

Support to RPFS in the Pacific Islands
GTFS/RAS/198/ITA
1st Meeting of the Regional Project Steering
Committee (RPSC)
June 10th–11th 2004, SAPA
Discussion Record

Opening

1. The meeting was officially opened by Dr. Vili Fuavao, SRR, Chairman, who welcomed and introduced the participants. He thanked the participants for their commitment by their presence in the first meeting of the Regional Project Steering Committee (RPSC). He reminded the meeting of the generous support by the Government of Italy to the FAO Fund for Food Security and Food Safety (TFFS) which is supporting the RPFS for the Pacific Island Countries (PICs). He referred to the meeting objectives in particular the role of the RPSC and noted the commitments of SAPA and RAPP in providing the technical backstopping support to the project thus ensuring its immediate implementation.

Agenda

2. In discussing the provisional agenda, Mr. Syed Saifullar, Chief, Policy Assistant Branch RAPP, Bangkok, requested the inclusion of resource mobilization noting it as an important component of the project and requires follow up. Mr. Aleki Sisifa, Representative of CROP/SPC requested the inclusion the status of RPFS in the Caribbean which could be helpful for planning implementation of the RPFS in the Pacific. The meeting agreed to adopt the revise agenda as such proposed.

Agenda Item 1: Project Design and Review

3. Mr. Syed provided an insight in to the project design and review. Emphasis was on the Italian contribution to the Fund for Food Security and Food Safety (TFFS) and its overall objective not only through implementation of agreed priorities but also to be seen as seed money or catalysts in identification of many more activities that other efforts or donors can pick up and develop further ensuring sustainability and promoting collaboration amongst efforts to address food security. He further discusses available resources through 13 National TCP' and 1 Regional TCP to technically support those activities agreed on for implementation under the fund and reminded the committee of the duration of the fund support which is 3 years and the importance of the timely implementation of those agreed activities.

4. Mr. Syed discussed the urgency to develop country detailed project documents for the activities agreed on and further request the priority of identifying mechanisms to catalyst action on the ground. A series of options were proposed to facilitate the process; identification of local consultants to develop detail plan; assistance through SAPA technical multidisciplinary team and RAPP.

5. Mr. Sisifa discussed the importance of ensuring that efforts under the Trust Fund are not isolated from regional programs that are currently being implemented i.e. Forum Secretariat and SPC, on Trade policy aspects and WTO agreement which the Fund could compliment under component 2. He further stressed the importance of countries taking the lead in sustaining momentum of these efforts. In addition he discussed that solving the issue of food security is a big task for countries thus commitment on such direction is crucial. Mr. Daniele Salvini, Country Project Officer, SAPA in support discussed that it is important for countries to believe in the activities and take leadership as the sustainability of the project will primary rest on their efforts with outside assistance to provide the support if required.

6. Mr. Syed discussed the project interest to establish linkages with regional institutions for research and training as agreed on, in particular for the implementation of Component 2. This is with regards to the understanding that Component 2 will involve a MoU between INEA and USP (or another Regional Organization as appropriate) to implement the activities through joint efforts. He further stressed the important for the implementation and sustainability of the activity, when setting up linkages between CROP Agencies and Italian Institutions.

7. The Chairman confirmed the importance of the finalization of the arrangement for the implementation of this component of the RPFS as well as ensuring that long term affiliation between the 2 institutions on research and training in agriculture is established. Mr. Syed added that a draft MoU was sent to USP and they had yet to come back with comments or any advice.

8. The Mr. Fredrick Muller, Representative of the Micronesian Sub-group, extend his appreciation of being involved in the meeting and for taking part in the project. He added that, regional collaboration needs to filter down to the national where exchange of experts between countries could be foster and countries will learn from their experience.

9. The committee discussed assistance through bilateral aid in the regional level and recognizes that such should be well defined to ensure capacity building efforts is filtered down to the countries.

10. Mr. Sisifa drew on the importance of recognizing the risk that may impact on the implementation of activities which involves commitment by countries; delay in mobilizing resources; shift of interest and change of priorities. Mr. Bismarck, Regional Project Coordinator added that while Component 1 is very much defined given that countries had given their specific priorities, Component 2 which provides a more horizontal and regional approach, would need to be develop in such a way that addresses common interest of the countries. This is in support of the

point that, countries are at various stages of their trade policies and negotiations of the WTO.

11. Mr. Carlos Santana, Senior Agriculture Policy Officer, TCAR, Rome informed the meeting on the recently approved Trust Fund Project “Support to Regional Economic Organizations (REOs) for the Implementation of their Regional Programme for Food Security”. He discussed the overall objective of the project which is to complement assistance to REO’s , particularly PIF, CARIFORUM and UEMOA, by strengthening their capacities to implement their regional programmes for food security (RPFS). More specifically, Mr. Santana reconfirmed the project aim which provide complementary assistance to secure funding for the continuing implementation of the RPFS supporting the capacity building process for market expansion and access for national products within regional and global markets, and assisting member countries to jointly identify agricultural investment opportunities for shared focus and specialization. He highlighted the importance of this complementary project given its regional focus and complementary activities to RPFS.

12. Mr. Muller drew on the importance of an inventory of projects in the currently implemented and on the pipeline for countries as a mechanism to identify gaps and needs, so countries can be specific on request that is seen most crucial and appropriate. The Chairman noted that SAPA multidisciplinary team has a good understanding of the issues and priorities of the countries which would be helpful in identifying these gaps for projects to address.

Agenda Item 2: Presentation and Discussions of the PSC Inception Report

13. Mr. Crawley provided a brief overview of the inception report which he discussed as providing the status of the project; the constraints faced and the gaps; recommended actions for constraints and the outlook for the project within the next 12 months.

14. The Chairman encouraged representatives of the member countries to take the lead in the discussion of all the issues raised in the inception report. He also reminded them that they are in the committee to represent their respective subgroup and not a representative of their respective government.

Project Management and Coordination

15. Discussions were set on the establishment of the RPSC. Mr. Seumanutafa Malaki, Representative of Polynesia Sub-group reflected on the decision by the Senior Officials Meeting, June 9th–11th 2003 Apia, Samoa for the setup of the RPSC. The committee endorsed the setup which comprises of FAO, Representative of the donor, CROP agencies, one representative each from Micronesia, Polynesia and Melanesia; the donor country; and the RPMU. It also endorsed the establishment of alternate representative for the member countries sub groups so as to allow proceedings of meetings when required without delays.

16. The functions of the RPSC were then discussed and the committee agreed to remove the following bullets from the recommendations proposed in the Inception by the RPMU:

- (v) Review and endorse project proposals for funding under project and
- (vi) Review and endorse all reports of the Project i.e. quarterly, annual, inception and terminal, before any dissemination from list in the RPC Inception Report (pg. 10).

The role of the RPSC as an advisory body was reconfirmed rather than been seen dealing with technical issues, which is the role of the LTU.

17. The frequency of meetings will be scheduled as agreed on in the Project Document; however it was agreed to also use other more cost effective communication such as email and fax throughout the implementation of the project.

18. Under project activity development, Mr. Syed reconfirms the leading role of the RPMU and the technical backstopping assistance of FAO when required to facilitate the process.

19. The implementation of Component 2 was discussed in light of the earlier discussion on the project design and review. The committee was noted of the current arrangement where a LoA is under consideration between FAO and INEA to implement the component. In addition, INEA through this arrangement could develop a MoU with relevant CROP agencies to jointly implement the activities. The committee further recognized the importance of FAO reviewing the terms and conditions of the arrangement to ensure agreed outputs as per the Project Document, is addressed. In response, the committee agreed for the RPMU to develop a proposal in collaboration with LTU, to guide the formulation of the relevant mechanisms for implementation. Mr. Santana will revisit the status of the LoA with the appropriate Personnel at the headquarters and inform the RPMU accordingly.

Proposal Development and Selection

20. The committee was in agreement with Mr. Syed's advice that the RPMU proceed with developing national project documents for activities. He suggested that priorities agreed on need not to go through another screening process as these were identified and developed based on the requirements of the project.

Administration and Disbursement of Funds

21. The committee agreed to handle this on case by case basis for the project with its administration to consider FAO procedure. The issue of setting up bank account for receipt of Funds under the project was raised by Mr. Muller in light of his experience in his country where it needs to get cabinet approval. The Chairman suggested that this be discussed with RPMU in due course and have it raised with the appropriate personnel in FAO.

Project Input

22. FAO technical backstopping support will be sought if necessary as discussed earlier. One constraint discussed by Mr. Salvini, is the limitation on the project budget for travel and DSA. It was agreed that in case a particular country needs specific FAO technical backstopping assistance, the costs of the mission must be borne by the country itself, using part of the allocation received.

Consultants

23. The Chairman confirmed the importance of cost saving when recruiting consultants to provide the necessary support. A preference for national consultants was considered before going out to regional support and the last option to recruit an international consultant.

Project Communication

24. The committee agreed to promote the use of email for matters of greater urgency and informal decisions. In addition, the committee suggested for the project to use the SAPA Newsletter to communicate on project progress and developments.

Agenda Item 3: Project Work Plan

25. The draft work plan (Annex 1) was presented to the committee. FAO suggested placing SSC Activities under Component 1. In addition, the committee agreed for the RPMU to adjust the work plan in order to reflect discussions on timing of the activities and the mechanisms to facilitate the process and have it cleared through LTU.

Agenda Item 4: South–South Corporation and SPFS

26. The committee agreed for Sub-group representatives to assist in facilitating signatory of the 13 National TCP's and 1 Regional TCP and the TPA.

27. Mr. Santana explained to the committee the role of SSC in the project. In that regard, it was noted that, in some cases the experts and technicians to be provided under the TCP's may not coincide with the priority areas identified by the member countries. In those circumstances, the SSC Team Leader in consultation with the RPC of RPFS, the SRR, and the National Authorities of the Ministry of Agriculture of the concerned country should define the work plan of the SSC Technicians in a way that maximizes the SSC Assistance in support of the RPFS.

28. The committee agreed that the project should initiate its activities without waiting for the SSC Assistance to be in place. In that regard, it was highlighted that the advantage of this approach is that if the project starts now, by the time the SSC are on board, the countries would have identified/defined the activities they wish to utilize the SSC assistance.

29. There was discussion on how the SSC will be linked to the Project in terms of management. Mr.Syed reflects on the TPA that the implementation of the SSC provided through the TCP will be closely coordinated with RPFS under the overall guidance and supervision of the RPMU.

Agenda Item 5: Country Responses

30. The Representative of Melanesia, Mr. John Harunari, thanked FAO for making the meeting possible. He extended his appreciation on behalf of the Melanesian countries to the Government of Italy for the generous contribution and the approach adopted by the project to recognize country specific priorities. He suggested that he now has a good background of the project and what is expected of the countries to implement and sustain the project. He reconfirmed the commitment of Solomon Islands Government on the project and further guarantees the

same for other countries in the Melanesian sub-group. He complimented the activities of DSAP in Solomon Islands and assured that the interest of SPFS will be accommodated in the DSAP setup as already agreed on between SPC and FAO. Regarding TCP's and the provisions for Technicians, the Mr. Harunari confirmed his government's commitment on the agreement and what is required off. He stressed the urgency of getting this project off the ground for his sub-group and confirms the timely receipt of the relevant requirement to initiate implementation.

31. Mr. Fredrick Muller on behalf of the Micronesia Sub group also expresses appreciation to FAO for the timely calling of this meeting. He shared on behalf of Micronesian countries, Melanesian appreciation to the Government of Italy for their support to the PICs through RPFS. He felt that he is now well acquainted with the Project in particular the resources available and the mechanisms in place to facilitate the process. He discussed the commitment by his Government indicated by plans that are underway to accommodate SSC Personnel. Like the Melanesian sub-group, he stressed the importance of having the project start now. He confirmed his commitment on behalf of his sub-group to work closely with the RPMU to ensure the timely and smooth implementation of the project. He informed the committee of the importance of the experience of DSAP in the Marshall Islands and other countries of the Micronesia sub-group.

32 Mr. Seumanutafa on behalf of the Polynesian sub-group echoed Representatives for Melanesian and Micronesian appreciation to FAO for the meeting and the generous contribution from the Government of Italy to support RPFS in the PICs. He said, although no formal consultation had been made with other countries in the Polynesian sub-group prior to the RPSC Meeting, there is a general assumption that they would all like to see this project started implementation as soon as possible. It was also perceived, unless seek confirmation that there will be no alteration nor adjustments received from our sub-groups on their priorities they would all like this project to materialize immediately.

CROP Response

33. Mr. Sisifa thanked FAO on behalf of CROP/SPC for the meeting. He voiced on behalf of CROP/SPC his appreciation of the FAO strategy and the interest of the Government of Italy to accommodate the interest and efforts of CROP on food security issues through the RPFS. In particular, he discussed DSAP and the operational arrangements established with countries that RPFS could utilize as agreed on with FAO. In addition, the representative confirms the commitment of CROP/SPC on RPFS and welcomes any assistance that they could provide to support the project.

FAO Response

34. The Chairman thanked the participants for their contribution to the discussion and the success of the meeting. He confirmed that through his frequent contacts with island countries, this sentiment of appreciation to the Italian Government is shared by all pacific countries. He added that it had been a fruitful meeting not only for the sub-groups representatives in getting acquainted with the interest of the project but also for FAO in learning of the expectation of the sub-groups in general. He wished the subgroup representatives well and a safe trip back to the islands. He also thanked the FAO team from Bangkok and Rome for their participation and contribution to the meeting.