



Stories from the field



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The Pacific islands

Improving life in the Pacific Better agriculture and fishing

Pacific Island countries face numerous obstacles to development, including size, remoteness and geographic dispersion. Most island people live in rural areas, depending on agriculture, fisheries and forestry for the food they eat and for their livelihoods.

Island food security is fragile. Natural disasters such as cyclones, flooding, drought, earthquakes, tsunamis and climate change are ever-present threats.

But, today, many Pacific islanders can live healthy lives, thanks to a seven-year food security initiative by 14 island countries supported by Italy, FAO and a broad alliance of development partners. Following a positive independent assessment, the effort is about to be expanded and extended as the *Food Security and Sustainable Livelihood Programme in the Pacific Island Countries (FSSLP)*.

"The over-arching goal of the *Regional Programme for Food Security* in the Pacific is to help island people grow healthier by eating more nutritious local foods, while reducing the amount of processed imported food they eat," says Vili Fuavao, FAO Subregional Representative for the Pacific Islands.

Fuavao added: "This unique and ambitious effort approached food security on two tracks: A national initiative and a regional one. At its heart, the national initiative was directly concerned with improving the food output of farmers and fishers, while the regional track focused on developing new trade relations among the islands."

FAO says food security exists "when all people, at all times, have access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life."

Photo: Solomon Islands: Locally grown foods like taro boost nutrition for many island people.

The 1996 World Food Summit recognized the importance of food security when it set the goal of cutting the number of hungry people in the world by half by the year 2015. Keeping this goal in mind, 14 Pacific Island Countries worked with FAO, using initial funding from Italy of US\$4.5 million to establish 26 national food security projects in their countries.

The projects helped farmers boost food production and incomes, which led to better nutrition as the variety and availability of local food increased while incomes grew. More than 43 500 people were trained in livestock improvement, crop intensification, food processing and adding value to local food products through modern packaging.

FAO and its development partners are looking to the future these days as they prepare to launch the follow-on initiative that will foster growing hope among island people, with greater livelihood opportunities and better nutrition as a wider variety of local food products are made available at more reasonable prices.



Samoa: Natural disasters are a constant threat to food security. (FAO/John Riddle)

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For a world without hunger

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