



Capacity development in action: Nutrition and trade in Small Island Developing States

The issue

The unique ecosystems of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) hold great potential to support sustainable healthy diets given their terrestrial and marine biodiversity. Yet, climate change, frequent natural disasters, land degradation and exploitation of oceanic resources have hindered this progress in the past 40 years. Along with changing diets and lifestyles, these contribute negatively to undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and obesity – the triple burden of malnutrition.

Given their geographic and economic isolation, the SIDS are highly reliant on imported foods as a major food source. However, most of these imports are of poor nutritional quality. Concurrently, **commercial drivers contribute significantly to the transformation of agrifood systems and diets in the SIDS.** Foreign investments in domestic food processing has contributed to increased availability of low-cost, highly processed foods. This has led to the shift away from the traditional domestic diet of staples and fresh foods, which is further aggravated by poorly regulated food labelling and unmonitored trade liberalisation policies. As such, **many SIDS now face a serious health emergency.**

The action

As a direct response to the ongoing challenges and request from SIDS member states, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) coordinated the project “Mainstreaming Nutrition in National and Regional Trade Laws and Regulations of SIDS and Promoting Local Food Value Chains for Intra-SIDS Trade.”² The following activities aimed to reduce levels of malnutrition, mainly obesity:

- 1) Sensitized target groups:** Identified key national stakeholders and development of project roadmap through exploratory missions and inception workshops.
- 2) Conducted capacity assessment at environmental and organizational levels:** Reviewed national trade policies, food laws, strategic plans, standards and nutrition security policies from different sectors that are related to food importation, labelling and intra-SIDS trade.
- 3) Organized a 3-day, multi-country virtual workshop for selected individuals from relevant national institutions** on the importance of mainstreaming nutrition in trade policies, food laws and regulations to facilitate intra-SIDS trade and promoting local food value chains to provide safe and nutritious foods.

In partnership with

Relevant ministries from SIDS in the Atlantic Ocean and Indian Ocean, and Madagascar, Regional Programme for Food Security and Nutrition (PRESAN).

Quick facts on the Small Island Developing States

- Non-communicable diseases are at excessive levels in a growing number of SIDS, largely as a result of a poor diets.
- 56 percent of adults, 30 percent of adolescents and 20 percent of children suffer from overweight or obesity.
- Although undernutrition has decreased in the past three decades, in SIDS with the lowest income levels, stunting still exceed 20 percent in children under the age of 5.
- Over 38 percent of women are affected by anaemia often caused by iron deficiency.

Location

Cabo Verde, Comoros, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Mauritius, Sao Tome and Principe and Seychelles

Capacity development target groups

Parliamentarians, trade division officials and customs staff, food regulatory bodies and food standards authorities, food and nutrition security and agrifood value chain officials, consumer associations and small and medium enterprises

Duration

2 January 2019 – 31 December 2020

Sustainable Development Goals contribution



1. The Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are a group of 38 UN Member States and 20 Non-UN Members/Associate Members of United Nations regional commissions that generally share similar challenges, including susceptibility to natural disasters, limited resources and excessive dependence on international trade. They are clustered in three regions - the Caribbean; the Pacific; and the Atlantic Indian Ocean, Mediterranean and South China Sea (AIMS).

2. More information is available in the project's terminal report. www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb3581en

The result

- **Individual capacity of the target groups was developed** through training and awareness raising of 100 participants – including at least 15 from each of the six SIDS and Madagascar. Topics included enabling strategies and approaches for participants to engage meaningfully in processes related to responsible agricultural trade and investment, such as appraising the nutrition sensitivity of value chains and promoting local food value chains.
- **Organizational capacity was strengthened** through the formation of an interministerial taskforce, among government divisions, departments and ministries. These could contribute to future nutrition mainstreaming activities and structures that improve internal coordination, communication and knowledge sharing.
- **Enabling environment was strengthened** through dialogues among agrifood systems stakeholders – trade, agriculture, health and consumer association authorities – that improved the utilization of existing networks towards reducing unhealthy food distribution, reinforcing food quality standards and raising consumer awareness. Better understanding on the link between trade and agrifood systems regulations create an environment that enables healthy diets for improved nutrition outcomes.
- **Recommendations were generated** on how trade policies, national food laws, standards and nutrition security policies and strategies might be amended and harmonized to mainstream nutrition and promote local food value chains development and intra-SIDS market access.

Recommendations for next steps and scaling up good practices

- Organize inclusive, well-coordinated dialogues that allow for experience sharing, knowledge exchange and strengthening of existing networks among trade division officials, local authorities, consumer associations and value chain actors.
- Organize in-person, country-specific trainings that address key topics of interest, such as labelling and legislation for each country and how to raise consumer awareness on locally produced, appropriately labelled nutritious food products. In August 2021, a follow-up training took place with a private sector company in Madagascar, with technical support from the FAO country office.
- Continue to update national trade policies and legislation and regional trade agreements through a consultative, participatory process. This can support the importation of healthy and nutritious foods and allow for the strengthening of local healthy food value chains trade among the SIDS.
- Enhance intra-SIDS network of specialists from both public and private sectors, to support continued cross-country learning and identification of good and promising practices and challenges.

Reflection from the participants

“I trained health inspectors on certain topics that were discussed during the FAO training to improve our supervision mechanisms of the fish dealers through better consideration of health and nutrition aspects.”

*Ismael Mohamed Adam,
Fish health inspector/officer, Comoros*

“The packaging labelling rules [was the most useful aspect from the training]. We are already applying it to improve our company’s existing packaging checklist and to sensitize the team and inform the organization’s strategic plan.”

*Felana Rakotondrajao,
Research and Development Manager, Madagascar*

