 2030 Agenda, what is the SDGs' role in the (country) food security policy development? Are there any other internationally recognised guidelines?

1.3 Theory and context

A policy has been described as “a deliberate system of principles to guide decisions and achieve rational outcomes” (Althaus et al. 2007). A policy is a statement of intent and is implemented as a procedure or protocol. Policies are generally adopted by a governance body within an organisation such as an agency or government and can assist in both subjective and objective decision-making. In subjective decision-making, policies can assist senior management and leadership in decisions that are based on the relative merits of a number of factors; while in objective decision-making policies are usually operational in nature and can be objectively tested, for example, policies related to fisheries, natural disasters and risk management (Althaus et al. 2007).

The policy process includes how policy changes are planned, designed, implemented and evaluated. Given the fact that the food security system involves many actors who are interlinked through socio-economic or political relationships, the food security policy process is said to be multifaceted, complex and reflective of the social and political contexts in which it takes place (FAO and SPC 2018). SPC uses the food security definition as follows: “Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.”¹

According to Wesselink et al. (2014), calls for evidence-based policy go back at least 50 years. These authors pointed out that demands for policy based on evidence are often driven by the need for robust decision-making, accountability to funders, and pressure to ensure taxpayers' money is spent on policies that work. Many frameworks for understanding the role of evidence in policy are linked to rational and linear models of policy processes such as the policy cycle. However, more recent models emphasise the non-linear nature of policy change, the importance of interactions between various networks of actors, and the role of power and politics in shaping evidence use (Punton and Hageman 2016).

Crafting a policy inevitably involves several steps, and numerous models of policy development have been described in different fields, such as social science. The Civic Kindergarten model, which focuses on the education sector, prescribed seven steps to policy development: policy review/identification of issues, research and analysis, consultation, draft policy, decision, implementation, and evaluation (Althaus et al. 2007; Figure 1).

¹ <https://sdd.spc.int/topic/food-security>

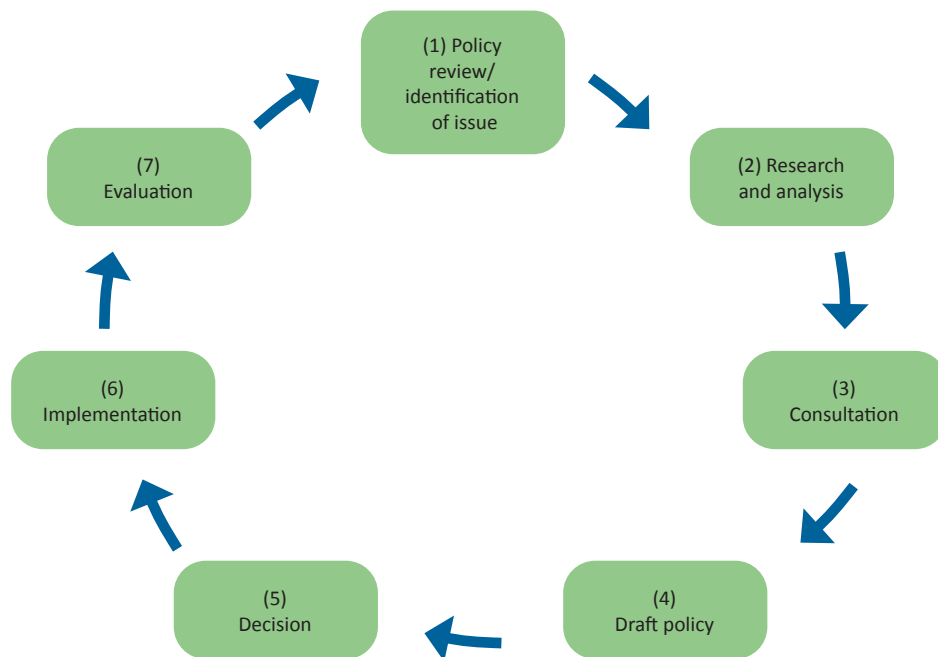


Figure 1. Civic Kindergarten policy development process. Source: Althaus et al. (2007).

The first step in the model is identifying the issue that needs to be addressed, and whether any policies are already in place. The second step entails rigorous needs assessment and/or evaluation processes, and extensive research and analysis involving experts and field professionals as well as expertise in the policy arena. The next step is consultation, where those in charge of policy development reach out to different stakeholders who have knowledge and expertise to contribute and can help validate opinions. This, along with the research and analysis step, will help with drafting the policy. A policy development decision can be reached if enough evidence and information are collected, and experts and stakeholders are consulted. Once confirmed as a policy, this will be communicated to the implementation teams at the relevant government agencies.

The final step is having an effective evaluation plan, to make sure the policy is performing as expected, to measure its implementation and to review and adapt/improve as necessary over time (New South Wales Department of Education 2014).

Sutcliffe and Court (2006), who developed a toolkit for progressive policy-makers in developing countries, noted similar stages in the policy development process; they identified the key steps as agenda setting, formulation, implementation and evaluation. These authors highlighted that evidence is needed in each of the steps and in different ways in each step. Sutcliffe and Court (2006) added that policy piloting is an important tool that allows for the phased introduction of major government policies or programmes. Other studies have noted that evidence is just one of many factors influencing policy decisions, along with political and strategic considerations, expert opinion, stakeholder and public pressure, and resource constraints (Punton and Hageman 2016).

Although a large number of studies exist on the policy development process in large developed (e.g. the United Kingdom and Australia) and developing countries, such studies, especially at sector level, are limited in the case of small island developing economies such as Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. A study by Aiafi (2016) focused on public policy processes in Solomon Islands, Samoa and Vanuatu, and highlighted similar steps to those of Sutcliffe and Court (2006), namely policy initiation, formulation and implementation. Aiafi (2016) noted that the geographical, economic, social and political landscapes of these countries, as well as international and regional policies, had largely influenced their policy development initiatives.

The Pacific Strategic Plan for Agricultural and Fisheries Statistics, developed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and SPC (2018), emphasised the need for evidence-based policy-making in the agricultural and fisheries sectors, with timely, relevant and reliable statistics that are readily accessible to policy-makers and other stakeholders. A baseline study by Chapman and Caniogo (2016) on the national agriculture and forestry policies of 15 Pacific Island countries, including Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, noted that there is little awareness by stakeholders, including within government, on the existence, content and breadth of agriculture policies managed by agriculture ministries, although many of the documents at national or sub-sector passed some form of ministerial or cabinet approval process.

2. THE CASE STUDY COUNTRIES

Table 1 gives a comparative summary of Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, providing background information for the case studies. The three Melanesian countries together account for 15.8% of the total population of the 22 Pacific Island countries and territories and approximately 13.3% of the subregion's gross domestic product (GDP). These countries were selected as case studies based on access to their government representatives and the availability of information.

The countries together consist of more than 1 300 islands. About 76% of Solomon Islands' population, 75% of Vanuatu's population and 44% of Fiji's population reside in rural subsistence communities, with their daily lives governed by traditional systems, i.e., chiefly or 'big-man' systems. Fiji is more urbanised with around 56% of its population living in the cities of Suva, Nadi, Lautoka and other smaller urban centres. The three countries are young independent nations, with Vanuatu gaining independence from its former British and French colonials in 1980, Solomon Islands gaining independence from Britain in 1978 and Fiji gaining independence from Britain in 1970. The historical ties with former colonial powers have a significant influence on the practices and development of sector policies in these countries.

Fiji has a diversified economy. Tourism is a key economic activity which cuts across many different industries and is a major contributor to the Fijian economy but is currently suffering from the impacts of COVID-19. In 2019, the two more food-related sectors agriculture and fishing/aquaculture contributed 6.8% and 0.6% of GDP respectively.

Solomon Islands is predominately a primary industry-based economy, largely dependent on logging, fishing and agriculture. The latter contributed 16.3% of GDP in 2018, with fisheries accounting for 5.4% of GDP.

Similarly, in 2018 agriculture accounted for 19.6% of Vanuatu's GDP and fisheries 0.5%. Like Fiji, tourism is a major industry in Vanuatu, and has suffered a heavy blow from the pandemic.

On food consumption, of total expenditure, Ni-Vanuatu spend 58%, Solomon Islanders 48.8%, and Fijians 31%.

Regarding governance structure, all three countries are governed by national and provincial governments under the Westminster system. Elected members of parliament have 4-year terms in office. In all three countries, the Prime Minister is the head of the government. In both Fiji and Vanuatu, the President is the head of state whilst for Solomon Islands the Governor-General, representing Queen Elizabeth, is the head of state.

Across all three countries, geographical, social, historical, political and developmental aspects have significant influences on policy development initiatives. These are further affected by frequent change in the political system and foreign influences.

Table 1. Background information on Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

	Fiji	Solomon Islands	Vanuatu
Geography and demography			
No. of islands	332 ^a	922 ^b	83 ^c
Total population (2020)^d	894,961	712,071	294,688
Rural population	44.1% (2017) ^e	74.4% (2019) ^f	74.61 % (2019) ^g
History and external influence	Fiji 2020^h	Solomon Islands 2020ⁱ	Vanuatu 2020^j
Independence (number of years as of 2020)	1970 (50 years)	1978 (42 years)	1980 (40 years)
External influence	British	British, Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) for 14 years from 2003 to 2017 ^k	British and France – joint condominium
Social			
Traditional authority	Chiefs (different levels, e.g., district, provinces)	Chiefs, ‘big-man’	‘Chiefly’ system of traditional governance
Economy	2019^l	2018^m	2018ⁿ
Agriculture (% of GDP)	6.8%	16.3%	19.6%
Fisheries (% of GDP)	0.6%	5.4%	0.5%
Household food consumption expenditure (% of total expenditure)	31.9%	48.9%	58%
Political	Fiji 2020^o	Solomon Islands 2020^p	Vanuatu 2020^q
Governance structure	National, divisions/provinces, local	National, provinces, local	National, provinces, local
National legislature	51 seats, 4-year term	50 seats, 4-year term	52 seats, 4-year term
Head of state	President (maximum two terms of three years each)	Governor-General (representing Queen Elizabeth II)	President (elected by an electoral college)
Government	Multi-party systems	Fluid. Coalition government since independence (except 1989). Post-conflict	A multi-party system, coalition government
No. of changes to prime ministerships	11 since 1970	18 (equivalent to a different PM every 2 years) between 1978 and April 2019	24 since 1980

Sources: (a) <https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/fiji.htm>; (b) <https://www.un.int/solomonislands/solomonislands/country-facts>; (c) <https://www.vanuatu.travel/en/planning/travel-information>; (d) <https://stats.pacificdata.org>; (e) <https://www.fiji.gov.fj/Media-Centre/News/Fiji-Bureau-of-Statistics-Releases-2017-Census-Res>; (f) https://www.solomonchamber.com.sb/media/1997/provisional_count-2019_census_result.pdf; (g) <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS?locations=VU>; (h) <http://www.pmooffice.gov.fj/our-history/>; (i) https://theodora.com/wfbcurren/solomon_islands/solomon_islands_government.html; <http://www.pmooffice.gov.fj/our-history/>; (j) <https://www.britannica.com/place/Vanuatu>; (k) <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00223344.2018.1472521>; (l) <https://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/index.php/statistics/economic-statistics/national-accounts-gdp>; (m) <http://www.cbsi.com.sb/statistics/key-statistics/>; (n) <https://www.rbv.gov.vu/index.php/en/e-gdds-statistics>; (o) <http://www.pmooffice.gov.fj/our-history/>; (p) https://theodora.com/wfbcurren/solomon_islands/solomon_islands_government.html; (q) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prime_Minister_of_Vanuatu

3. METHODOLOGY

The study used qualitative methods to map the policy development process in the case study countries of Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Taking a multi-stakeholder perspective, information gathering focused primarily on virtual interviewing of senior and management officials of relevant government agencies, particularly the ministries of agriculture and fisheries; donor and development agencies in the countries; and SPC divisions and regional offices, which hold extensive local knowledge and provided first-hand information on the policy process and data uptake. Secondary information was also drawn from literature, publications, consultancy reports, research work and website and library searches. Information and documents were collected relating to national development strategies and policies, sector policies and plans, annual and costed reports, legislation, regional and

international policies, and other relevant information. The travel bans due to the COVID-19 pandemic prevented field study trips that could verify the quality of the information collected.

4. MAPPING THE POLICY DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES

Following Sutcliffe and Court (2006), Althaus et al. (2007) and Aiafi (2016), this study examines the policy development process under the following headings: initiation, formulation, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. The study focuses on the food security sector to map out the policy processes in Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. The key findings are described below and mapped in flow diagrams and will hopefully provide a better understanding on policy-making processes in these countries. The findings present a starting point for an open discussion on evidence and data uptake in policy development and analysis in these countries. The results also provide a learning tool for SPC and for national policy-makers to improve their awareness and understanding on their roles in the complex relationships and inter-dependent environments that contribute to policy decisions.

4.1 Fiji

This section analyses Fiji's policy development process, focusing on food security policies in the Fiji Ministry of Agriculture. Senior officials from the Ministry of Agriculture shared their experiences and observations on how the policies were generally initiated, formulated, implemented and monitored.

Initiation

The Fiji Prime Minister, through the Ministry of Agriculture, initiated the Fiji 2020 Agriculture Sector Policy Agenda, of which food security is one of the clusters. At the sector level, the Permanent Secretary for Agriculture signed off the policy agenda and submitted it to Cabinet as an information paper. The policy agenda was then adopted by the Ministry of Agriculture. Construction of policy is also influenced by national, regional and international policies, such as those crafted within regional or global bodies such as FAO and SPC.² Key influencers in the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Fisheries include the minister, permanent secretary, deputy secretary, and directors.

Formulation

The Fiji Ministry of Agriculture policy agenda development is government-driven with technical assistance from FAO. This process involved comprehensive consultations with communities (farmers), agriculture industries, partner ministries, NGOs, international organisations, and other stakeholders. The World Food Programme (WFP), staff of the Ministry of Agriculture, all other agencies across government and NGOs in the food security cluster were also involved in the policy formulation process.

The Ministry of Agriculture has in recent years increased its focus on strengthening data collection and placing greater emphasis on evidence-based approaches to better inform its work. This includes developing a robust policy agenda, strengthening research programmes, and elevating strategic approaches to food security. The Strategic Development Plan and the 2020 National Agriculture Census aim to provide comprehensive information on agriculture and related productive sectors. The Ministry of Agriculture has its own Economic Planning and Statistics Division that produces agricultural data and supports its policy formulation process. Further, agricultural statistics are integrated into the national statistics systems with stakeholders sharing data and information on trade and market prices.

Implementation

The Ministry of Agriculture costed operational plans, as in the policy agenda, are often not fully implemented due to a variety of factors including political. However, the Ministry of Agriculture, in

2 The Pacific Heads of Agriculture and Forestry meetings are convened by SPC every two years, with outcomes of regional policies for these two sectors as agreed by member states and territories.

collaboration with FAO and stakeholders including farmers, communities, government leaders and exporters, has been implementing the food security policies.

Monitoring

The Ministry of Agriculture reviews and evaluates its costed operational plan (2019–2020) twice a year to ensure it reflects the agriculture policy agenda and the annual reports of the Agriculture Development Plan.

Summary of the policy development process

Contextual factors (geographical, social, historical and development status) have a significant influence on the development and practices of agriculture food security policies. Moreover, foreign influences related to international policies, such as FAO policies, trade policies etc., also play a key role in shaping the development of Fiji's agriculture policies.

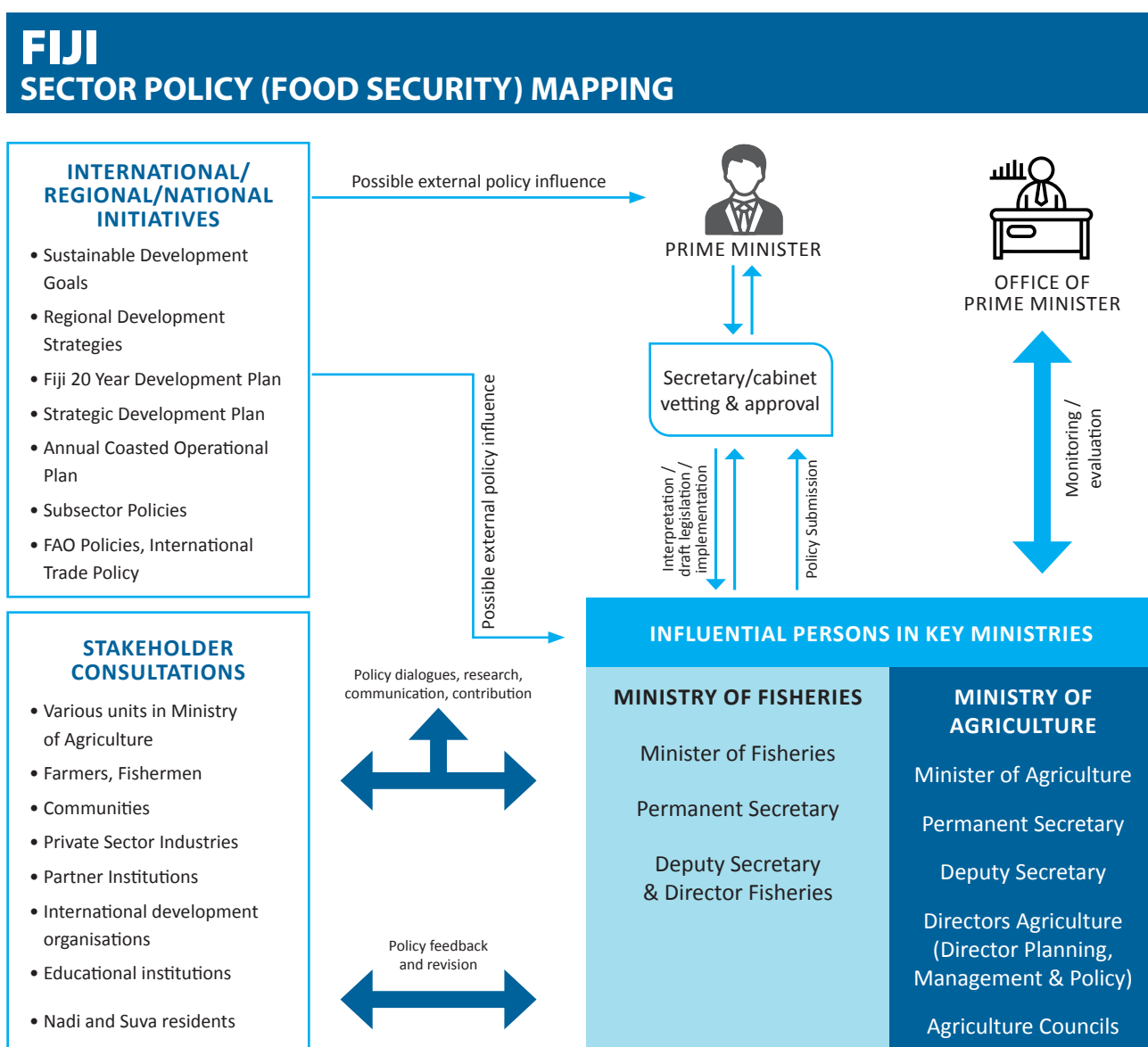


Figure 2. Fiji food security policy development process.

4.2 Solomon Islands

This section provides an overview of the Solomon Islands policy development process, focusing on food security policies in the Solomon Islands Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL) and the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources (MFMR). Senior government officials from MAL and MFMR shared their experiences and observations on how food security policies were generally initiated, formulated, implemented and monitored.

Initiation

Solomon Islands sector policy development initiation, particularly food security policy in MAL and MFMR, strongly relies on the Minister and the Permanent Secretary. For example, the new Fisheries Policy 2019–2029 was initiated by the Permanent Secretary of MFMR. In the agriculture sector, the MAL sector policy 2015–2019 has expired and initiation for a policy review or renewal is expected to come from the Minister or the Permanent Secretary.

The Minister or the Permanent Secretary's knowledge of sector development needs, and existing regional and external policy influences (such as pressure from donors), both play a role in the policy initiation stage. The Permanent Secretary will initiate ministry-wide and external stakeholder consultations to draft or review policy. Once finalised, the policy documents are submitted to Cabinet as information papers before adoption by the ministry as approved policy documents.

Formulation

The formulation process in both ministries involves internal staff. Both the fisheries and the agriculture sector policies were prepared internally by the ministries' own staff and executive management under the guidance of the permanent secretaries. Consultations were undertaken with all divisions in both ministries, as well as with other key ministries, the private sector and NGOs engaged in the productive sector. MAL and MFMR also work closely together on food security policies as well as working in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology on climate change considerations. The Ministry of National Planning and Development Coordination oversees planning in all ministries.

MAL reported that wider national consultation would have been optimal but was not undertaken due to a lack of resources. Similarly, MFMR was unable to consult communities on their overarching sector policy but utilised the Solomon Islands community-based resource management team which was already well engaged and directly linked to more than 100 communities.

The fisheries policy formulation process used data from the ministry's Planning and Statistics Division, which collects offshore and inshore fisheries data including data from private companies. There is data and information sharing between the MFMR and its key stakeholders to support their policy and decision-making process. For instance, the MFMR works closely with national statistics offices to link fisheries data into national statistics systems.

Implementation

For both MAL and MFMR, not all work programmes under the policies are implemented. For instance, the MFMR policy is implemented through a new corporate plan supported by the annual operational plans which include all working plans of all divisions in the ministry. However, in 2018 and 2019 the Ministry implemented only selected activities, focusing on four key areas under the policy (management, community benefits, law enforcement and aquaculture). MFMR also signed agreements with communities on approved fisheries and marine resources projects. Although communities have their own programmes with NGOs, there is recognition that MFMR is the key policy and regulatory agency. The fisheries policy has strong linkage with all other line ministries and the national development policy, to ensure that the strategies and issues under the four key areas are implemented and well addressed.

SOLOMONS ISLANDS

SECTOR POLICY (FOOD SECURITY) MAPPING

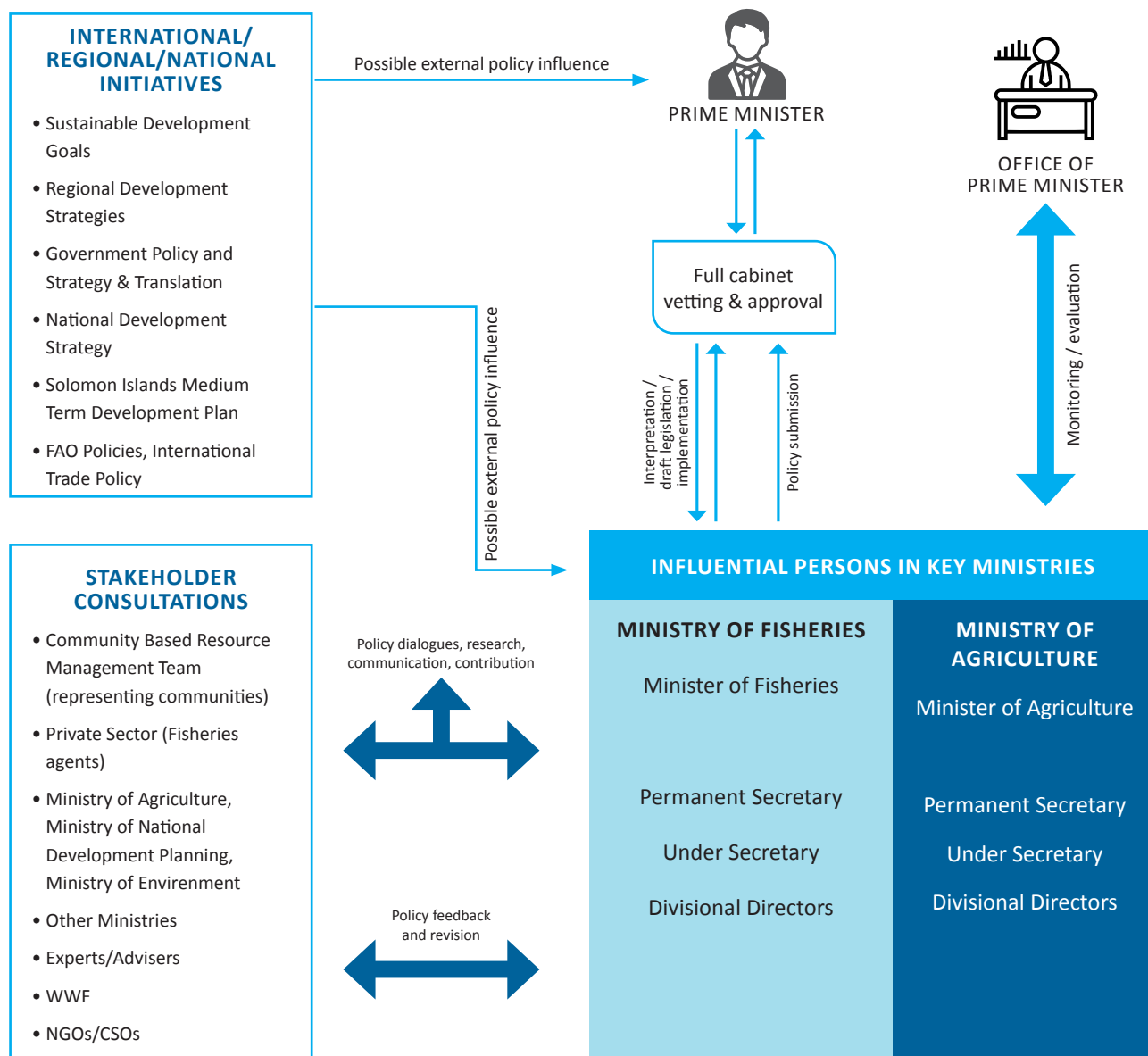


Figure 3. Solomon Islands food security policy development process.

The MFMR has also worked closely with the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the Nature Conservancy on several projects to implement fisheries policies. The MFMR also engages with the Fishermen’s Association and the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) on climate change.

Similarly, not all programmes under the Agriculture Medium-Term Development Plan developed from the agriculture policy are implemented. Aside from working closely with the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology and the MFMR on food security and livelihoods, MAL also works with NGOs such as consumer associations, faith-based organisations and farmers’ associations around the country. Consumers’ and farmers’ groups are very active in raising their concerns to the government through extension officers based in provinces and through provincial government administrations; however, direct aid to farmers and farmers’ associations is extremely limited.

Monitoring

MAL is lagging in terms of monitoring and evaluation as there are no mechanisms or evaluation methods in place to monitor and review agriculture policies. The lack of a policy and planning division within MAL further contributes to this challenge. There are mechanisms in place for monitoring and evaluating at the national level through a focal point in the Ministry of National Planning who is tasked with tracking implementation of the National Development Strategy (NDS), but there is limited knowledge on the agriculture sector policies being monitored and reviewed at sector level.

At this time, MFMR is planning to review some of the sector policies. As fisheries is a dynamic sector, the Ministry has a policy and planning division that is responsible for developing and reviewing fisheries policies, legislation and plans pertaining to the Ministry's mission and vision.

Summary of the policy development process

Contextual factors (geographical, social, historical and development status) have a significant influence on the development and practices of sector policies in the Solomon Islands. At the local level, around 76% of the Solomon Islands population resides in rural subsistence communities, with their daily lives still partially managed through traditional systems of governance, i.e., chiefly and 'big-man' systems. Many of the rural populace have limited knowledge on national/sector policies and this may cause difficulties in implementing policies. Continued political instability and frequent changes in government also contribute to the challenge of obtaining policy stability and implementation. Further, Solomon Islands as a young independent nation is still very much influenced by the colonial political systems and was subjected to external influences through the Australia-led Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands over 14 years following the 1998–2003 tensions.

4.3 Vanuatu

This section maps out the process of policy development by the Vanuatu government in the food security sector. The Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Forestry, Fisheries and Biosecurity (MALFFB) is the responsible government agency.

Initiation

Policy development initiation and/or change normally comes from a high political level, similar to the other two case study countries. Policy development is often donor and politically driven. There is little science-based assessment and there are limited reliable data and domestic resources to identify the needs for policy development or change. National policies normally go through the Development Committee of Officials (DCO), comprised of all directors-general in government. The DCO prepares briefs and papers for the Council of Ministers (COM) of Cabinet. COM-approved policy is then submitted for ministers' approval in Cabinet.

At sector level, the Director-General of MALFFB can sign policies and plans. Similarly, under the Fisheries Act, the Minister can sign policies and plans, as well as sometimes present to Cabinet before signing off the policies as part of the consultation process.

Formulation

Under the Prime Minister's Office, the Department of Strategic Policy Planning and Aid Coordination (DSPPAC) was responsible for the lengthy process of design and development of Vanuatu 2030, the National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP; also called the People's Plan), in collaboration with all ministries. Ministries have noted, however, that consultations were not effective resulting in gaps between the NSDP and ministries' corporate and business plans. Policies are normally written by consultants. At present, evidence and data from local actors rarely play any role in these national processes.

At sector level, for example with respect to Vanuatu fisheries management policies and plans, SPC's Fisheries, Aquaculture, and Marine Ecosystems division (FAME) provides assistance in policy formulation through provision of data/evidence and analysis. The Vanuatu Fisheries Department has a food security database that contains information from market surveys, national statistical data and agriculture census data. The Fisheries Department also works closely with key stakeholders including local communities and fishing cooperatives, other ministries, departments such as women and agriculture, and regional and international organisations such as FFA, the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) and FAO, on formulating food security related policies.

Implementation

Looking at food security policy implementation, Vanuatu's implementation strategy is generally weak. Poor coordination of development partners and stakeholders contributes to challenges in policy implementation. There is no single policy on food security, making the implementation process difficult. At the departmental level, there is a national food security policy that is expected to fall under and align with the National Fisheries and Management Policy. Changes in government, and therefore changes in priorities, also impact policy implementation.

Monitoring

MALFFB aims to evaluate food security related policies every three years, however there is very limited monitoring and evaluation capacity in either line ministries or in the DSPPAC. Ministries often do not turn in complete monitoring reports and it is difficult for DSPPAC to review ministry activities for outcomes against the NSDP.

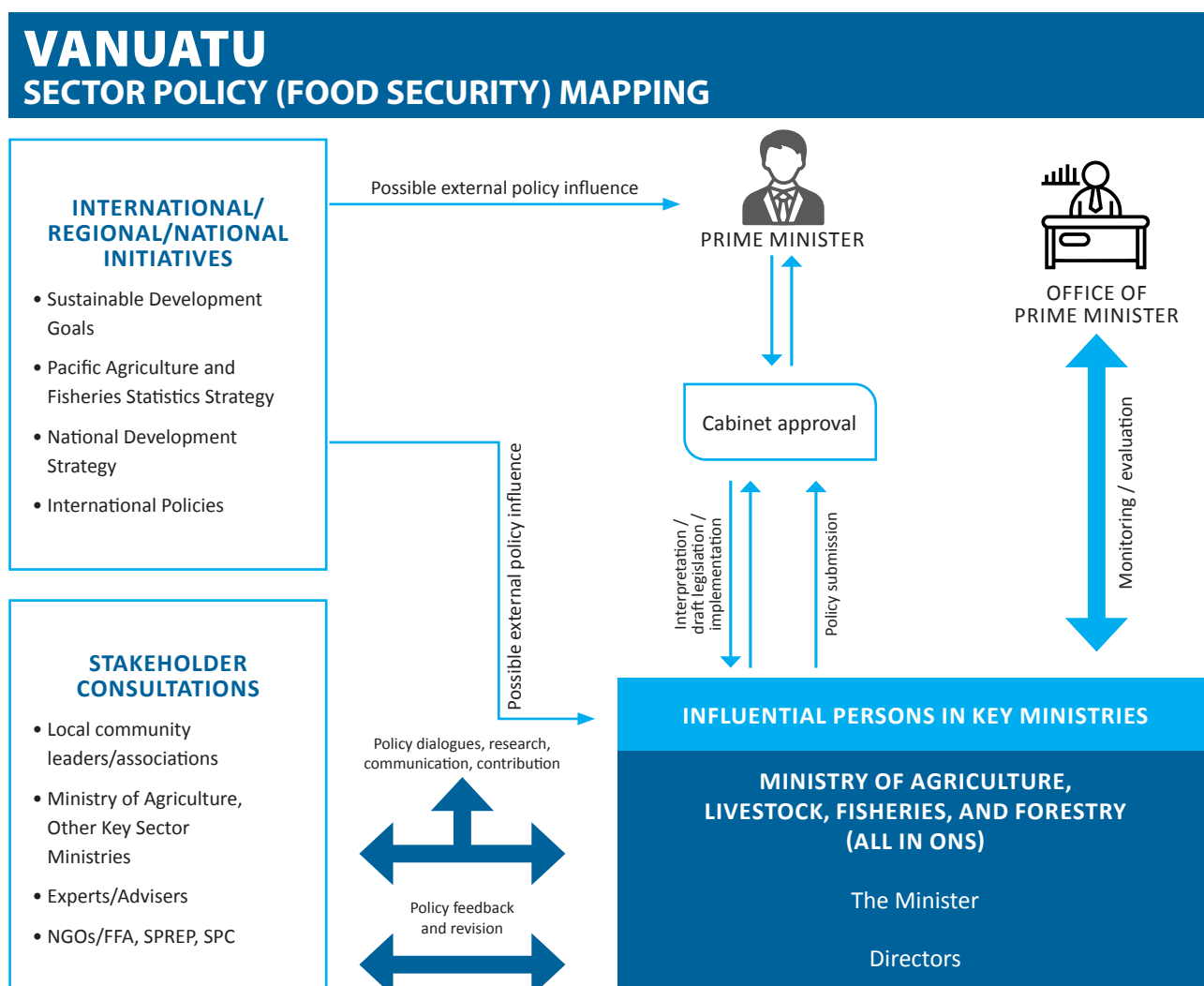


Figure 4. Vanuatu food security policy development process.

Summary of the policy development process

Vanuatu is a small Pacific Island country comprising 83 islands with a total population of 294,688 of which are 74.61% are rural based. Geographical, development and political factors play important roles in policy development and assessment, with Vanuatu's political system, a multi-party system government through coalition, itself a challenge to the process. Vanuatu's policy-makers do not have access to reliable data and evidence to form and evaluate policies; the resources and infrastructure to collect data are insufficient. Therefore, they rely on donors and international development agencies for support in setting priorities in their policy development.

4.4. Summary of the key findings in the policy development processes

Table 2 provides a comparative summary of the key findings on the policy development processes of Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. While all three countries generally share similar practices and challenges in terms of initiation and adoption, formulation and implementation of policies, they differ significantly on the monitoring and evaluation processes, reflecting the complexity of the sector organisations and the political landscapes in these countries.

Table 2. Summary of policy development processes in Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

Policy development step	Fiji	Solomon Islands	Vanuatu
Initiation and adoption	Sector policy development initiation depends very much on the government of the day. In the case study, the Prime Minister, through the Ministry of Agriculture, initiated the agriculture sector policy agenda. The Permanent Secretary signed off the policy agenda and submitted it to cabinet, and it was adopted by the Ministry of Agriculture.	Sector policy development initiation depends very much on the minister and the permanent secretary of the day. In the case study, the Permanent Secretary signed off the agriculture and fisheries sector policies and submitted them to cabinet as information paper, and they were adopted by the ministries.	Policy development initiation is normally driven by both the government of the day and donors. At the national level, the Director-General initiates and finalises policies. In the fisheries sector, the Minister of Fisheries has the power under the Fisheries Act to sign policies/plans and can present to cabinet before signing off as part of the consultation process.
Formulation	The agriculture policy agenda development was government driven and prepared with external technical assistance. Comprehensive community and stakeholder consultations were conducted. There was demonstrated data uptake in formulating the agriculture policies. Stakeholders are sharing data and information to support the decision-making process.	Agriculture and fisheries food security policies are government driven through the ministries. Sector policies were prepared internally supported by the Permanent Secretary. Stakeholder consultations were conducted. The Ministry of Fisheries demonstrated data uptake when formulating the new fisheries policy.	At the national level, agriculture and fisheries food security policies are mostly donor or politically driven. At sector level, with respect to fisheries, policy formulation is government driven. Community and stakeholder consultations were conducted. There was data uptake by the Vanuatu Ministry of Fisheries when formulating the fisheries policy.
Implementation	Implementing in the context of the Ministry of Agriculture costed operational plan agenda, not all agendas are implemented due to regular changes of government.	Not all policies under the annual corporate and operational plan or work programmes are implemented.	Donors and government recognise the importance of implementation with respect to food security policies, although in general policy implementation is a challenge.

Monitoring/evaluation	The Ministry of Agriculture costed operational plan (2019–2020), which reflects and embraces the agriculture policy agenda and links to the annual reports of the agriculture development plan, is reviewed twice a year.	Fisheries policy is evaluated against the programme of activities in four key areas which the ministry intended to address. No knowledge of monitoring/evaluation in the Ministry of Agriculture.	There is a policy evaluation every three or four years. The implementation strategy of monitoring and evaluation could be improved further. The policies may be updated or changed when politically/donor driven, although government departments have their own set of priorities.
Overall policy process	Contextual factors have significant influence on agriculture and food security policies and their development. Foreign influences are related to international policies (e.g. FAO, trade policies).	Contextual factors have significant influence on agriculture and food security policies and their development. Foreign influences are more confined to RAMSI, with direct external intervention.	Contextual factors have significant influence on agriculture, fisheries and food security policies and their development. Foreign influences are related to international policies (e.g. FAO).

5. KEY POLICY DOCUMENTS IN FIJI, SOLOMON ISLANDS AND VANUATU

Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu food security policy frameworks comprise key policy documents, shown in Table 3. As the table shows, generally, the policy development process across the three countries does not follow a consistent model. The most-referred-to key policy documents were the national development strategies/plans and plans at sectoral and ministry levels. International and regional policies, donor requirements, legislation and other documents were also referred to as policy. Most of these documents are constructed at the ministry level by executive management and internal staff with the support of technical advisors (external) as evident at different levels of the policy process. The national development strategies/plans co-exist with sectoral and ministries' strategic plans. Operational policies (legislations, procedures, instructions, manuals) exist within the ministries of agriculture and fisheries of the three case study countries. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms mostly encompassed the ministries' annual reporting to parliament, sector development strategies/plans, and budgetary reviews.

Table 3. Key policy documents in Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

Country	Level	Policy documents	Most relevant to
Fiji	National	Fiji National Development Plan (5-year and 20-year plans), Cabinet directives	Agenda-setting
	Sector	Ministry of Agriculture Strategic Development Plan (5 years), Fiji 2020 Agriculture Sector Policy Agenda Ministry of Fisheries Strategic Development Plan (10 years), medium-term frameworks, international and/or regional policies, donor requirements	Formulation
	Ministry	Corporate (3 years) and annual costed operational plans, legislation, operational policies (standards, procedures, instructions, manuals), budget	Implementation
	Across	Annual reports, Strategy Development planning reviews, Cabinet development committee monitoring, budget reviews	Monitoring and evaluation
Solomon Islands	National	Solomon Islands National Development Strategy (2016–2035), Democratic Coalition Government for Advancement policy statement (4 years), Government 100 days Policy Agenda, cabinet and caucus directives	Agenda-setting
	Sector	Solomon Islands National Fisheries Policy (2019–2029), Solomon Islands Agriculture and Livestock Sector Policy 2015–2019), medium-term frameworks, ministers’ directives, fisheries sector advisory councils, international and/or regional policies, donor requirements	Formulation
	Ministry	Government policy translation and implementation document, corporate (3 years) and annual plans, strategic framework, legislation – Acts and regulations, operating procedures, instructions, manuals, operational policies, development budget, ministers’ and permanent secretaries’ directives	Implementation
	Across	Annual reports, Sustainable Development policy planning review, policy, planning and project management (Ministry of Fisheries)	Monitoring and evaluation
Vanuatu	National	Vanuatu National Sustainable Development Plan (2016–2030)	Agenda-setting
	Sector	Vanuatu National Fisheries Sector Policy (2016–2031), international and/or regional policies, donor requirements	Formulation
	Ministry	Legislation – Acts and regulations, rules, instructions, procedures, manuals (operational policies), budgets	Implementation
	Across	Six-monthly reports, annual development reports	Monitoring and evaluation

6. OVERVIEW OF THE POLICY PROCESSES

In general, the policy processes in Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu reflect the top-down approach, with most agriculture and fisheries policies initiated at the minister and prime minister level and with little direct community involvement (especially in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu). While consultative approaches have improved, as seen in the policy development steps, the meaningful participation of civil society in policy processes is limited. For all three countries, documentation of the policy framework is lacking or incomplete. For example, in the Solomon Islands MAL, the corporate plans and the agriculture policy are outdated, and there are no monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in place for the policies.

The main challenge in the policy development process for Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu lies in the implementation and monitoring steps. Initiation and formulation of a national or sector policy document can be straightforward – it is easy to write the policies through internal and external advisors/experts – but implementation, monitoring and evaluation are big challenges. These challenges are compounded by the complex societies in the three countries, with more than 900 islands in Solomon Islands, over 300 in Fiji and over 80 islands in Vanuatu – people are divided as a community, and politics and policy are also fragmented. A lack of consolidated community support is a key area affecting policy implementation in these geographically and culturally diverse countries. Political instability with regular changes of government also contributes to a lack of implementation of some policies.

Ministries, and planning and statistics divisions, have some influence in evidenced-informed policy and data uptake. For instance, the Fiji Ministry of Agriculture has an Economic Planning and Statistics Division which collects, for example, agriculture production data that supports food security policy formulation. Similarly, the Solomon Islands MFMR has a Fisheries Information/Statistics Division which collects onshore and offshore fisheries data used to provide support to policy formulation. In both the Fiji Ministry of Agriculture and the Solomon Islands MFMR, data collection is also embedded into the national statistics system, as well as sharing of data by stakeholders to support the policy-making process. In contrast, ministries with no planning and statistics division, such as the Solomon Islands MAL, faced challenges in formulating evidenced-based policy.

7. REGIONAL POLICY-MAKING

Nine Pacific inter-governmental organisations are active in regional policy-making, coordinated through the Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific (CROP): the Pacific Aviation Safety Office (PASO), the Pacific Community (SPC), the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), the Pacific Islands Development Program (PIDP), the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS; CROP Chair), the Pacific Power Association (PPA), the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), the South Pacific Tourism Organisation (SPTO), and the University of the South Pacific (USP). CROP was first endorsed by Pacific Islands Forum Leaders in 1988 as an overarching committee for regional organisations in the Pacific. Its original name was the South Pacific Organisations' Coordinating Committee. The purpose of CROP is to work collectively to build a stronger region for Pacific people by coordinating policy advice and providing technical expertise, assistance and resources to support Pacific countries.³

The Framework for Pacific Regionalism endorsed by Pacific Islands Forum Leaders in 2014 is the key regional policy platform. The Forum priorities include climate change and resilience, fisheries, security, ocean management and conservation, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which covers food security.

³ SPC CROP family, <https://www.spc.int/crop-family>

PIFS, SPC, FFA and SPREP are the 'core' group of the regional policy architecture, playing key roles in inter-government interactions in regional and national policy processes. The remaining five CROP agencies perform relatively low levels of political cooperation and are sector specific, i.e. mainly concerned with education (USP, PIDP), tourism (SPTO), power utilities (PPA) and aviation (PASO). The CROP agencies are semi-autonomous bodies with their own governance structures and mandates based on country membership. As such, regional policy-making and implementation depend closely on cooperation, coordination, and integration at the national level.

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PIFS is the main regional policy-making institution; its meetings are conducted annually and include the heads of governments of all the PIFS member countries. PIFS, which is governed by the Forum Official Council comprising national officials (e.g., ministers of foreign affairs, finance or prime minister), provides policy advice, coordination, and leadership in implementing Forum decisions. SPC is the key regional technical (implementing) institution with a broad mandate covering applied geoscience and technology; economic development; education, training and human resource development; fisheries, aquaculture and marine ecosystems; land resources; health; statistics; strategic engagement; policy; and planning.

While SPC plays a key role in the regional technical (implementing) arena, at the national sector level, the ministries of agriculture and fisheries in Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu demonstrated key challenges in implementing sector policies relating to food security. Nevertheless, Solomon Islands MFMR highlighted that they work closely with SPC and FFA in the policy development process, particularly in implementing fisheries projects and programmes, and this reflected strong support from SPC's FAME. At the international level, although the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a key Forum priority, national sector ministries see the SDGs as a low priority.

Three subregional organisations, the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), the Polynesian Leaders Group (PLG) and the Pacific Small Island States Subgroup, also play key roles in regional dialogue and policy development. The MSG, comprising the five Melanesian countries (Fiji, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu), is a forum for member states to drive their national and common interests and solidarity in spearheading sub-regional issues.⁴ The PLG is an international government cooperation group bringing together the ten independent or self-governing island nations and territories in Polynesia (American Samoa, the Cook Islands, French Polynesia, Niue, Samoa, Tonga, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Wallis and Futuna) to consider issues of concern to Polynesian countries and territories with a view to agreeing common positions and actions to further their collective interests.⁵ The Pacific Small Island States Subgroup comprises 14 Pacific Island countries (Cook Islands, Federated State of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu) who are members of the United Nations (UN) (Fry and Tarte, 2015).

Other regional stakeholders include donors, development agencies, private sector and civil society also engaged in regional dialogue.

⁴ See <https://www.msgsec.info/about-us/>

⁵ See <https://corporate.southpacificislands.travel/polynesian-leaders-group-meet>

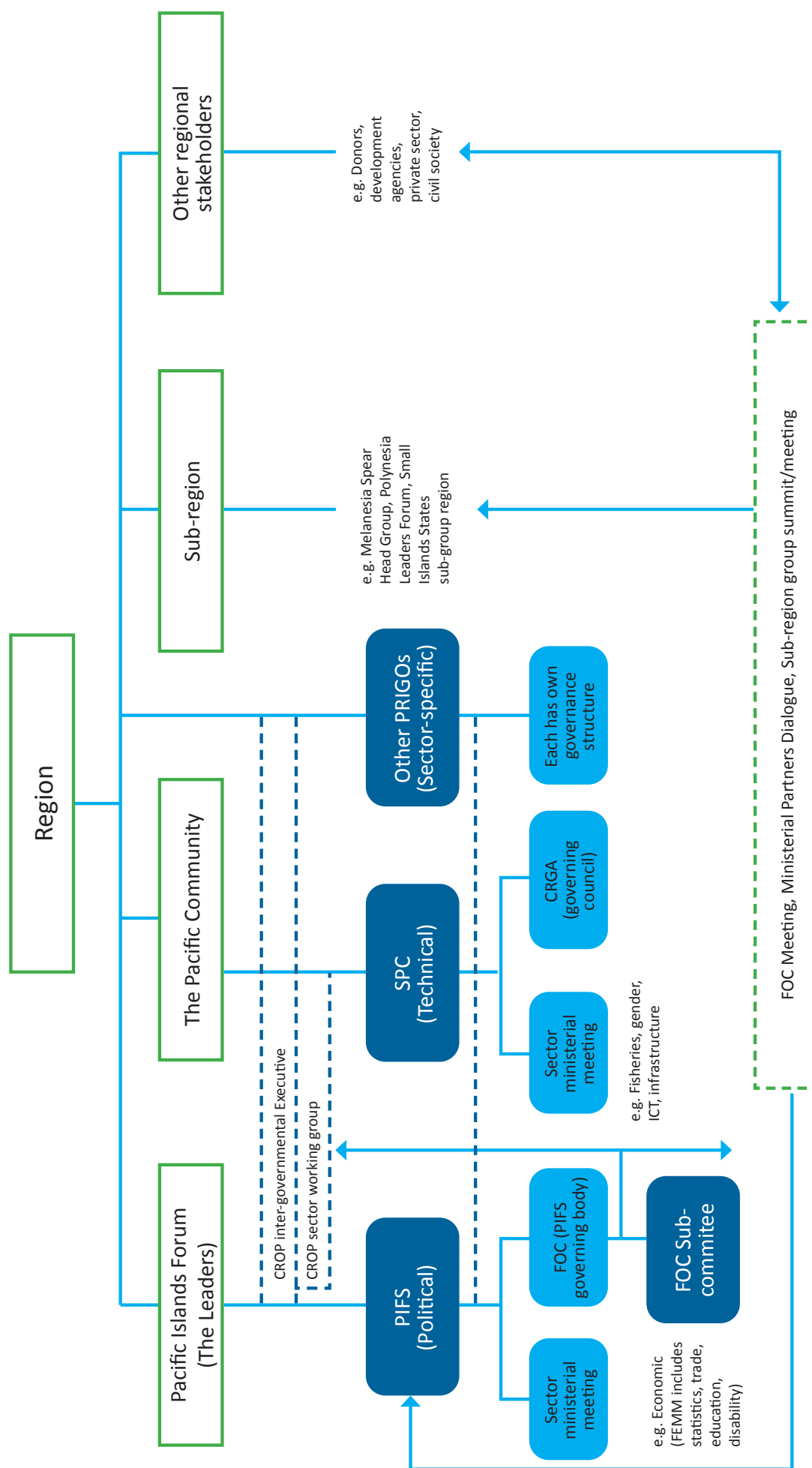


Figure 5. Regional (inter-governmental) policy-making. Source: <https://www.spc.int/crop-family-and-Aiafi> (2016).

8. SPC POLICY SUPPORT AND POTENTIAL SUPPORT FOR MEMBER COUNTRIES

Table 4 provides a quick stocktake of policy-related work at SPC, and where the Pacific Data Hub (PDH) can potentially support member countries in data outreach, uptake and innovation. In 2019, SPC divisions supported more than 20 member countries in policy-related work across a wide range of key regional thematic areas, including non-communicable diseases (NCD), gender and equality, human rights, water and sanitation, education, energy, climate change, legislation and spatial data.

Table 4. SPC policy support and PDH potential support for member countries.

SPC policy support activity	Scope of SPC support	Potential for PDH support
Five PICTs were assisted to review or develop their NCD-related policies and legislation, including RMI (tobacco legislation and healthy trade bill); Solomon Islands (development of NCD Alliance constitution, and health promotion fund policy and guidelines); Nauru (school food policy).	Stage of policy cycle (development, implementation, monitoring) and any results	Potential data advocacy and uptake activities, capacity development and providing regional guidelines that could support the divisional objective and support better evidence-based decision-making
Gender policy in Tonga and gender equality integrated into a policy in Tuvalu	Stage of policy cycle, development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation	Potential data outreach and uptake activities that could support the divisional objective and support better evidence-based decision-making
Policy and legislation change concerning human rights, for example, Pohnpei's Disability Bill, Chuuk established new disabled organisations, Republic of Marshall Islands single used plastic ban	Stage of policy cycle-development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation	Promoting data governance that could support the divisional objective, and support hosting relevant information for better evidence-based decision-
Energy policy (Tuvalu)	Stage of policy cycle-implementation, monitoring and evaluation	Potential data advocacy and uptake activities that could support the divisional objective and support better evidence-based decision-making
Draft Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) policy developed for Ministry of Human Resource Development following SPC peer review of policy and technical advice (Solomon Islands)	Stage of policy cycle-development and formulation, and evaluation	Promoting the peer review process which could support the divisional objective and support better evidence-based decision-making
Draft seed policy developed using the Pacific Seed Systems Framework (Vanuatu)	Stage of policy cycle-development and formulation	Potential data advocacy and uptake activities that could support the divisional objective, and support better evidence-based decision-making
Water and sanitation policy (Tokelau)	Stage of policy cycle-development and formulation	Potential data advocacy and uptake activities that could support the divisional objective, and support better evidence-based decision-making
Education policies assessed using World Bank SABER (Systems Approach for Better Education Results). Country report produced with policy recommendations to inform interventions (e.g. Kiribati). Policy briefs – all Pacific Island countries	Stage of policy cycle-monitoring and evaluation	Potential automated monitoring and evaluation system that could support the divisional objective and support systematic approach in formulating evidenced-based information
National Disaster Management Plan (policy framework) 2017–2020 reviewed (Samoa)	Stage of policy cycle-monitoring and evaluation	Potential data management activities that could support the divisional objective and support better data management for evidence-based decision-making
Policy gap analysis and instruction paper	Stage of policy cycle-development, formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation	Potential data advocacy and uptake activities that could support the divisional objective, and support better evidence-based decision-making
Review of legal frameworks for aggregate extraction and market assessment begun with view to developing policy options for government for sustainable management of aggregate (RMI)	Stage of policy cycle-development, formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation	
Spatial data policy framework implemented (FSM)	Stage of policy cycle-implementation.	

Source: Pacific Data Hub Explorer, <https://stats.pacificdata.org/>

9. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Although the study achieved its aim in mapping the policy development processes in the case study countries of Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, there were unavoidable limitations to the study. First, the case study focuses on only three countries, and all Melanesian countries, so that findings may be biased towards the Melanesian policy development context rather than all the Pacific ethnic subgroupings. The countries were selected based on the project's network of experts and decision-makers who could provide the information needed, as well as the countries having more developed governing structures and policy development processes that could provide a model to study other member countries.

Second, there is limited information and research studies on policy development cycles in the pilot countries' food security sector. There is limited documentation of current policy development processes and data uptake in these countries which make analysis difficult.

Third, the study only addresses a single ministry in each government, i.e., the ministries of agriculture and fisheries, and thus the study does not reflect the whole-of-government in the countries.

Fourth, field trips were not possible due to COVID-19, and this impacted on the quality and verification of the findings as well as maintaining interactions with the key informants for this study. The travel bans meant that the study had to undertake virtual interviews, and this resulted in a limited number of interviewees as getting confirmation was a challenge and walk-in interviews were not possible, which is a common practice in the Pacific Islands.

Fifth, this study does not include issues relating to commercially sensitive data such as fisheries and aquaculture data that form a significant portion of sectoral data in the Pacific Island countries. Data management and data uptake in these sectors have their own challenges that were not addressed in the current study.

Lastly, the study did not investigate the role that the PDH can play in supporting the member countries in bringing together multi-sectoral data and the data interpretation experts to address particular policy questions related to food security. This is an area to explore in the future.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Based on the literature and the findings for the case study countries of Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, several recommendations are put forward to improve evidence-informed decision-making in the region and for further research.

- SPC as the leading regional implementing institution should support and enhance PSD/PDH as an enabling tool for member states' policy development. Through central positioning of PDH, the connection can be strengthened between all actors in the policy development process, including SPC divisions, CROP agencies, partner agencies, international and research institutions and the member country governments.
- Regional informative guidelines about the policy process could support better evidence-based policy formulation and analysis for government agencies and national stakeholders.
- PSD/PDH's short-, medium-, and long-term capacity-building programmes should focus on the practical aspects of data analysis for policy development for member countries and key stakeholders through knowledge sharing, dashboards, and collaborative training. At the same time this will advance the PSD/PDH role in the Pacific policy arena. The capacity-building programmes will further strengthen data uptake in targeted sector ministries and other government agencies who are the central policy actors. The training programmes will also

enhance technical expertise in the areas of planning and policy that are extremely important in utilising data and evidence in Pacific policymaking.

- PSD/PDH can leverage on SPC's regional mandate and can potentially facilitate regional policy support at national levels through the Forum ministerial meetings, regional cooperation, innovative partnerships, and resource mobilisation. For instance, through the Ten-Year Pacific Statistics Strategy (TYPSS), PSD/PDH can facilitate strengthening of cross-cutting statistics (agriculture, fisheries, SDGs etc.) within SPC and member countries.
- SPC's Strategy, Performance, and Learning (SPL) unit can serve as a strategic coordination point for key relationships with external stakeholders, including member countries and territories, donors and development partners, to support sector ministries in all phases of the policy development process. SPL can also promote and facilitate the participatory approach, enhancing community involvement and ownership in developing, implementing and monitoring the policies.
- Data users play a critical role in the policy development process. PSD/PDH can be a vehicle in identifying, connecting and empowering data users which can influence data outreach, uptake and innovation in the region. By connecting the data and evidence producers and holders and helping establish networks of data champions, this can support and strengthen evidenced-based policy- and decision-making in the region (Figure 6).

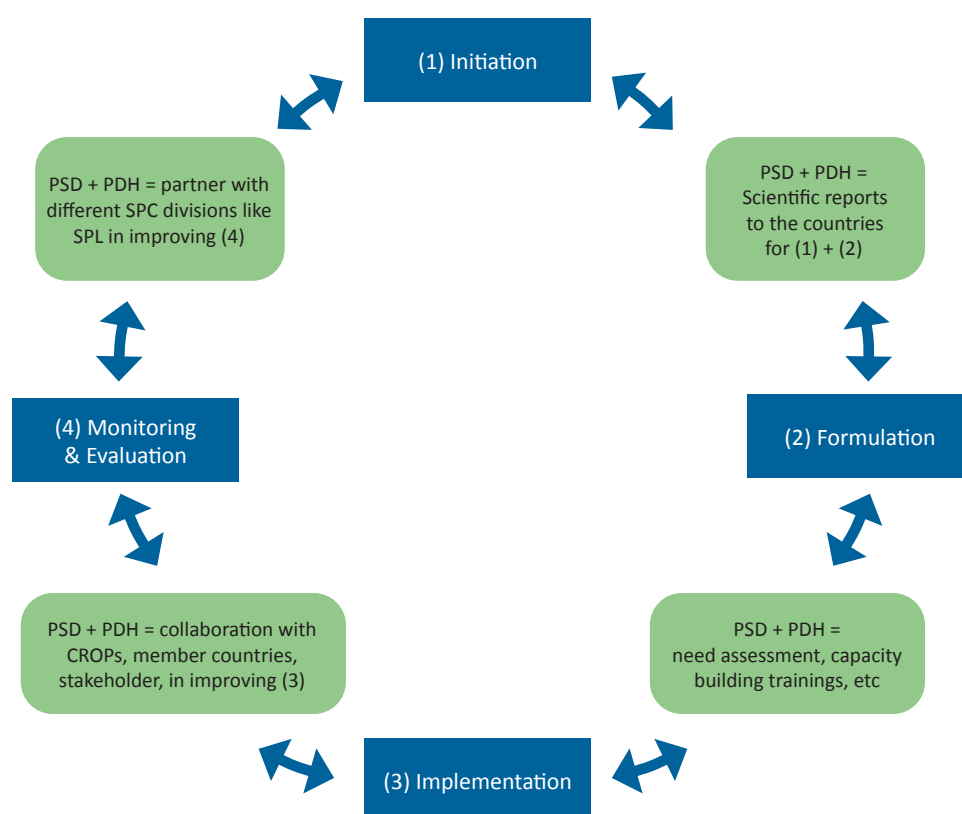


Figure 6. Policy development process model proposed by the Pacific Statistics and Data Initiative and the Pacific Data Hub project.

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