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FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

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**Pacific action plan on mainstreaming biodiversity across
agricultural sectors (2024-2030)**

Executive Summary

The 36th Session of the Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific (APRC 36) recommended that FAO “develop a regional plan to promote cohesive action on mainstreaming biodiversity across agricultural sectors [...] in the Pacific region”. It should be noted that, as per FAO’s mandate, agriculture includes crop and livestock production, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture. It also recommended that FAO “ensure that the regional plan is demand-driven, involves a multistakeholder consultation process and is aligned with relevant global and regional frameworks and initiatives”. In response, FAO initiated a highly consultative, multistakeholder process in the region that led to the formulation of the Pacific Action Plan on Mainstreaming Biodiversity across Agricultural Sectors (2024–2030) (Pacific Action Plan). This Information Note provides an overview of the process followed to develop the Pacific Action Plan and a description of its objectives, strategic priority areas and key actions. The development of the Pacific Action Plan has helped to identify the biodiversity challenges across sectors, and to create the much-needed coordination among various stakeholders and focal ministries.

Suggested action by the Regional Conference

The Regional Conference is invited to:

- a. welcome FAO’s efforts to support Members in developing the Pacific Action Plan;
- b. recommend that Members implement the priority actions identified in the Pacific Action Plan;
- c. encourage FAO and other partners to provide guidance and technical assistance for the implementation of the key actions based on their respective mandates.
- d. suggest that progress on mainstreaming biodiversity for food and agriculture be reviewed periodically and the Pacific Action Plan updated accordingly.
- e. take note that mainstreaming biodiversity across agricultural sectors is an important step towards sustainable and resilient agrifood systems and their transformation.

- f. encourage FAO to identify resource partners to support the implementation of the Pacific Action Plan.

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I. Background

1. Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) encompass thousands of relatively small islands exhibiting unique and highly diverse ecological systems and landscapes. These islands host an array of endemic aquatic and terrestrial species of global importance and vital significance to the lives of Pacific peoples. In the last decades, social, economic and environmental drivers have exerted enormous pressure on these systems and their biodiversity. Although the need to reverse this trend is well established, progress has been modest so far, and efforts need to redouble to achieve the regional targets on nature and biodiversity loss by 2030.¹
2. Biodiversity mainstreaming has been defined as “the process of embedding biodiversity considerations into policies, strategies and practices of key public and private actors that impact or rely on biodiversity, so that it is conserved and sustainably used both locally and globally.”² It is evident that mainstreaming biodiversity for food and agriculture requires cross-sectoral actions which will have positive impacts at different levels of actions to bring sustainability and resilience to agriculture, including crop and livestock production, forestry, fisheries and related ecosystems, including soils.
3. In 2022, recognizing the need for urgent action, the Regional Conference, at its 36th Session,³ recommended that FAO develop a demand-driven regional plan to mainstream biodiversity across agricultural sectors, including crops and livestock production, forestry and fisheries, in the Pacific region. This need is also clearly acknowledged in the *Small Island Developing States Accelerated Modalities of Action Pathway* (SAMOA Pathway) and the *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent*,⁴ two cardinal policies for the Pacific that promote a green and blue inclusive sustainable development in the region.
4. In 2023, FAO conducted a highly consultative, multistakeholder process in the region that led to the formulation of the Pacific Action Plan on Mainstreaming Biodiversity across Agricultural Sectors (2024–2030) (Pacific Action Plan). Regional organizations such as the Pacific Community, the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) actively contributed to this highly consultative and inclusive approach.
5. The Pacific Action Plan is therefore built from a bottom-up approach which anchors it to the unique circumstances of the PICTs. Over 200 national stakeholders representing the public and private sectors were engaged in national consultations aimed to revise and update priorities, needs and gaps regarding sustainable biodiversity use and management for food and agriculture. Prior to the consultations, a comprehensive stocktaking of relevant policies and initiatives and an analysis of the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) were carried out for each country to identify the current priorities. These consultations took place in Cook Islands, Fiji, Micronesia (Federated States of), Nauru, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu, while the remaining FAO Member PICTs provided their contribution in writing. A final workshop to validate the plan took place in Nadi, Fiji from 15 to 17 November 2023.⁵

II. Pacific Action Plan for Mainstreaming biodiversity for food and agriculture (2024–2030)

6. In recognizing the vital role that biodiversity plays to support agrifood systems that are efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable, the Pacific Action Plan fully aligns with the FAO Strategic Framework 2022–31 and its *four betters: better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life*. Developed by and for the PICTs, the Pacific Action Plan contextualizes

¹ United Nations. 2023. *The Sustainable Development Goals Report. Special Edition*. New York, USA. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2023.pdf>

² GEF. 2016. *Biodiversity mainstreaming in practice: A review of GEF experience*. <https://www.thegef.org/publications/biodiversity-mainstreaming-practice-review-gef-experience>

³ APRC/22/REP, paragraph 30 (i) <https://www.fao.org/3/ni607en/ni607en.pdf>

⁴ Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. 2022. *2050 Strategy for Blue Pacific Continent*. Suva. <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/PIFS-2050-Strategy-Blue-Pacific-Continent-WEB-5Aug2022.pdf>

⁵ All FAO member PICTs (except for Palau and Tuvalu) also participated in the validation workshop.

the guidance of the Framework for Action on Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture to the region. It directly contributes to the implementation of the FAO Strategy on Mainstreaming Biodiversity across Agricultural Sectors and its Action Plan (2024–27).

Objective of the Pacific Action Plan

7. The long-term objective of the Pacific Action Plan is to effectively mainstream the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of biodiversity across agricultural sectors, including crop and livestock production, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture, in the Pacific Islands region through an integrated, inclusive approach.

8. The implementation of the Pacific Action Plan also aims to:

- a. drive sustainable, diverse and resilient agrifood systems for healthier livelihoods and diets;
- b. promote cohesive and inclusive action on mainstreaming biodiversity across agricultural sectors, including crop and livestock production, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture, in the Pacific Islands region;
- c. support a more systematic and coordinated approach among key sectors and stakeholders to the sustainable management and utilization of biodiversity for food and agriculture in the Pacific Islands region;
- d. recognize the crucial role that Indigenous Peoples and local communities, including women and youth, play in biodiversity management and invoke gender-responsive, equitable and effective participation of the whole of society in decision-making processes;
- e. effectively monitor and report the status and trends of biodiversity for food and agriculture, and reduce biodiversity losses through a harmonized approach across sectors;
- f. encourage exchanges of traditional and scientific knowledge and best practices among PICTs;
- g. call for greater investment in technology development and innovation to better protect, manage and restore biodiversity for food and agriculture;
- h. drive research and development for mainstreaming biodiversity for food and agriculture;
- i. incentivize sustainable economic development founded on ecosystem-based approaches to agricultural and fisheries production and green and blue value chains development;
- j. create an enabling policy and institutional environment for the sustainable management of biodiversity for food and agriculture;
- k. forge strategic partnerships between national and regional stakeholders, including civil society and the private sector, to deliver more effectively and efficiently, and avoid duplication of action;
- l. mobilize adequate financial resources to support PICTs in delivering on their commitments to ensuring sustainable biodiversity management in the region;
- m. solicit greater political will to integrate biodiversity mainstreaming into national priorities, programmes and strategies; and
- n. strengthen the provision of technical support to PICTs for the conservation, sustainable utilization and restoration of biodiversity in agriculture.

III. Strategic Priority Areas

9. The Pacific Action Plan is built around the following three strategic priority areas, which together address the reduction of drivers of biodiversity loss associated with certain agricultural practices and the scale-out of ecosystem-based practices and approaches that deliver benefits in terms of climate change adaption and mitigation, healthy diets and sustainable livelihoods:

- a. characterization, assessment and monitoring of biodiversity for food and agriculture and associated traditional knowledge systems;
 - b. management of the biological and cultural diversity underpinning resilient and inclusive food systems; and
 - c. institutional (enabling) frameworks for the management of biodiversity for food and agriculture: policy, research, awareness and education.
10. Each strategic priority area is articulated in priorities and key actions.

Strategic Priority Area 1: Characterization, assessment and monitoring of biodiversity for food and agriculture and associated traditional knowledge systems

11. While regional biodiversity monitoring programmes with environmental and conservation purposes (e.g. wildlife, threatened species) have evolved significantly in the region, the lack of data on species of relevance to agriculture continues to limit the capacity of countries to assess the status and trends of agrobiodiversity (except for a few species intensively exploited for international trade, such as yellow tuna and certain timber species). This is particularly true for distributional, taxonomical and ecological data of native (wild) species, wild foods and associated biodiversity (microorganisms and invertebrates). Traditional production systems have been well described in ethnobotanical studies. However, national monitoring systems for agrobiodiversity, where they exist, are often poorly integrated or not at all integrated with other environmental monitoring programmes, making national biodiversity assessments and reporting efforts difficult and mostly incomplete.

12. The main aim of this strategic priority area is to improve national capacity to document, assess and monitor terrestrial, marine and freshwater biodiversity and ecosystems, and their associated knowledge systems, for food and agriculture (Priority 1.1). Key actions include the prioritization and characterization of terrestrial and aquatic species (including associated biodiversity) and ecosystems that underpin traditional food systems, with a focus on native species and the valorization of traditional knowledge on biodiversity management, including benefits in terms of increased food security and nutrition, and climate resilience.

Strategic Priority Area 2: Management of the biological and cultural diversity underpinning resilient and inclusive food systems

13. The management of biodiversity includes sustainable use, and conservation and restoration activities. Uses include cultivation and domestication of species, management of associated biodiversity, and harvesting of food and other products from the wild. The main aim of this strategic priority area is to intensify support for ecosystem-based approaches and practices that protect, restore and sustainably use the genetic and cultural diversity underpinning agrifood systems. There are two priorities under this strategic area.

- a. *Priority 2.1: Promote ecosystem-based management approaches and practices that sustainably use biodiversity and preserve ecosystem services.* Restoring degraded ecosystems, including soils, estuaries and marine habitats, among others, has a significant potential for enhancing the productive capacity of agrifood systems under conditions of increased climate variability and unpredictability, and for providing buffering services against extreme weather events. This priority focuses on the promotion of integrated sustainable systems and approaches that have proved to be successful in restoring landscapes and ecosystem services in the Pacific, such as community-based coastal management and locally managed marine areas, climate-resilient production practices, agroecology, agrosilvopastoral systems, organic agriculture and aquaculture. This priority also recognizes the role of the private sector and the need to promote the establishment of sustainable enterprises and green value chains (coffee, cocoa, cassava, kava, ginger, noni, taro, turmeric and vanilla) in order to develop a stronger domestic food market and promote the consumption of native, healthy foods, including through green public procurement in schools and ecotourism.
- b. *Priority 2.2: Conserve and restore the biological and cultural diversity underpinning food systems to increase resilience to climate change and restore healthy, nutritious diets.* A wide genetic foundation entrusts production systems with a high adaptative capacity to overcome environmental pressure, including climate change effects. However, genetic erosion is already occurring in the region, jeopardizing the viability of iconic crops like taro and coconut. This priority focuses on the need to improve national *ex situ* and *in situ* conservation programmes, especially for native, neglected and under-utilized foods, climate-resilient varieties and associated biodiversity. Key actions include: revitalizing national livestock and plant breeding programmes, seed banks and local nurseries; mapping hotspots; and setting up participatory plant breeding with local communities and women's groups. The priority also captures the

need to improve access to terrestrial and aquatic genetic resources and to strengthen national institutional capacity to implement biosecurity strategies for invasive alien species.

Strategic Priority Area 3: Institutional frameworks for the management of biodiversity for food and agriculture: policy, research, awareness and education

14. This strategic priority area aims to support policymakers to meet multiple policy objectives such as biodiversity conservation, poverty alleviation, and climate change adaptation and mitigation. It also aims to create an enabling environment for the mainstreaming of biodiversity in research and education programmes. It includes five priorities.

- a. *Priority 3.1: Implement the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and other relevant regional frameworks through an integrated, inclusive and cohesive approach across agricultural sectors, including crop and livestock production, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture.* All Pacific Islands are parties to the CBD. However, financial and human capacities for the implementation of NBSAPs vary across the Pacific Islands region, with most PICTs having critically inadequate resources. Several of the current NBSAPs have a primary focus on conservation, leaving significant scope for mainstreaming the sustainable use of biodiversity. The revision and implementation of NBSAPs through a cross-sectoral, inclusive and consultative process that engages local and traditional communities and other relevant stakeholders is the core action of this priority, which also looks at strengthening the Pacific agricultural sectors' voice at, participation in, and contribution to the Conference of the Parties to the CBD. Countries have proposed the establishment of a community of practice for biodiversity mainstreaming, with the inclusion of traditional and indigenous leaders, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations, farmer organizations and the private sector. Countries can participate in the new Global Biodiversity Framework Fund as soon as the new Fund becomes operational, with emphasis on Small Island Developing States and Least Developed Countries.
- b. *Priority 3.2: Mainstream biodiversity conservation and sustainable management and use into national, sectoral agricultural (crop and livestock production, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture) policies and legal frameworks.*
- c. *Priority 3.3: Ensure fair representation of indigenous and local communities in decision-making related to biodiversity for food and agriculture at all levels.* Countries need to integrate into their national policy and legislation frameworks the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources, following the guidance provided by the CBD. Key actions are the mapping of indigenous and local organizations and networks active in the PICTs, the utilization of existing platforms to support exchanges, learning and sharing among and with indigenous and local communities, and the definition of legal and policy procedures associated with the utilization of and access to traditional knowledge.
- d. *Priority 3.4: Incorporate biodiversity-related priorities into the Pacific Regional Research Agenda.* Establish research priorities and identify research gaps on the impacts of climate change on biodiversity for food and agriculture. Facilitate collaborative research that integrates traditional ecological knowledge and science and increase availability of relevant (existing and new) data and research outcomes to decision-makers at various scales, including within the Indigenous Peoples and local communities.
- e. *Priority 3.5: Create awareness and educate society on the benefits arising from the preservation of biodiversity for food and agriculture and ecosystem services.* Educate people (including youth) and communities on responsible and sustainable consumption choices in relation to loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

IV. Implementation

15. The implementation of the Pacific Action Plan will depend on the active engagement of an array of national stakeholders committed to green and blue value chains, including governments;

academic and research institutes; community and faith-based organizations and NGOs; indigenous and local communities; the private sector; and local authorities.

16. During the development of the plan, strategic partnerships have already been forged and support pledged from, among others: The Pacific Islands Roundtable for Nature Conservation; the Pacific Island Farmer Organisation Network; the Pacific Agricultural Plant Genetic Resources Network; the Pacific Blue Foundation; Conservation International ; the Global Hub on Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems; the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research ;; and Birdlife International. More engagement will need to be pursued with sector-specific agencies, NGOs and the private sector.

V. Conclusion

17. The Pacific Action Plan has addressed the biodiversity mainstreaming ground reality of PICTs, highlighting various priorities which are critical and need to be addressed. The bottom-up, highly inclusive and consultative approach has ensured that the common denominator of biodiversity loss will be addressed as a priority. The Pacific Action Plan highlights unique strategic priority areas for intervention as well as actions to be undertaken. The actions mentioned in this Pacific Action Plan are acknowledged in the SAMOA Pathway and the *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent*.