

National Consultation on Policy and Programmatic Actions to Address High Food Prices in the Solomon Islands,

**Heritage Park Hotel, Honiara, Solomon Islands
8-9 May 2012**

Outcome Statement

1. The National Consultation on Policy and Programmatic Actions to Address High Food Prices in the Solomon Islands was held at the Heritage Park Hotel, Honiara on 8-9 May 2012. The meeting was convened by the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations (UN). Participants from government agencies, private sector, civil society organizations and development partners, attended the consultation.
2. The objective of the national consultation was to assist government in identifying various policy options and designing immediate actions in response to food price rises.
3. The consultation recognised the following:
 - a) High food prices will continue to follow global trends and it is unlikely that they will return to pre 2007 price levels.
 - b) Issues relating to high food prices are location specific in the Solomon Islands.
 - c) The most vulnerable groups affected by high food prices are: the low income families with no access to resources; socially disadvantaged; unemployed urban families; and,, households in remote locations. Within the most vulnerable groups, women and children are the most vulnerable.
 - d) The most vulnerable households spend a large proportion of their income on food.
 - e) Women's contributions are predominant in food production, marketing, preparation, and income generation from selling food.
 - f) Household food production plays a significant role in mitigating the negative impacts of high food prices in the Solomon Islands, and income from informal and formal employment also plays a role.
 - g) Freight rates and the cost of agricultural inputs are high in the Solomon Islands, and will likely continue into the future.
 - h) There is a need to conserve and preserve traditional food crop varieties through actions including in-situ collection in farmers fields and gardens, local germplasm collections and storage at the SPC Centre for Pacific Crops and Trees (CePaCT).

- i) Significant changes have occurred in the diets and food preferences of people in the Solomon Islands.
 - j) A lack of loans, savings, remittance and local money transfer services in the rural areas and a history of failed efforts by the private sector in providing these services.
 - k) The need for greater awareness and education programmes to raise food and nutrition security during times of high food prices.
 - l) The need to increase the engagement of youth in food and agricultural production in the Solomon Islands.
 - m) That there is significant food wastage at the food and agricultural production and marketing chain, including at the household level, in the urban areas.
 - n) There is need to improve collaboration among relevant agencies on data collection, documentation and management, including standardization of measuring units, in the Solomon Islands.
 - o) Production of local foods is seasonal and the nature of these foods does not lend themselves well to bulk storage.
 - p) The traditional safety net systems of the Solomon Islands such as the ‘wantok’ system will continue to play a role in mitigating the negative impact of high food prices in time of crises.
 - q) The Solomon Islands Government has a comprehensive set of 16 agriculture and livestock development policies, which assist in mitigating the negative impacts of high food prices. Although the government with assistance from the Rural Development Programme (RDP) and other development programmes, have contributed to achieving those policies, significant gaps exist in the policies as they relate to addressing high food prices, and in implementing those policies.
 - r) There is support for community driven development in mitigating the impacts of high food prices with the support by government, civil society and development partners.
 - s) Significant competition exists in exports from the Solomon Islands whereas in trade of imported food products, prices are controlled by the “cartel”.
 - t) Improved family planning, adoption of family values, personal viability and capacity building in life skills will help prevent occurrences of crises and contribute to improved resilience in times of disasters, including those caused by high food prices
4. Participants discussed the trends, impacts and key issues of high food prices and agreed that the following guidelines can inform their actions:
- a) Households should be empowered through having better access to information, skills, knowledge and resources to increase and sustain domestic food and cash crop production.

- b) Upscale community driven approach to increase agricultural production, and government, civil society organisations, and other partners should be more responsive to specific needs of communities to mitigate negative effects of high food prices.
- c) Build resilience against high food prices impacts through community based natural resource management and, sustainable landscape and improving farming systems, including in;
 - i. disaster risk management;
 - ii. diversification of income sources;
 - iii. land use policy and zoning; and,
 - iv. conservation of food crop varieties and traditional preservation methods.
- d) Government should consider improving the effectiveness of the Price Control Policy and the role of the price control unit in regulating prices of basic food commodities, to address high volatility of food prices.
- e) Improve the coordination and linking of producers, middleman and consumers, to improve marketing efficiency.
- f) Central Bank of Solomon Islands (CBSI) to lead in collaborative effort with relevant organizations in regularly distributing market information on local and imported foods.
- g) Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL) to provide farm management handbooks as source of information on gross margins of local produce.
- h) Government may consider revaluing the Solomon Islands dollar as a measure to help mitigate negative impacts of high food prices.
- i) Government should consider commissioning a market chain study to investigate bottlenecks in addressing issues related to the ongoing high food prices and strategies for overcoming them.
- j) Government to consider providing financing facility and capacity building to local traders in order to strengthen competition in the market place and thereby help reduce high food prices.
- k) CBSI, civil society organisations and government should consider expanding the loans and savings services currently provided in the Solomon Islands, including remittances and local money transfers.
- l) Government, private sector and Non Government Organisations to consider adjusting the Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) as a measure for addressing high food price issues.
- m) Civil society organisations and government should consider strengthening the positive aspects of the 'wantok' system, including capacity building, sharing human capacities, reviving traditional values and expanding the coverage of sharing.
- n) Government, civil society and development partners, should consider cash transfers, cash for work and food vouchers, for the most disadvantaged groups in times of extreme high food prices crises.
- o) Government, civil society organizations and development partners should consider subsidising cost of inputs for agricultural production in times of extreme high food prices crises.

- p) Government and civil society to consider a school meal programme in times of natural disasters and high food prices.
- q) Women and youth should be empowered to be involved in planning, decision making and implementing roles in addressing issues arising from high food prices.
- r) Government, private sector and civil society organisations can organize producer groups within communities to strengthen their production and marketing capacity.
- s) Government, civil society and development partners to consider promoting those areas that have comparative advantages for specific agricultural commodities and to enhance their resilience to shocks, including high food prices.
- t) The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL) is tasked with the responsibility of submitting the outcome statement to cabinet and ensure follow-up of implementation in conjunction with key stakeholders.
- u) The meeting recommends that the Government of the Solomon Islands endorses, and call upon development partners to support the implementation of the outcome statement.