

SUB-REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

**CONSULTATION REPORT
JUNE 2012**

**NATIONAL CONSULTATION ON POLICY AND PROGRAMMATIC
ACTIONS TO ADDRESS HIGH FOOD PRICES IN SOLOMON ISLANDS
08-09 MAY, 2012
HERITAGE PARK HOTEL, HONIARA, SOLOMON ISLANDS**



**FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS**

Prepared By
Aleki Sisifa
(FAO Consultant)

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From left to right

BACKROW: Mr. Pateson Akipu (MAL); Mr. Michael Ho'ota (MAL); Dr. Mark Johnston (Rural Development Program); Mr. Simon Baete (MAL); Mr. Francis Tsatsia (MAL); Mr. Lafaele Enoka (FAO Consultant); Mr. Clement Hadosaia (Kastom Gaden Association); Mr. Shinobu Takashita (JICA Resident Representative)

MIDDLE ROW: Mr. Peter Trena (MAL); Mr. Donald Kiriau (Central Bank Solomon Is.); Mr. Gabriel Hiele (RDP); Mr. Osbert Lalahu (World Vision, SI); Mr. Gary Shea (RDP); Mr. Jimi Saelea (MAL); Mr. Moses Pelomo (KGA/ Cocoa Livelihoods Project); Mr. David Patternot (MAL); Mr. Noel Roposi (MAL); Mr. William Okekini (MAL).

FRONT ROW: Ms. Helen Tsatsia (MAL); Ms. Hee Sook Koh (KOICA- Resident Representative); Rev. Sam Pedoro (Solomon Islands Christian Association); Mr. Frank Wickham (Permanent Secretary, MAL); Honorable Connelly Sandakabatu (Hon. Minister for Agriculture and Livestock); Mr. Aleki Sisifa (FAO Consultant); Ms. Linda Tupe (Child Protection, Ministry of Health); Ms. Roselyn Kabu (Kastom Gaden).

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CBSI	Central Bank of Solomon Islands
CePaCT	Centre for Pacific Crops and Trees of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community
COLA	Cost of Living Adjustment
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
MAL	Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock
NGO	Non Government Organisation

OVERVIEW OF THE NATIONAL CONSULTATION

Introduction

The National Consultation on Policy and Programmatic Actions to Address High Food Prices for Solomon Islands was held at the Heritage Park Hotel, Honiara on 8-9 April 2012. Solomon Islands is one of the four countries selected by FAO to hold further dialogue following the Sub-Regional Consultation on High Food Prices for the Pacific sub-region that was held in Nadi, Fiji in 2011. The other countries included Vanuatu, Cook Islands and Niue. The meeting was convened by the Solomon Islands Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

Participants

The consultation was attended by participants from government agencies, international partners, private sector and civil society organizations (see Annex 2: List of Participants). Documents and presentations on policy and programmatic action to address high food prices were distributed to participants for reference and were made available in electronic form.

OPENNING SESSION

Reverend Sam Pedoro of the Solomon Islands Christian Association offered the dedication and prayer. Mr. Frank Wickham, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL) then made his welcoming remarks. He said that the delay of the National consultation from 2011 did allow more time for his staff to make preparations and he expressed hope for successful outcomes. Mr. Wickham pointed to the high price of rice during the 2008 high food price crisis and expressed belief that high food prices have generally persisted to the present time.,

Mr. Aleki Sisifa, FAO Consultant, on behalf of the FAO Sub-regional Representative for the Pacific, gave his opening remarks. He informed that as part of its core function of promoting food security in member countries FAO has in recent years increasingly involved in monitoring high food prices. He said that the Solomon Islands national consultation was one of four to be held in the Pacific following the Sub-Regional Consultation on Policy and Programmatic Actions to Address High Food Prices which was held in Nadi, Fiji, in 2011. One of the main outcomes was the identification of need for national dialogue to raise awareness of the negative impact of high food prices and identification of potential policy and programmatic actions to address them..

The Minister of Agriculture and Livestock, Hon Connelly Sandakabatu delivered the key note address and officially opened the consultation. He said the meeting is important in helping to

identify and discuss practical solutions to food price volatility; especially the upward trend is not only a global concern but a local one as well where the most vulnerable are the low income earners, old people and children. Solomon Islands therefore cannot escape this reality, but must find ways to mitigate the effects of this global phenomenon.

The Minister said that Solomon Islanders have experienced the increases of global price to unprecedented levels. Many factors are contributing to this phenomenon. Some of these factors include the high price of fuel, and crop failure in exporting countries due to extreme weather conditions brought about by climate variability. Costs in the factors of production and market forces are also some of the factors at play.

Many people believe the price of food will continue to fluctuate in the coming years. That is not very good news, especially where price increase is concerned because it represents a major threat to food security for low income earners in countries such as Solomon Islands

The resilience of our rural people to mitigate such occurrences or shocks needs to be supported. Stakeholders that have anything and everything to do with food are responsible for helping Government develop policies and programmatic actions and must support the implementation of these as well to counter this price volatility, especially the up-ward trend (see Annex 3: Speech of the Minister of Agriculture).

Background and objectives of the national consultation

Mr. Aleki Sisifa briefly outlined the historical perspective of the global high food prices crises and the key causes. He then explained the approach used in the national consultation. The two day consultation would be conducted in three main parts: 1) statements on high food prices by the national government and the FAO; 2) presentations by FAO on global, regional and national policy and programmatic actions to address high food prices, followed by group discussions; and 3) plenary discussions and the drafting, verification and endorsement of an outcome statement from the consultation.

The objective was to assist government in identifying various policy options and designing immediate actions in response to food price rises. The expected impact, as a result were improved policies on food price volatility that are relevant to national realities and are designed and implemented by both national stakeholders and development partners.

Similarly, the expected outcome was for stakeholders to be sensitized and encouraged to work closely to better address high food prices through relevant policies and programmatic actions that safe guard food security of low-income consumers, while at the same time provide opportunities for producers and exporters.

The expected outputs of the consultation included (1) shared understanding of global and national food price situation and future developments, (2) shared overview on policies and programmatic actions to address volatile and high food prices, (3) agreement on strengths and weaknesses of current national policies and programmatic actions, (4) agreement on specific policy and programmatic actions, (5) required cooperation and necessary support, and (6) a workshop report that helps in following up activities.

PLENARY PRESENTATIONS

Global and Regional Trends in Food Prices: Underlying Causes and Implications to Food Security

Mr. Sisifa made this presentation. The policy imbalance that came about through many developing countries reducing investment in agriculture, availability of credits and protection to agriculture while developed countries were maintaining high levels of support to agriculture and to bio-fuel production, led to increased dependence of developing countries on food imports from developed and emerging countries. This has led to the creation of the global high food price crisis.

The crisis of 2008 caused major threat to political stability of many countries and a major cause of high rates of inflation, coinciding with record high petroleum and fertilizer prices. The potential impacts of climate change on production/productivity stand to make matters worse in future.

The impacts of high food prices have been particularly high on the poor who spend most income on food, forced to reduce consumption of nutritious foods and forced to sell off productive assets.

Guide to Policy Measures and Programmatic Action: Overview, Global Experiences

Mr. Sisifa presented the FAO guide as a “menu” of options which countries need to consider and possibly adapt depending on local contexts. He emphasised the relevance of the “no one size fits all” concept.

He outlined the three main categories of country level actions: Trade and market related measures; measures to facilitate access to affordable food by consumers; and measures to increase food production. He indicated how each measure could mitigate high food prices and suggested some possible implications (both positive and negative and both long and short term).

Mr. Sisifa emphasised some features of good interventions such as: do little harm as possible; be clear on humanitarian versus economic scale (efficiency vs. Equity); and ownership and participation.

Finally he outlined some policy responses and lessons learnt from data collected from an FAO survey involving 81 countries. Most countries applied general consumer support measures e.g. reducing tariffs and custom fees, releasing public stocks and restricting or banning export. The next most popular category of measures is targeted subsidy consumer support, as in cash transfer, food transfer and increasing disposable income.

One of the lessons learnt so far is that country wide consumer support measures did not help much in many countries for the following reasons. Reducing tariffs had minimal impact on prices in countries that had already reduced tariffs; budgetary costs were often very high; general subsidies fail to reach the rural poor; and unplanned interventions affected traders and producers. Safety net programmes work well in situations where: they are effectively designed; foster synergies between social protection for the poor and support provided to food production; and government is centrally involved in planning and implementing long-term programmes of assistance. Furthermore, producers' response has not been high for the following reasons: high fuel prices raised cost of farm power, transport, fertilizer, pesticides etc.; increased price volatility reduced incentives; lack of or poor markets prevented transmission of high prices to producers in many cases; and well designed productive safety nets (smart subsidies) have worked.

Outcomes of the Sub-regional Consultation on Policy and Programmatic Actions to Address High Food Prices in the Pacific

Mr. Sisifa briefly talked about the Sub-regional Consultation that took place in Nadi, Fiji, 14-15 April 2011. In summarising the outcome statement of the Sub-regional consultation, he asked participants to note that the outcomes were all general in nature befitting regional contexts. In contrast, the outcome statement from the national consultation should be very specific for Solomon Islands, and where relevant to specific communities targeted. Furthermore, in identifying and considering policy and programmatic actions at national level, implications, particularly any long term ones should be seriously considered.

Mr. Sisifa emphasised that an important task for the consultation would be to identify the most group(s) within the Solomon Islands society that are the most vulnerable if and when high food prices crises occur.

WORKING GROUPS SESSION

Participants broke into three groups to identify and discuss potential policy measures and programmatic actions that the Government may consider developing to address high food prices. The three groups focused on the following: measures: policies and programmatic actions to increase production; policies to enhance food supplies (e.g. pricing, marketing, food stock management and foreign trade and tariff policies); and policies to provide social protection/safety nets).

The three groups reported back to plenary. Participants then in plenary discussed the proposed measures and actions in detail. From these discussions, participants reached agreement on what to include in the Outcome Statement of the consultation.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The following are the conclusions and next steps to which the participants agreed to. These constitute the Outcome Statement of the Solomon Islands national consultation on policy and programmatic actions to address high food prices.

The consultation recognised the following:

- a. High food prices will continue to follow global trends and it is unlikely that they will return to pre 2007 price levels.
- b. Issues relating to high food prices are location specific in the Solomon Islands.
- c. The most vulnerable groups affected by high food prices are: the low income families with no access to resources; socially disadvantaged; unemployed urban families; and,, households in remote locations. Within the most vulnerable groups, women and children are the most vulnerable.
- d. The most vulnerable households spend a large proportion of their income on food.
- e. Women's contributions are predominant in food production, marketing, preparation, and income generation from selling food.
- f. Household food production plays a significant role in mitigating the negative impacts of high food prices in the Solomon Islands, and income from informal and formal employment also plays a role.
- g. Freight rates and the cost of agricultural inputs are high in the Solomon Islands, and will likely continue into the future.
- h. There is a need to conserve and preserve traditional food crop varieties through actions including in-situ collection in farmers fields and gardens, local germplasm collections and storage at the SPC Centre for Pacific Crops and Trees (CePaCT).
- i. Significant changes have occurred in the diets and food preferences of people in the Solomon Islands.

- j. A lack of loans, savings, remittance and local money transfer services in the rural areas and a history of failed efforts by the private sector in providing these services.
- k. The need for greater awareness and education programmes to raise food and nutrition security during times of high food prices.
- l. The need to increase the engagement of youth in food and agricultural production in the Solomon Islands.
- m. That there is significant food wastage at the food and agricultural production and marketing chain, including at the household level, in the urban areas.
- n. There is need to improve collaboration among relevant agencies on data collection, documentation and management, including standardization of measuring units, in the Solomon Islands.
- o. Production of local foods is seasonal and the nature of these foods does not lend themselves well to bulk storage.
- p. The traditional safety net systems of the Solomon Islands such as the ‘wantok’ system will continue to play a role in mitigating the negative impact of high food prices in time of crises.
- q. The Solomon Islands Government has a comprehensive set of 16 agriculture and livestock development policies, which assist in mitigating the negative impacts of high food prices. Although the government with assistance from the Rural Development Programme (RDP) and other development programmes, have contributed to achieving those policies, significant gaps exist in the policies as they relate to addressing high food prices, and in implementing those policies.
- r. There is support for community driven development in mitigating the impacts of high food prices with the support by government, civil society and development partners.
- s. Significant competition exists in exports from the Solomon Islands whereas in trade of imported food products, prices are controlled by the “cartel”.
- t. Improved family planning, adoption of family values, personal viability and capacity building in life skills will help prevent occurrences of crises and contribute to improved resilience in times of disasters, including those caused by high food prices

Participants discussed the trends, impacts and key issues of high food prices and agreed that the following guidelines can inform their actions:

- a) Households should be empowered through having better access to information, skills, knowledge and resources to increase and sustain domestic food and cash crop production.
- b) Upscale community driven approach to increase agricultural production, and government, civil society organisations, and other partners should be more responsive to specific needs of communities to mitigate negative effects of high food prices.
- c) Build resilience against high food prices impacts through community based natural resource management and, sustainable landscape and improving farming systems, including in;
 - i. disaster risk management;
 - ii. diversification of income sources;
 - iii. land use policy and zoning; and,
 - iv. conservation of food crop varieties and traditional preservation methods.
- d) Government should consider improving the effectiveness of the Price Control Policy and the role of the price control unit in regulating prices of basic food commodities, to address high volatility of food prices.
- e) Improve the coordination and linking of producers, middleman and consumers, to improve marketing efficiency.
- f) Central Bank of Solomon Islands (CBSI) to lead in collaborative effort with relevant organizations in regularly distributing market information on local and imported foods.
- g) Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL) to provide farm management handbooks as source of information on gross margins of local produce.
- h) Government may consider revaluing the Solomon Islands dollar as a measure to help mitigate negative impacts of high food prices.
- i) Government should consider commissioning a market chain study to investigate bottlenecks in addressing issues related to the ongoing high food prices and strategies for overcoming them.

- j) Government to consider providing financing facility and capacity building to local traders in order to strengthen competition in the market place and thereby help reduce high food prices.
- k) CBSI, civil society organisations and government should consider expanding the loans and savings services currently provided in the Solomon Islands, including remittances and local money transfers.
- l) Government, private sector and Non Government Organisations to consider adjusting the Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) as a measure for addressing high food price issues.
- m) Civil society organisations and government should consider strengthening the positive aspects of the 'wantok' system, including capacity building, sharing human capacities, reviving traditional values and expanding the coverage of sharing.
- n) Government, civil society and development partners, should consider cash transfers, cash for work and food vouchers, for the most disadvantaged groups in times of extreme high food prices crises.
- o) Government, civil society organizations and development partners should consider subsidising cost of inputs for agricultural production in times of extreme high food prices crises.
- p) Government and civil society to consider a school meal programme in times of natural disasters and high food prices.
- q) Women and youth should be empowered to be involved in planning, decision making and implementing roles in addressing issues arising from high food prices.
- r) Government, private sector and civil society organisations can organize producer groups within communities to strengthen their production and marketing capacity.
- s) Government, civil society and development partners to consider promoting those areas that have comparative advantages for specific agricultural commodities and to enhance their resilience to shocks, including high food prices.
- t) The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL) is tasked with the responsibility of submitting the outcome statement to cabinet and ensure follow-up of implementation in conjunction with key stakeholders.

- u) The meeting recommends that the Government of the Solomon Islands endorses, and call upon development partners to support the implementation of the outcome statement.

In closing, Mr. Sisifa on behalf of FAO thanked the MAL and the Government of the Solomon Islands for their hospitality in hosting the meeting. He also thanked the participants for their valuable contributions to the discussions and the meeting outcomes.

On behalf of the participants and the Government, Mr. Frank Wickham Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock expressed sincere gratitude to FAO for organising the meeting and for sharing their experiences and knowledge. The meeting outcomes reflected the views of participants and they look forward to the implementation of these outcomes in the future.

Annex 1: Agenda

National Consultation on Policy and Programmatic Actions To Address High Food Prices in Solomon Islands Heritage Park Hotel, Honiara, 8 - 9 May, 2012

A g e n d a

Day 1: Tuesday 8 May 2012

Purpose: To provide an overview of policy and programmatic actions to address high food prices

Time	Session
8.00 – 10.00	Official Opening
10.00 – 10.30	Tea/Coffee Break
Session 1: Global and Regional Food Price Situation, Trends and Implications – Chairperson : Permanent Secretary – Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock.	
10.30 – 11.30	1. Background and objectives on national consultations: <i>Aleki Sisifa</i> 2. Presentation: Overview of the Global and Regional Trends in Food Prices, Underlying Causes and Implications to Food Security: <i>FAO</i> Discussion
11.30 – 12.30	3. Presentation: Guide to Policy Measures and Programmatic Action: Overview. Global Experiences ¹ : <i>FAO</i> Discussion
Session 2: Sub-Regional Food Consultation	
12.30 – 1.00	4. Presentation: Outcomes of the Sub-Regional Consultation on Policy and Programmatic Actions to Address High Food Prices in the Pacific: <i>Aleki Sisifa</i> Discussion
1.00 – 2.00	LUNCH BREAK
Session 3: National Consultation	
2.00- 2.45	5. Presentation: Price situation and trends of major food commodities in Solomon Islands, their implications on food security and the government's policy and programmatic response: <i>N. Roposi (MAL)/ D. Kiriau (CENTRAL BANK)</i>
2.45-3.15	6. Working group session a. Policies and Actions undertaken in SI to address high food Prices b. Constraints identified in Implementation.
3.15-3.30	Tea/Coffee Break
3.30-4.30	7. Presentation and discussion of results of working groups: <i>Lafaele Enoka</i>

¹ Reference: *Guide for Policy and Programmatic Actions at Country Level to Address High Food Prices*, FAO, 2011.

Day 2: 9 May 2012

Purpose: What are the gaps in policies and programmatic actions to address high food prices?

Time	Session
Session 4: Policies and Programmatic Actions to Address High Food Prices	
9.00-9.30	1. Formation of briefing to the working groups for parallel break-out sessions: <i>Aleki Sisifa/Lafaele Enoka</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lessons learnt from the 2009 FAO assistance for addressing high food prices• Policies to increase production,• Policies to enhance food supplies (e.g. pricing, marketing, food stock management and foreign trade and tariff policies), and• Policies to provide social protection/safety nets
9.30-10.30	2. Parallel working group sessions
10.30-11.00	Tea/Coffee Break
11.00-12.30	3. Presentation of results and discussions ² : <i>Aleki Sisifa/Lafaele Enoka</i>
12.30-1.30	Lunch Break
Session 5: Key Messages and Guidelines for Action	
1.30-2.30	4. Preparation of outcome statement: <i>Aleki Sisifa/Lafaele Enoka</i>
2.30-3.30	5. Presentation, discussion and adoption of the Outcome Statement: <i>Aleki Sisifa</i>
3.30-4.00	Tea/Coffee Break
4.00-4.30	6. Closing remarks and workshop evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participant representative:• FAO representative• MAL Government representative: [Permanent Secretary]
7.00 – 9.00	DINNER HOSTED BY HON. MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND LIVESTOCK

² Each working will have 15 minutes for presentation followed by 15 minutes for a question-answer session.

<p align="center">National Consultation on Policy and Programmatic Actions To Address High Food Prices in the Solomon Islands OFFICIAL OPENING PROGRAMME MC: David Patternot</p>	
8.00 – 9.00	Registration
9.00 – 10.00	Official Opening
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prayer/ Devotion – Solomon Islands Christian Association Representative – Rev. SAM PEDORO. 2. Welcome Remarks- Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock- MR. FRANK WICKHAM 3. Message from FAO – Mr. ALEKI SISIFA 4. Official Opening Remarks - Minister , Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, HON. CONNELLY SANDAKABATU
10.00 – 10.30	Tea/ Coffee break

Annex 2: List of Participants

National Consultations on Policy and Programmatic Actions to Address High Food Prices in Solomon Islands Heritage Park Hotel, Honiara, 8 to 9 May 2012

	NAME	ORGANISATION	REMARKS
1	Mr. Frank Wickham	Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock	Permanent Secretary
2	Mr. William Okekini	Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock	Chief Planning Officer, Planning Division
3	Ms. Helen Tsatsia	Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock	Director (Acting) Research Division
4	Mr. Simon Baete	Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock	Deputy Director, Livestock & Vet Services
5	Mr. Noel Roposi	Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock	Principal Planning Officer (Marketing), Planning Div.
6	Mr. Michael Ho'ota	Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock	Director Extension Division
7	Mr. Francis Tsatsia	Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock	Director Quarantine Services Div.
8	Mr. Jimi Saelea	Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock	Undersecretary - Technical
9	Mr. Peter Trena	Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock	Chief Information Officer Agriculture Information
10	Mr. David Patternot	Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock	Undersecretary - Admin
11	Ms. Linda Tupe	Ministry of Health and Medical Services	Child Protection Unit
12	Ms. Judith Reynolds	Ministry of Health and Medical Services	Food Safety Unit
13	Mr. Max Erenimae	Ministry of Finance and Treasury	National Manager Customs & Excise Division
14	Mr. Donald Kiriau	Central Bank of SI	Data
15	Mr. Clement Hadosaia	Kastom Gaden Association	Programme Manager
16	Mr. Moses Pelomo	Kastom Gaden Association	Chairman
17	Ms. Roselyn Kabu	Kastom Gaden Association	Food Security Manager
18	Mr. Osbert Lalahu	World Vision (SI)	Agriculture/ Food security
19	Rev. Sam Pedoro	Solomon Islands Christian Association	
20	Mr. Winston P	UNICEF	
21	Mr. Shinobu Takashita	JAPAN INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AGENCY (JICA)	Resident Representative
22	Mr. Nixon Nalo	JICA	
23	Ms. Hee Sook Koh	KOREA INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AGENCY (KOICA)	Resident Representative
24	Mr. Gary Shea	Rural Development Programme (RDP)	Team Leader
25	Mr. Lottie Vaisekavea	RDP	Programme Manager
26	Dr. Mark Johnston	RDP	Component 2 Advisor

27	Mr. Gabriel Hiele	RDP	Component 2 Coordinator
28	Mr. John Haonima	Secretariat	
29	Mr. Lafaele Enoka	FAO	Consultant
30	Mr. Aleki Sisifa	FAO	Consultant

Annex 3: Speech of the Hon. Minister of Agriculture



Speech by

The Hon. Minister for Agriculture and Livestock,

Hon. Connelly Sandakabatu,

National Consultations on High Food Prices.

8th – 9th May 2012, Heritage Park Hotel, Honiara.

GOOD MORNING TO YOU ALL.

- Reverend Sam Pedoro of the Solomon Islands Christian Association. Thank you for the devotion and prayer.
- Mr. Aleki Sisifa and Mr. Enoka Lafaele - our FAO advisors
- Mr. Frank Wickham - Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and livestock.
- Under-secretaries
- Distinguished guests from various agencies, including
 - Government Ministries:-
 - UN Agencies and Donor Partners :-
 - Diplomatic Corp:-
 - NGOs:-
 - Private Sector
- Invited Guests
- Media Representatives
- Ladies and Gentlemen

I am greatly honoured and privileged to be with you this morning to give this official opening remarks for this "National Consultations on Policy and Programmatic Actions to Address High Food Prices". As we gather to consult each other let us spare a thought for those who may not be having enough or nothing at all to eat at this very moment due to not having the means to produce or to buy their food due to high food prices. For those of us who have access to food, are we eating enough of the right kind of food or going for the less nutritious foods because of the high cost of essential food stuff?

Food price volatility especially the upward trend is not only a global concern but a local one as well where the most vulnerable are the low income earners, old people and children. Solomon Islands therefore cannot escape this reality, but must find ways to mitigate the effects of this global phenomenon.

At the outset, I would like to thank Dr. Vili Fuavao and his team at the FAO Sub- regional office in Apia Samoa and FAO Rome, for responding to our request made in early 2011, for technical assistance to help us develop national policies and programmatic actions to address the effects of the global high food price phenomenon.

Although the workshop was approved to be held in 2011, unforeseen circumstances only made it possible to have it now. Solomon Islands is one of the lucky few to receive this assistance. The outcomes of this consultation will help us develop national policies and programmes to address the cause and effects of high food prices. Many thanks again to the FAO for this timely consultation, and many other assistance it has provided to Solomon Islands over the years.

We have heard about and experienced the global price of food increasing to unprecedented levels. Many factors are contributing to this phenomenon. Some of these factors include the high price of fuel, and crop failure in exporting countries due to extreme weather conditions brought about by climate variability. Costs in the factors of production and market forces are also some of the factors at play.

The global price of rice for example, increased by 166% in 2008. This resulted in the high retail price of products where rice for example in Solomon Islands was \$300.00 per 20 kg bag or \$15.00 per kilogram. Although the price came down in 2009, it did not last long where in 2010 the price of grains shot up 50% and continued to climb into 2011 to gradually level off.

Many people believe the price of food will continue to fluctuate in the coming years. That is not very good news, especially where price increase is concerned because it represents a major threat to food security for low income earners in countries such as Solomon Islands.

The 2011 World Food Day theme "Food Prices - From Crisis to Stability" was chosen to reflect the ongoing trend and to shed some light as to what to do about the impacts on the most vulnerable groups of the population.

At the national level, high global prices translates into the retail sector where the high price may not be affordable to the low income sector, therefore certain groups of the population such as women, children and old people may suffer.

The resilience of our rural people to mitigate such occurrences or shocks needs to be supported. Stakeholders that have anything and everything to do with food are responsible for helping Government develop policies and programmatic actions and must support the implementation of these as well to counter this price volatility, especially the up-ward trend. On this note, my

Ministry whose mandate is to facilitate food production is working hard with partners to support the diversification and scaling up of domestic food production. This demonstrates the National Coalition for Reform and Advancement (NCRA) government's concern about the upward trend which is translated to national markets where certain food and essential goods have sky-rocketed in their retail price, resulting in vulnerable sectors of the community using most of their income to buy food.

What has the government of the day done to address this very important issue of high food prices? High food prices not only affects imported food products such as rice and flour, but it is obvious that prices of locally produced foods sold in the urban markets are also showing an upward trend. The policy of the NCRA government clearly spells out the importance of food security for the nation.

As an example my Ministry has been embarking on the National Rural Rice Development programme to try and reduce our huge food import bill where rice is a large contributor, while at the same time produce affordable rice in rural areas. Semi-commercial and commercial rice development has been rolled out in Isabel and Western Provinces late last year. The first harvest from one of these commercial rice farms (Gojoruru in Isabel) was brought to Honiara and sold out in a week at \$7.50 per kilogram. This price can be afforded in the rural areas while at the same time generate income for the growers. Similarly in supporting and assisting smallholder farmers, my Ministry is helping to mitigate the effects of high food prices by providing the means to produce affordable nutritious food.

Following the aftermath of the 2007/8 high food price crisis, successive governments have initiated certain measures to mitigate its effects. Whether these actions are still effective, needs evaluation and review. Nevertheless, the NCRA government policies clearly spells out its commitment to address economic security where free market is ensured to deliver lower costs and improved services to consumers in the country. Similarly, food security for the nation is ensured through the various food crops and livestock production programmes, as well as cash crops development to support livelihoods. Let me quote the FAO Director General's message regarding the food price Volatility...

"If we are to seriously address the issue of world hunger, more effort has to be made to address the problem of food price fluctuations, particularly for those who spend most of their incomes on food, to ensure that they can return from the market with enough for their families to eat nutritiously"

With this reminder from the FAO Director General, may I take this opportunity to thank you all for coming to participate in this National Consultations on Policy and Programmatic Actions to Address High Food Prices in Solomon Islands, and wish you all a fruitful two-day deliberations.

In conclusion may I take this opportunity to once again thank Dr. Viii Fuavao and his team at FAO Apia and to Aleki and Lafaele for coming to help us rethink ways to mitigate the negative

effects of high food prices which affects all of us in Solomon Islands. On the same note, I would also like to thank our RDP for their assistance in the facilitation of this workshop. All participants here today are to be commended for being part of this consultation, to help map out potential policy issues and programmatic actions to address high food prices in Solomon Islands.

I look forward to the outcomes of the consultation and believe these will be of benefit to our people.

TENKYU TUMAS