



## Pacific Regional Food Security Policy Brief

Many poor people are faced with higher food prices in the midst of a global economic slowdown. This is significant as one third of the total Pacific population lives below national poverty lines. With real gross domestic product (GDP) growth rates forecasted to remain low or negative in most countries because of weak to moderate agricultural economy performance, reliance on food imported will be very expensive for these island nations.

### The challenge

The challenge is to ensure that growing rural and urban populations have access to safe and nutritious food at all times. In rural areas, food should be made available in ways that enable households to produce it themselves. In urban centres, food should be supplied at affordable prices.

### Recommended Policy Actions

It follows from the challenge and the issues threatening food and nutrition security that the development of food production and associated services in the Pacific region may be defined as the strengthening of food and nutritional security resilience against adverse impacts of disasters and climate change in the Pacific Islands. In this context the Regional Food Security Policy aims to achieve four overarching food and nutrition security objectives:

- 1. Availability of food.** Promote the sustainable domestic production of safe, affordable, nutritious, good quality Pacific food commodities/products and facilitate food imports.
- 2. Access to food.** Ensure access (grown or purchased) of Pacific Island households and individuals to sufficient, nutritious affordable food at all times by agricultural development focussing on smallholders and creating employment and income generation from food production.
- 3. Food utilization.** Improve the ability of individuals to utilize food maintaining its nutritive quality and making it available to consumer. Policy actions will be: (i) Improve food preservation and preparation; (ii) establishment of proper food standards; (iii) improving public health; (iv) provision of safe drinking water; (v) improve sanitation; and (vi) hygiene and nutrition education
- 4. Stability of food systems.** Improve the food and nutrition security resilience of the region to natural and socio-economic shocks and climate change by establishing a system of disaster preparedness and response, including early warning systems and a set of measures to ensure food stability.

### Technical assistance and further information

Technical assistance can be provided by the Land Resources Division, Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC). [lrhelpdesk@spc.int](mailto:lrhelpdesk@spc.int)

### Further Reading

Towards a Food Secure Pacific: *Framework for Action on Food Security in the Pacific*

Fish and Food Security. Policy Brief 1/2008. Secretariat of the Pacific Community

FAO Policy Brief: Food Security. June 2006. Issue 2.

*Pacific Island Food Security in the 21st Century: Situation, Challenges and Opportunities.* Paper presented at the 2008 Ministers of Agriculture and Forestry Meeting, Apia, Samoa.

STEPS Reports of Fiji, Nauru, American Samoa, Tokelau, the Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia (Pohnpei) and Kiribati (2005-2010)

Vulnerability and Adaptation Reports of the USAID Climate Change Projects on Impacts of Climate Change on Food Security (Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu) (2012 to 2013).

Pacific island food security: situation, challenges and opportunities. Andrew McGregor, R. Michael Bourke, Marita Manley, Sakiusa Tubuna and Rajhnael Deo

World Food Summit 1996, *Rome Declaration on World Food Security.*

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### What is Food Security?

"Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life". (World Food Summit, 1996)

The right to food security is central to human development and many of the major human rights treaties. It is also implicit in Goal 1 of the Millennium Development Goals – Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger.

### Food Security in the Pacific is threatened

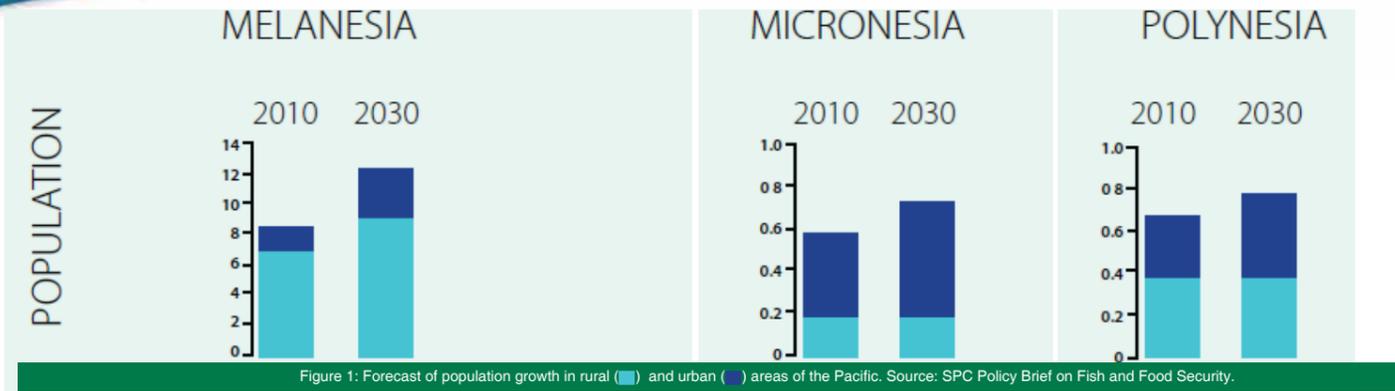
Traditionally, Pacific islanders achieved food security through sustainable agricultural and fishing practices and a reliance on local staples such as roots and tubers, bananas and breadfruits. More recently, imported foods have helped contribute to food

security by meeting a growing demand for more and a greater variety of foods. However, food security in the Pacific is considered to be under threat, due to:

**1. Limited Food Production Capacity:** The agricultural production in many of the countries in the Pacific is limited by factors such as declining soil fertility, increasing incidences of pests and diseases, poor quality of water, and poor genetic resources (both crops and animals).

**2. Population growth and Urbanization:** The total number of people in the region is predicted to increase by around 50% by 2030. Most of the increase will be in urban areas especially in Melanesia (Fig 1). This will present a major challenge to produce adequate local foods for urban areas otherwise there will be an increase in food imports to meet the food requirements in the urban areas.





Urbanization and high population growth rates (in excess of 2% in Melanesian countries) accompanied by stagnant agricultural productivity is severely challenging existing farming systems to produce enough food to meet the needs of growing populations.

**3. Climate Change:** Many countries of the Pacific region are among the most vulnerable to impacts of climate change. Community based vulnerability analysis conducted by SPC has shown that behaviours of some of the traditional crops and animals are changing. The same studies also show that adaptive capacities of many of these communities are very low in terms of financial capital in combination with natural, human and physical capitals (as illustrated in Fig 2). These have multidimensional impacts on food security of many Pacific communities.

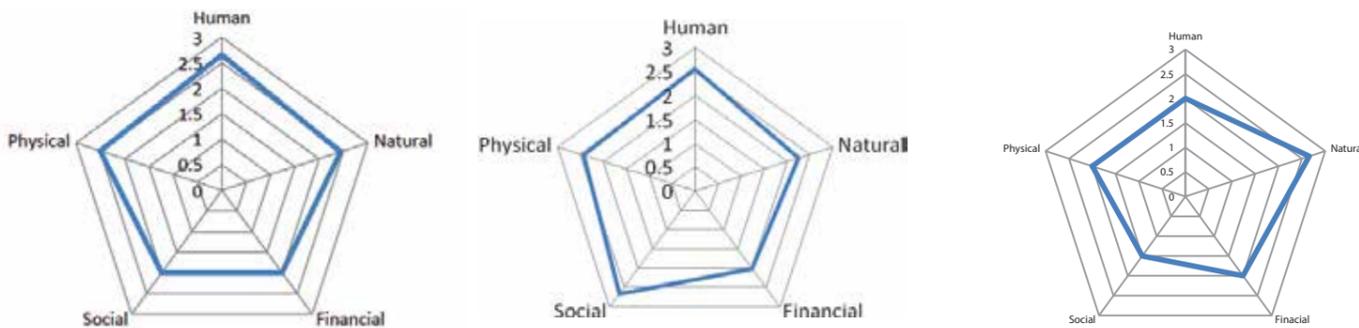


Fig 2. Adaptive capacity for some of the communities in Pacific Islands (left is for Kolonga village in Tongatapu, middle is for Takarano in Abaiang, and right is Korobebe in the Sabeto Catchment of Fiji). Source: USAID Climate Change Project National Vulnerability and Adaptation Analysis for Tonga, Kiribati and Fiji (2012 – 2014).

**4. Land Ownership:** Land ownership and land tenure policies affect the allocation of land and thus access to agricultural, forestry and aquaculture production, which have implications therefore to local food production and economic development potential.

**5. Increasing Consumption of Imported Foods:** Imports of affordable (e.g. rice, wheat), low quality (e.g. lamb flaps, turkey tails) and convenient (e.g. ready-to-eat) foods now compete with domestic foods (e.g. root crops) that often have higher production costs and are less convenient to store and prepare (Fig. 3).

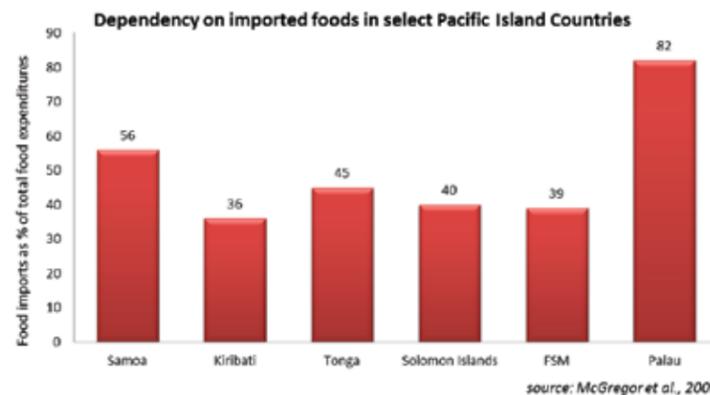


Figure 3: Dependency on imported foods in selected Pacific island countries

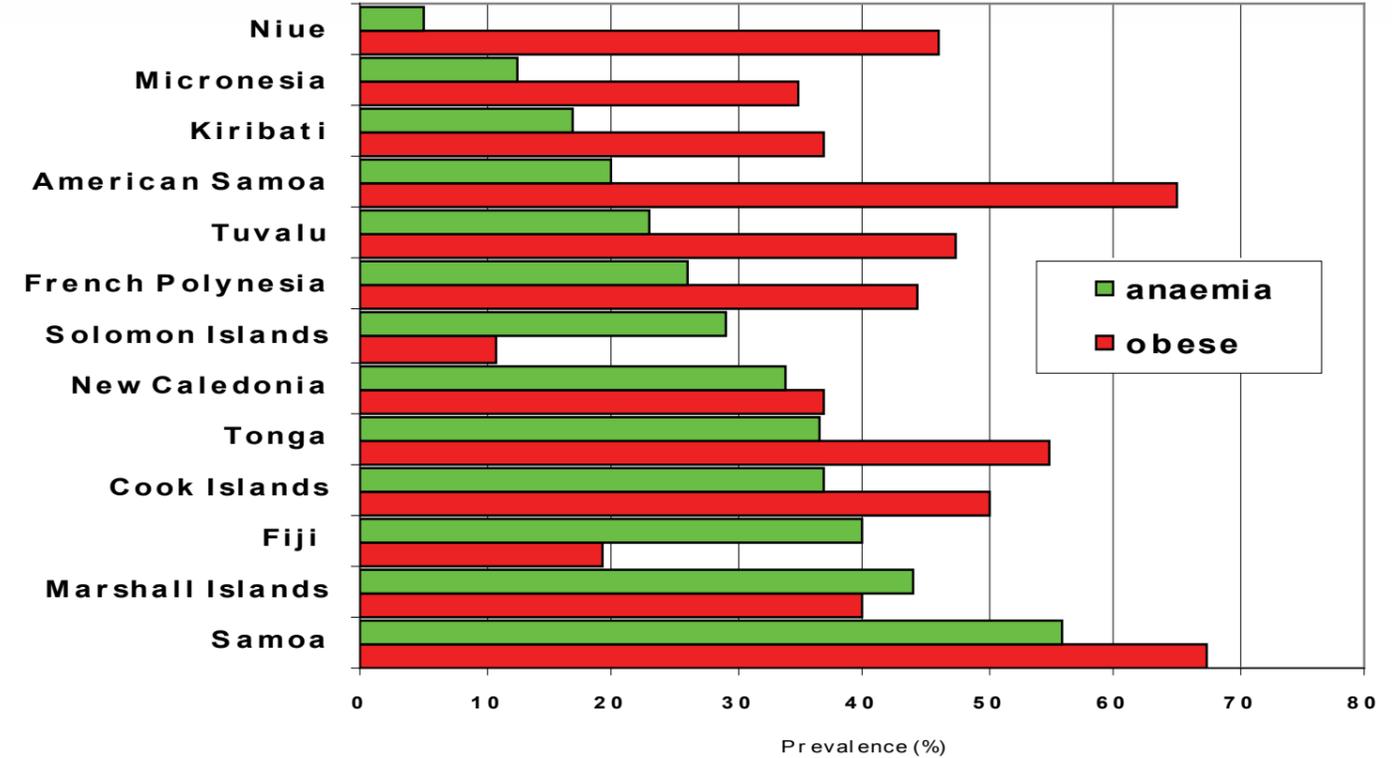


Fig 4: The incidences (%) of female anaemia and obesity in the Pacific Islands. Source: SPC Public Health

As a consequence of increased consumption of low quality cheap imported foods the Pacific Islanders have some the highest incidences of NCDs coupled with the emerging vitamin and mineral deficiencies like iron (Fig 4).

**6. Rising Global Food Prices:** The increasing reliance on food imports is of special concern particularly for Polynesian and Micronesian region countries that have limited agricultural production and export earnings. The increasing reliance on imports to meet the demand for food has heightened the Pacific's susceptibility to food and fuel price levels. There has been a steep rise in food prices (Fig 5) in recent years in 2007-08 and 2011. Some countries are still recovering from the effects of the global food prices.

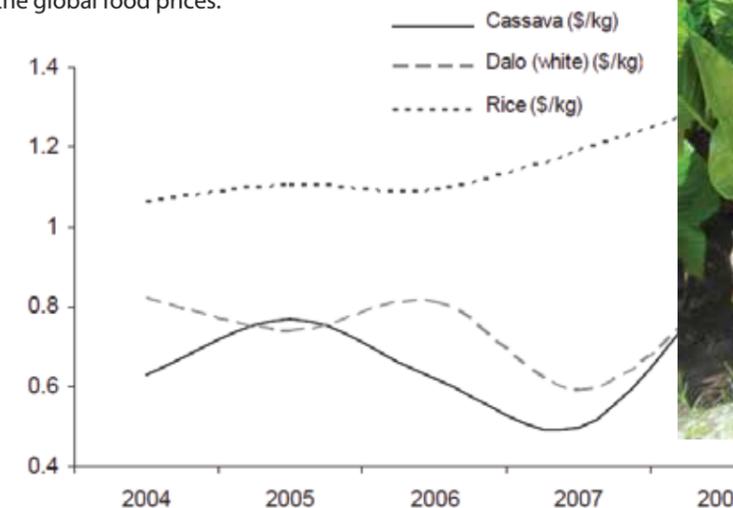


Fig 5 Cassava, dalo and rice prices in Suva in the years leading up to the 2008 global rise in food prices. Source: McGregor et al., 2009