

Newsletter

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PIFON hosts Pacific Soil Learning Exchange

It is not often that you get over 50 farmers from five Pacific island countries to gather in a farming establishment for over one week – to learn and exchange ideas about the importance of the soil and how they can improve farming techniques. This great gathering of some of the Pacific’s most committed farmers and farmer organisations took place from 23rd to 25th September, 2015 at the renowned Tutu Rural Training Centre (TRTC), on Fiji’s beautiful garden island – Taveuni.



A taro farmer on Taveuni displaying a healthy taro plant



Group discussion on sustainable soil management practices

The Pacific Soil Learning Exchange was supported by the European Union and Pacific Community through the Pacific Agriculture Policy Project and the IFAD funded Medium Term Cooperation Programme for Farmer Organisations in Asia and the Pacific Phase 2.

The learning exchange achieved significant progress towards a common understanding in the Pacific about the various methods and techniques for maintaining healthy soil in the region – a key element for the Pacific if it is to

grow its crucial agricultural industries. PIFON is proud to present a publication and short video on this event that cover the main topics and field visits. The publication can be downloaded from the website on www.pacificfarmers.com/publications-2/ and the video can viewed on the PIFON YouTube channel (accessible through our website on www.pacificfarmers.com/videos/).

A media competition was held in parallel with the regional Pacific Soil Learning Exchange held on Taveuni in September. The competition theme was also the UN declared International Year of Soils theme 'Healthy Soils for a Healthy Life' to highlight the positive impact of sustainable soil management around the Pacific region.

Rohit Lal of the Ministry of Agriculture in Taveuni and who is currently pursuing his PhD at the Massey University in New Zealand submitted the winning entry, a video on dalo production on Taveuni entitled “Building better crops for better profit”. His video production was in both the English and Fijian language and can be found online on www.pacificfarmers.com/videos.

The runner-up entry to the regional Pacific Soil Learning Exchange media competition was the video production by Tei Tei Taveuni (TTT). TTT is an FO member of PIFON.

Farmer-farmer exchange bears fruit in Samoa

The Samoa Farmers Association (SFA) has been working on a series of farmer-farmer exchanges over the past two years using expertise from Fiji to try and increase production of papaya and pineapple in Samoa. These farmer-farmer exchanges are funded through PIFON under the MTCP II project.

These farmer-farmer exchanges are now beginning to bear fruit for participating farmers. In the case of pineapple, the situation in Samoa prior to the start of the programme was:

- ◆ Very low plant density and excessive spacing on all farms/low yields
- ◆ All production was harvested during the main season (around December)
- ◆ There was little to no knowledge of off-season production systems
- ◆ Lack of planting material for off-season planting.

For Samoa Farmers Association (SFA) the challenge was to get farmers to plant more systematically and to use a planting plan to break the natural cycle and prepare for off-season production. The approach used was to facilitate farmers helping farmers.

In November 2015, the impacts of this programme can already be seen on some pineapple farms in Samoa, including:

- The natural cycle had been broken on a number of farms.
- 65,000 – 70,000 plants had been planted in stages and are ready to produce off-season fruit before the 2016 natural pineapple season in November/December 2016.

All credit for these developments must go to the driven farmers who are putting what they have learned into practice. For SFA, the next step will be to change “the fertilizer culture” among the farmers, and make the necessary inputs available to continue transforming this industry.



Impacts of 2014 pineapple planting now showing

New publication discussing Pacific Island Farmer Organisations now available



The European Tropical Forest Research Network (ETFRN) of the Netherlands published its 57th edition of ETFRN News in a book form entitled "Effective forest and farm producer organizations".

In this new book, the experiences of individual producer organizations and the pivotal role that umbrella organizations are able to play in supporting small scale farmers is discussed in detail through case studies from around the world.

The publication also includes a contribution from the Pacific Islands made by the PIFON Manager and Chairman discussing the importance of farmer organizations in the region and some of the issues they face.

This new book was launched in a side event at the **World Forestry Congress: Landscapes and livelihoods: Forest and farm producer organizations sharing their stories** that was held in South Africa the week of September 7th, 2015.

The publication is available for download on our website at www.pacificfarmers.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/

Leadership and Strategic Planning Training for FOs in PNG

The PNG Women in Agriculture Development Foundation (PNG WiADF) recently hosted a 'Farmer Organisations Leadership and Strategic Planning Training' event in Lae, PNG from 19th – 22nd October, 2015.

The two part event consisted of a two day PNG Farmer Organisation Learning Exchange bringing together PNG FOs, regional FOs, public and private sector partners to discuss the successes and constraints of farmer organisations. The latter part of the event consisted of a two day Women's Leadership Training from Oct 21-22. The training brought together farmer organisation leaders, entrepreneurs and public sector women to encourage and foster strong leadership values and skills.



Participants in a group discussion on the key 'information gaps' facing their farmer members.

PNG WiADF is a non-governmental organization with a vision that PNG families and communities will be prosperous and women recognized as equal partners in Agriculture for development. It commits itself with passion to pursue and implement policies that are conducive to investments in human resource development, research and infrastructure to achieve food security.

Through this workshop PNG WiADF is working to empower its members by building their capacity to be good leaders and to develop strategic plans for their farmer organizations. This is significant because it emphasizes one of PNG WiADF's key focus areas on Organisational Capacity Development with a strategy to invest in human capacity building as a basis for its organisational development in its national secretariat, branches and farmer women groups and organisations in provinces and in regional and international networking. The meeting has also helped in expanding the PIFON network to more farmer organisations across PNG.



Participants on field trip during the Farmer Organisations Leadership & Strategic Planning Training in Lae, PNG

PIFON hosts IFAD Pacific Programme Review

PIFON hosted IFAD's 1st Pacific Programme Review Workshop at South Sea Orchids conference facility in Nasau, Nadi on 21 – 23 October, 2015. About 20 participants from around the region including four IFAD representatives, attended this workshop.

The purpose of the Review was to take stock of the performance of the on-going IFAD financed activities in the Pacific Region with a view towards improving their performance and the outcomes that they seek to achieve in the lives of rural people.

An important outcome of this event was the strengthening of relationships between projects and making stronger connections within country and regional programmes.

PIFON is working to integrate farmer organisations into more IFAD development programmes across the region.



Group discussion at IFAD's 1st Pacific Programme Review Workshop at the South Sea Orchids in Nasau, Nadi.

PIFON supports Vanilla Technical Exchange and Value Chain Training in Tonga

PIFON with funding from EU funded SPC-PAPP project has recently assisted the Mainstreaming of Rural Development Innovation Tonga Trust (MORDI) in providing vanilla technical exchange and value chain training to about 60 workshop participants including its staff.

The focus of the training was to improve the flow of information along the chain and also to improve the production/curing of vanilla. The training was conducted by Mr. Piero Bianchessi, a vanilla processor on the island of Santo in Vanuatu.

Tonga has the longest established vanilla industry in the South West Pacific with vanilla being introduced to the island of Va'vau in Tonga by Catholic priests. A first pilot plot of 50 plants was established in the early 1950's and in 1959 the Tongan government sent an agriculture officer to Tahiti to learn vanilla farming techniques. Farming of vanilla has since then taken off and spread to Tongatapu. There are currently 5 curers and 3 vanilla exporters operating in Tonga.



'Eua vanilla market



PIFON FO member holds a graduation with a difference

Thirty Three (33) young men enrolled in the Young Farmers program at the Tutu Rural Training Centre (TRTC) in Taveuni graduated on the 23rd of July 2015. The Tutu Young Farmers is a course about farming, about using land commercially, about management, about rural development, about self-employment etc. However at its heart it is a course for people. It is about their hopes and dreams, their hurts and pains, their relationships, their sexuality, their growth in autonomy whereby they are helped to take charge of their own lives and relationships. This process does not happen in a vacuum and Tutu is blessed in its part of Fiji, with its wonderful soil.



Tutu's greatest asset is the creativity and dedication of its staff who work with these young men. The majority of its staff are from the local community and have been formed in Tutu. From the leadership in Naisavere, through the cooks, the tractor driver, the technical staff, human development formators, the farm workers, Tutu staff are blessed with its extraordinary sense of mission. The young farmers that successfully completed the course, graduated with a 'diploma' consisting of their 5 year development plan, their bank deposit book and a packet of mucuna beans. The farmers are back in their own village focusing on their five year development program.

TRTC is a farmer organisation member of PIFON located on Taveuni, the 3rd largest island of Fiji. For more information on Tutu see their publication 'Tutu Rural Training Centre – Lessons in Non-formal Adult Education for Self Employed in Agriculture' available on our website

www.pacificfarmers.com/publications-2/



TRTC graduates receiving their award—5 year development plan, bank deposit book and a bag of mucuna bean seeds.



TRTC Principal, Father Michael McVerry and Commissioner Northern cut the graduation cake as the Young Farmer Course graduates look on.

PIFON represented at the 1st Asia Pacific Local Champions Exhibition 2015

Mrs Sinai Tu'itahi of the Growers Federation of Tonga (GroFed) represented PIFON to the 1st Asia Pacific Local Champion Exhibition 2015 that was held over three (3) days in Cambodia from August 10th – 12th. The exhibition was jointly hosted by the Cambodia MAFF, IFAD and PROCASAUR and was attended by participants from seven countries namely, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Laos, Nepal, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam and Tonga from the Pacific region.

The Asia Pacific Local Champion Exhibition 2015 is about bringing together local champions with the public sector, universities, NGOs and cooperation agencies to build personal contacts with outstanding rural women and men, promoting innovations in sustainable rural and agricultural development, with special focus on the involvement of rural youth.

The three-day gathering combined smart networking and learning tools within an interactive framework whereby local champions operated from their Innovation Shops and sales booths to share and explain solutions, best practices and technologies born from endurance; public-private Roundtables were available to identify concrete collaboration opportunities between local champions and other rural development practitioners; and a Field training was conducted to strengthen the know-how of participants on local knowledge management and on scaling up local solutions.



Sinai trying out rice parachuting with Dr Keshab Khadka of ANPF —a farmer innovation method

PIFON participation at the Global Forum Agricultural Research Constituent Assembly (GFAR)

PIFON Manager, Kyle Stice was invited to help shape the future of Agricultural Research and Innovation by attending the GFAR Constituent Assembly on 24 – 26 August 2015 in Bangkok, Thailand.

The Global Forum on Agricultural Research – GFAR – is uniquely placed to bring about such actions among the many stakeholders involved in the generation, access and use of agricultural knowledge and innovation. Established between FAO and IFAD as an open and inclusive forum, GFAR works to transform and strengthen agricultural research and innovation systems, to improve the lives and livelihoods of farmers and farming families across the developing world.

The GFAR Constituent Assembly brought together over 100 representative stakeholders from all sectors and all regions, to consider and renew the role, purpose and governance of GFAR. This landmark Assembly formed a key step in a process of governance review, reform and renewal of the Global Forum, responding to the fact that much has changed in the world of agricultural research and innovation since the Forum was first established in 1996.

PIFON was nominated to attend the Assembly through a consultative process with the Asia-Pacific Association of Agricultural Institutions (APAARI) and stakeholder networks in the region that has identified key leaders from each sector.

PNG WiADF supports local farmer organisation development



Mix farming of round cabbage and sweet corn in PNG

recent survey of open-pollinated vegetable varieties available in PNG with the hope that this will be the foundation for a programme to increase the availability of open pollinated seed to farmers around PNG.

PNG WiADF in partnership with PIFON has assisted six national farmer organisations in terms of strategic planning and proposal writing in an effort to develop the capacity of these organisations to better serve their members.

PNG WiADF has also been involved in a



Mix farming of rice and taro in PNG

Farmer Organisation Learning Exchange to Vanuatu

Sharing experiences and strengthening networks was the aim of a learning exchange between Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. PIFON members Kastom Gaden Association (KGA) in the Solomon Islands, Tei Tei Taveuni (TTT) and Tutu Rural Training Center (TRTC) had expressed their interest in learning about the operations of farmer organisations in Vanuatu.

In response to this request the Vanuatu Farm Support Association (FSA) organised a 4 day learning exchange over the islands Efate, Malo and Santo in Vanuatu.



Piero Bianchessi explaining about vanilla planting

The programme showcased the operations of the Vanuatu Spices Network which is a partnership between rural farmers, FSA and buyer/exporter Venui Vanilla. The programme also included discussions with Syndicat Agricole which is one of the regions oldest farmer organisation input supplier. Many important lessons from Syndicate Agricole can be applied to other farmer organisations interested in input supply.

Finally the learning exchange covered the work of FSA and Vanuatu Agricultural Research Technical Centre (VARTC) which are engaged in on-farm applied research, including work on enhancing traditional cropping systems.