



Improving Access to Climate Adaptation Support for Pacific Smallholder Farmers in Tonga and Fiji



Note. FGD with smallholder farmers in Nuku'alofa, Tonga (2025) - taken by research team

Prepared for the Pacific Farmers Organization - PFO by the Keough School of Global Affairs Integration Lab

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Pacific Farmer Organizations (PFO)

The Pacific Farmer Organisations serves as an umbrella organisation for national farmer organisations in the Pacific region, to coordinate capacity building, share success stories and the lessons learnt and support regional exchanges of expertise between farmer organisations and their associated private sector partners.



Glossary

FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FO	Farmer Organization
i-Lab	Integration Lab
KII	Key Informant Interview
KSGA	Keough School of Global Affairs
MORDI	Mainstreaming of Rural Development Innovation Tonga Trust
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PFO	Pacific Farmer Organizations
PIANGO	Pacific Islands Association of Non-Governmental Organizations
SPC	The Pacific Community

About the Authors

This document was authored by a team of graduate students enrolled in the Integration Lab (i-Lab) in the Keough School of Global Affairs (KSGA) at the University of Notre Dame. This document assembles data, analyses, recommendations or guidance at the request of the Pacific Farmers Organizations. As the product of an academic experience, any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed herein are those of the student authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Keough School of Global Affairs, the University of Notre Dame or the Pacific Farmer Organizations.



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Executive Summary

Smallholder farmers are the foundation of food production across the Pacific, yet they remain among the most vulnerable to the accelerating impacts of climate change (Taylor & Stice, 2024). Rising sea levels, shifting rainfall patterns, and more frequent extreme weather events threaten agricultural livelihoods and food security (Taylor, 2016). Despite their importance, smallholder farmers face barriers in accessing financial, technical, and institutional support to increase their adaptive capacity.

Recent global evidence highlights the scale of this challenge. New analysis by Climate Focus for Family Farmers for Climate Action (FFCA) estimates that small-scale farmers require US\$443 billion per year in adaptation finance, yet only 0.36% of this need is currently being met. In the Pacific, farmers receive just US\$0 to 0.01 billion annually, despite an estimated minimum need of US\$80 million, a stark illustration of the region's widening adaptation financing gap. This significant underfunding leaves farmers increasingly exposed to climate shocks (2025).

This white paper, developed in partnership with Pacific Farmer Organizations (PFO), examines how smallholder farmers are currently being supported in adapting to climate change in Fiji and Tonga, the role of Farmers' Organizations (FOs) in enhancing farmers' adaptive capacity, the systemic barriers that limit farmers' access to support, and the factors that enable or constrain political support of smallholder farmers' needs.

Building on these observations, the following section summarizes the key findings that consistently emerged across semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), surveys, and field observations with a sample of primarily FO-affiliated farmers and key stakeholders. The data provides rich insights into how current systems are functioning on the ground.

Core Findings From the Research

Analysis across interviews, FGDs, and surveys reveals five central findings:

1. **Climate change, market volatility, and lack of infrastructure** are the most frequently cited challenges affecting farmers in Fiji and Tonga.
2. **FOs are the primary support channel** and deliver the highest satisfaction among all service providers for sampled farmers.
3. **FOs play a critical role in knowledge sharing, resilience building, and establishing strategic partnerships**, though their full impact is constrained by inconsistent funding and limited policy influence.
4. **Capacity gaps and limited awareness** hinder access to support.
5. Despite strong regional political recognition of climate vulnerability, **national-level implementation gaps and structural barriers** prevent effective support from reaching smallholder farmers.



While the research findings reflect varied local contexts, smallholder farmers' perspectives were remarkably consistent. Three challenges emerged most frequently: climate change, market volatility, and lack of infrastructure. Farmers in FGDs overwhelmingly identified climate change as their primary challenge, citing droughts, floods, cyclones, unseasonal temperature changes, and unpredictable heavy rains that damage crops, infrastructure, and farm structures. Survey results reinforce this pattern: 73–85% of crop, floriculture, and livestock surveyed farmers strongly agreed that climate change affects their farming. Although farmers are already implementing local adaptation strategies, limited finance and increasingly erratic weather events constrain these efforts.

Market volatility and access challenges were the second major concern. Farmers reported sudden price drops at harvest, limited local market spaces, high transport costs, and export barriers undermine profitability and production planning. Many farmers expressed that they "do not know where to go" or "where to raise [their] voice" on price-setting and market regulation, pointing to weak institutional mechanisms for addressing market risks. The third key challenge relates to infrastructure deficits: absent or poorly maintained roads increase transport costs and limit market access, while inadequate water storage and irrigation systems leave farmers highly dependent on rainfall. Some farmers reported requesting farm roads for over a decade without response, underscoring the long-standing nature of these constraints.

Within this context, FOs emerged as the primary and most trusted support channel for sampled farmers. Survey data from Fiji (n=33) and Tonga (n=100) show that 69% of farmers turn to FOs for advice and services to improve their farming, compared to 24% who turn to Government sources. Farmers also lean heavily on family and fellow farmers, with 43% turning to them for support, while local organizations were rarely approached (4%). In FGDs, FO-affiliated farmers reported receiving more services and resources from FOs than from any other actor, particularly around training, agricultural inputs, and equipment. Among those receiving FO support, 74% rated it "very useful," compared to 40% for Government support. Farmers consistently described FOs as accessible, reliable, and responsive organizations that visit communities frequently and engage directly with farmers.

These findings align with global evidence that channeling climate finance directly through grassroots organizations is among the most effective ways to support adaptation, because such organizations understand local realities and can rapidly reach communities. Farmers in our study emphasized FOs' simplified processes and frequent direct engagement.

Despite these strengths, FOs' ability to sustain and scale this support is highly dependent on external project funding and fragmented partnerships. While training, knowledge sharing and peer learning are central to FOs work, these activities often decline sharply once project funding ends, especially for remote or outer-island communities where travel costs are high. Partnerships with Donors, Governments, and other FOs extend reach but also create administrative burdens as organizations juggle multiple small grants and reporting requirements. Although FOs are increasingly invited into policy discussions, participants consistently reported



that farmer perspectives shared in these spaces rarely translate into concrete policy changes or implementation, leaving FO policy influence limited.

Beyond FO-specific issues, the study identifies broader systemic capacity gaps and access barriers that hinder equitable support for smallholder farmers. Government agencies and other support institutions were widely described as underfunded, understaffed, and overburdened. In the Pacific overall, the ratio of extension officers to farmers can reach 1:10,000, and in Fiji approximately 1:1,000, making regular contact challenging (Sustainability Research Centre: Transforming Regions, n.d.; Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways, 2024). Insufficient funding and staffing constrain both service delivery and collaboration across actors; many Donors and FO representatives emphasized that “everyone is still working in silos,” despite shared recognition of the problems. On the farmer side, limited awareness, complex application procedures, and digital and financial literacy barriers significantly restrict farmers from accessing assistance. Illiterate farmers, those without digital access, and those unable to travel long distances are particularly at risk of exclusion and may simply “give up” after repeated attempts.

A consistent theme across stakeholder interviews is that current systems tend to favor larger, commercial, or well-organized farmers over less resourced or more informal smallholders. Donors and Governments often prioritize organized farmer groups with stronger internal systems, both for ease of fund management and to demonstrate financial sustainability. While this approach can improve accountability, it also risks deepening inequalities: farmers without formal groups, networks, or “direct contacts” are less likely to receive support, even though they may be among the most vulnerable to climate impacts.

Finally, the research finds a misalignment between strong regional political awareness of climate vulnerability and weaker national-level implementation in Fiji and Tonga. Regionally, climate impacts and the role of agriculture feature prominently in policy platforms and events such as the Pacific Week of Agriculture. Regional organizations and frameworks create space for farmer organizations to be “at the table,” and smallholder farmers are increasingly recognized in regional strategies. However, a persistent disconnect between regional priorities, national institutional capacity, and local realities prevents this political attention from consistently translating into tangible support for smallholder farmers.

To address these challenges, the white paper proposes **five key actions**:

1. **Formalize FOs as co-delivery partners** in national and regional adaptation programs.
2. **Invest in institutional and logistical capacity** to strengthen service delivery.
3. **Improve coordination mechanisms** among FOs, Governments, and Donors.
4. **Tailor the services provided according to farmers needs.**
5. **Increase farmer representation and advocacy** in policy processes.

Together, these recommendations aim to strengthen Farmer Organizations as effective, trusted partners in delivering community-driven climate adaptation support for smallholder farmers, while addressing the structural financing and capacity gaps that currently prevent Pacific farmers from realizing their full role in a resilient, food-secure future.



Introduction

Smallholder farmers are the backbone of Pacific agriculture, producing most of the region's food and sustaining rural livelihoods across the Pacific Islands (Georgeou et al., 2022). Yet they face mounting pressures from a changing climate that threaten crops, livelihoods, and food security. Climate-related disruptions such as rising sea levels, saltwater intrusion, increasingly erratic rainfall, and stronger cyclones have already reduced agricultural productivity and increased vulnerability in coastal and upland farming systems (FAO, 2021; Taylor, 2016). Despite their centrality to food systems, smallholders remain among the least resourced to adapt effectively to these challenges.

This underinvestment in smallholder adaptation is not unique to the Pacific. New global analysis conducted for Family Farmers for Climate Action (FFCA) estimates that small-scale farmers require US\$443 billion per year in adaptation finance, yet only 0.36% of this need is currently being met. In the Pacific, farmers receive just US\$0 to 10 million annually, despite an estimated minimum need of US\$80 million. In the Pacific specifically, smallholder farmers receive close to zero in direct adaptation finance despite high vulnerability, forcing reliance on personal savings or unpaid labor for adaptation investments. The FFCA report concludes that structural financing barriers, particularly highly centralized and donor-driven allocation systems, prevent resources from reaching the farmers and organizations best positioned to support climate adaptation at the local level. These global trends mirror the challenges observed in Fiji and Tonga, where farmers consistently report limited access to funding, inconsistent support, and persistent institutional bottlenecks.

Across the Global South, a growing body of literature shows that smallholder adaptation capacity depends not only on access to new technologies or financial resources but also on the quality of social and institutional systems that enable cooperation, learning, and coordination. Eakin, Lemos, and Nelson (2014) argue that effective adaptation requires both "generic capacities" which are associated with fundamental human development goals such as education, health, and income, and "specific capacities", such as networks and organisations that help communities manage climate risks. Their findings highlight that institutional and governance structures can strengthen or undermine the ways smallholders build adaptive capacity to climate change impacts. Similarly, Ensor et al. (2019) argue that "adaptation research and practice too often overlook the wider social context within which climate change is experienced". In other words, adaptation is not just a technical fix, it also depends on relationships, learning, and trust. Communities are more resilient when they have strong organizations that help them share knowledge and make decisions together.

A Global Analysis estimates that a minimum of US\$80 million a year is needed to help small-scale family farmers in the Pacific to adapt to climate change, yet only 0.36% of the needed funds reach smallholder farmers globally.



In the Pacific, Farmer Organizations (FOs) link farmers with Government programs, markets, and each other. Farmers' organizations are autonomous, membership-based groups of small-scale rural producers, including cooperatives, associations, and unions, that collectively represent farmers' economic and political interests (International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2023). Taylor and Stice (2024) note that Pacific FOs play a critical role in linking farmers to technical knowledge, markets, and policy processes, thereby translating regional climate adaptation frameworks into practices that are relevant at the community level. Much of the existing research on climate adaptation in the Pacific has focused on short-term project outcomes or policy frameworks, with limited attention to how local organizations such as FOs can sustain adaptation over time. Nunn et al. (2022) argue that many adaptation efforts in the region remain fragmented and donor-driven, often failing to strengthen local institutional systems that could ensure continuity.

Pacific FOs play a critical role in linking farmers to technical knowledge, markets, and policy processes.

Recent studies of agricultural extension in the Pacific reinforce these institutional challenges. Agricultural extension refers to the systems and services that facilitate the transfer of knowledge, skills, and technologies to farmers to improve their productivity, resilience, and decision-making. Chand and Kumar (2019)

observe that while Government agencies have historically led agricultural extension, there is an emergence of new extension service models private owned or jointly managed by Government and NGOs. They also note that some cooperatives and private organizations have resorted to providing their own extension service in response to resource constraints. These shifts underscore the growing importance of farmer-led initiatives in delivering agricultural and climate services, especially where public capacity is limited.

Existing studies tend to focus either on Government-led extension or on short-term project-based initiatives, leaving unanswered questions about whether FOs have the capacity, legitimacy, and resources to deliver sustained support to farmers, and what barriers may prevent them from doing so. This lack of evidence means that policymakers and development partners have little guidance on how to more fully leverage FOs within national adaptation and agricultural systems. This study examines how Farmer Organizations in Fiji and Tonga enable smallholder farmers to access climate adaptation support, navigate policy systems, and strengthen their adaptive capacity. It examines both the practical ways FOs deliver training, share technical knowledge, and connect farmers to resources and the broader systemic barriers that make it difficult for farmers to access the support that already exists. Additionally it also explores the factors that shape whether smallholder farmers' needs are prioritized in national and regional policy agendas.



Context

This study addresses a key gap in current research by focusing on the roles of local organisations and multi-level actors in supporting climate adaptation over the long term. The insights gained highlight how FOs function as co-delivery partners and how they interact with Government and Donor programs to enhance the adaptive capacity of smallholder farmers. By integrating multiple stakeholder perspectives, this research provides a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities for farmer-centered, climate adaptation in the Pacific.

Understanding the agricultural and climate context of Fiji and Tonga provides important background for interpreting the findings of this study. The Republic of Fiji is an upper-middle-income Pacific Island nation comprising over 330 islands, roughly one-third of which are inhabited. Agriculture, forestry, and fishing contribute approximately 8.4% of GDP (World Bank, 2024). The country's total population is estimated at 928,784 people in 2024 and 2020 Agriculture Census reported 70,991 agricultural households with about 65% considered smallholders (with land of 1 ha or less). Its tropical climate and frequent exposure to cyclones render smallholder farmers particularly vulnerable to climate impacts.

The Kingdom of Tonga is a constitutional monarchy encompassing more than 170 islands; its population stands at about 104,175 in 2024 (World Bank, 2025). Within Tonga, agriculture and forestry (19.6 %) and fishing (2.1 %) together account for around 21.7 % of GDP as of recent national accounts (Tonga Statistics Department, 2024). Tonga's low-lying, dispersed geography and high dependence on coastal ecosystems heighten the vulnerability of smallholder farmers to sea-level rise, saltwater intrusion, and cyclones.

Figure 1: Taveuni, Fiji Coastland



Note. A view of the Taveuni, Fiji Coastland. Photograph taken by the research team during fieldwork in June 2025.



Research Questions

Given the urgency of climate impacts and the persistent barriers facing smallholder farmers in Fiji and Tonga, this study seeks to understand how local institutions, support systems, and policy environments shape farmers' ability to adapt. The research was guided by the following questions, which together explore how adaptation support is delivered, who can access it, and what factors influence political support of smallholder needs:

RQ 1. How do Farmers' Organizations (FOs) support Pacific smallholder farmers in climate adaptation and policy engagement?

RQ 1.1 What systemic barriers, beyond the role and agency of FOs, impede Pacific smallholder farmers' access to climate adaptation resources?

RQ 2. How do Pacific smallholder farmers (affiliated with FOs) currently access climate adaptation support and finance?

RQ 2.1. What are smallholder farmers' perceptions of how access to climate adaptation support services and finance can be improved to meet their needs?

RQ 3. What factors enable or inhibit the political prioritization of climate adaptation support for Pacific smallholder farmers on national and global policy agendas?



Methodology

To answer the research questions the project employed a mixed methods approach, with qualitative and quantitative data. The research team conducted semi-structured Key Informant Interviews (KII) with Government officials, Donors, FO leaders, NGO representatives, Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with FO-affiliated farmers and surveys with smallholder farmers as shown in **Table 1**. Data was collected primarily in Fiji and Tonga, with additional insights from across the Pacific Islands.

A convenience sampling approach was employed given the geographical, cultural, and connectivity barriers across the Pacific islands, meaning that participants were selected based on their availability, willingness to participate, and accessibility through FOs. For the survey, responses were obtained from smallholder farmers contacted through FOs, as well as from individuals who voluntarily completed the questionnaire after seeing it published on the social media platforms of PFO or FOs. The KII and FGDs were transcribed and coded for thematic analysis, while the quantitative survey data were cleaned and analyzed using descriptive statistics, analyzed using statistical software and qualitative data analysis software.

Study Limitations

It should be noted that the perspectives from FGDs and surveys represent the views of a limited convenience sample of primarily FO-affiliated farmers and are not representative of all smallholder farmers. Therefore, these perspectives cannot be generalized to all smallholder farmers in Fiji and Tonga. Furthermore, because the selection process utilized a convenience sample, there is a possible selection bias among the responses, as FO-affiliated farmers may have more positive perceptions and experiences with FOs due to their engagement, access to resources, and established relationships with them. While these insights highlight the support that affiliated farmers received from FOs, they may not reflect the experiences of non-affiliated farmers. Nonetheless, these insights provide meaningful perspectives from farmers actively involved in agricultural networks.

Figure 2: A Research Team Member Conducting a Focus Group in Taveuni, Fiji.



Note. A member of the research team conducting a FGD with smallholder farmers in Taveuni, Fiji. The FGDs gathered qualitative data on farmer challenges and support access. Photograph taken by the research team during fieldwork in June 2025.



Table 1: Key Informant Interviews by Stakeholder Type

Stakeholder Type	Quantity
Farmer Organizations	14
Donor Organizations	9
Regional NGOs	8
Government Representatives	7
Local NGOs	5
Researchers	1
Total Participants	44

Note. Interviews conducted during fieldwork period (May-July 2025).

Table 2: Smallholder Farmer Focus Groups Participants and Surveys Respondents

Research Activity	Quantity
Focus Group Participants	98
Survey Respondents	133
Total Participants	231

Note. A total of 10 FGDs and 133 surveys were conducted across Tonga and Fiji during the fieldwork period (June–July 2025). Participating farmers in FGDs were all associated with a FO. Each FGD generally consisted of between 5 and 12 participants and included a mix of single-gender (only-men, only-female) and mixed-gender groups. For the surveys, the sample was drawn primarily from farmers associated with local FOs as 118 farmers were FO-affiliated, and 15 farmers were not FO-affiliated.



Findings

From analyzing our data from interviews, focus groups, and surveys, we have identified five key findings, briefly summarized below:

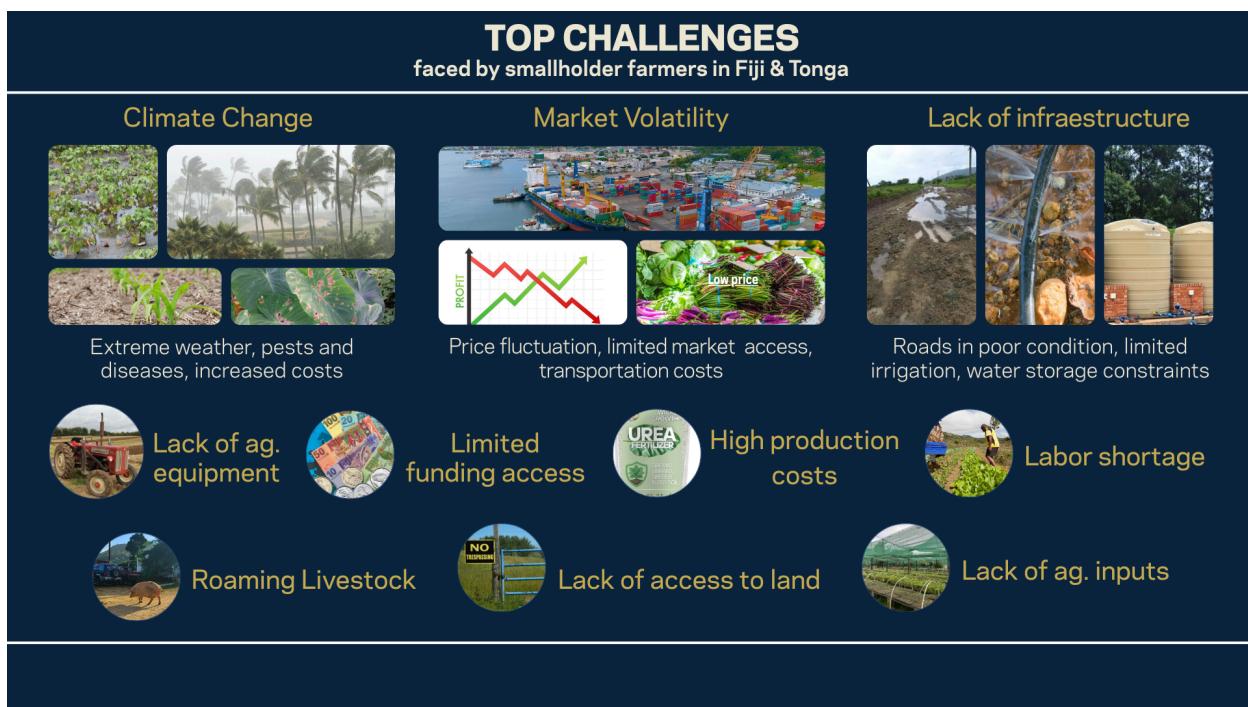
1. **Climate change, market volatility, and lack of infrastructure** are the three most commonly cited challenges affecting farmers in Fiji and Tonga today.
2. **FOs are the primary support channel and deliver the highest satisfaction** among all service providers for sampled farmers. Surveyed smallholder farmers primarily turn towards FOs and other farmers for advice and support, and smallholder farmers affiliated with FOs consistently reported higher satisfaction with the support received from FOs compared to other service providers. FOs achieve this through focusing on knowledge sharing and leveraging essential partnerships.
3. **FOs are central to knowledge sharing, resilience building, and establishing strategic partnerships**, playing a vital role in supporting smallholder farmers' adaptive capacity. However, their full impact is constrained by fragmented, inconsistent funding and limited policy influence, which often prevents farmer perspectives from translating into tangible policy outcomes.
4. **Capacity gaps and limited awareness hinder access to support.** Insufficient funding and staffing lead to weak institutional capacity, which, combined with complex application processes, causes many farmers to struggle to find and access existing support. Consequently, the system often favors certain farmers and leaves others behind.
5. **High regional political awareness of climate vulnerability is consistently undermined** by challenges in national implementation and structural barriers that prevent effective support from reaching smallholder farmers.



Key Finding 1: Climate change, market volatility, and lack of infrastructure are the three most commonly cited challenges affecting sampled farmers in Fiji and Tonga today.

During FGDs, FO-affiliated farmers noted the following challenges, in order of frequency: climate change, market volatility, lack of infrastructure, lack of agricultural equipment, limited access to funding, high production costs, labor shortage, roaming livestock, lack of access to land, and lack of agricultural inputs. The top three challenges are highlighted in the paragraphs below.

Figure 3: Top Challenges Faced by Smallholder Farmers in Fiji and Tonga



Note. Data compiled from FGD conducted in Tonga and Fiji (May–July 2025). Farmers were asked to identify the most significant challenges impacting their farming. The figure displays the most frequently cited challenges as identified by the respondents.



A. Climate vulnerability: sampled smallholder farmers report overwhelming challenges from extreme weather.

Vulnerability to climate change was the overwhelming challenge reported by sampled smallholder farmers during the FGDs. The participants described extreme weather events such as droughts, floods, unseasonal temperature changes, unpredictable heavy rains, and cyclones, which damage or destroy crops and infrastructure, increase pests and diseases, raise costs through greater use of inputs such as insecticides, or force changes in crop types. As one farmer from Nadi, Fiji shared: **“So...after a cyclone, most of our plants get damaged...and sometimes what happens the structure too, gets damaged. Then we have to start again. Rebuild. Our hardest part is to...building is one thing, and then growing the plants again. So that sets us back a lot.”**

Survey results indicated that sampled smallholder farmers engaged in crop farming ($n=78$), floriculture ($n=42$), or livestock farming ($n=26$), strongly agreed (73%, 74%, and 85%, respectively) that climate change is a problem for their farming, which is a higher proportion than many other reported types of farming in the survey such as agroforestry (62%) and beekeeping (60%). *This suggests that crop, floriculture, and livestock farmers may be more vulnerable to climate change, likely due to the fact that their production is highly sensitive to changing weather patterns.*

Sampled smallholder farmers also mentioned that they are taking action to adapt to these challenges. For example, a farmer from Tonga shared that, as an adaptation measure on his farm, they cut branches from trees to ensure that yam leaves are separated from the soil. This helps prevent plant diseases during heavy rains when water touches the leaves, and leaf burn during droughts, when the soil becomes too hot. However, findings suggest that the unpredictability of extreme weather events and limited access to funding may hinder farmers' adaptation efforts.

Figure 4: FO Climate-Resilient Measures



Note. Fruit trees maintained by the FO are placed in moveable containers as a climate adaptation measure against cyclones. This allows the FO to protect the trees from damage and control their growth. Photograph taken by the research team during fieldwork in July 2025.



B. Market volatility and access challenges undermine farmers' production planning and profitability.

The second major concern for our sampled smallholder farmers relates to market conditions. The vast majority of farmers reported that price volatility significantly affects their production plans. This is largely because market saturation often drives prices down, preventing them from achieving expected returns. Farmers also highlighted limited local market spaces, difficulties in exporting, and high costs to reach new markets, all of which make planning extremely challenging. As one farmer from Taveuni shared: *“Most of the time, when you plant a lot expecting that price, you'll get it for a good price. Then when it comes the day for harvesting, you find out that the people have dropped the price right down.”*

Notably, farmers mentioned a lack of support in addressing challenges such as market access and price fluctuations, despite these being major concerns. They also noted not knowing where to raise their voices on these issues, which increases the difficulty of this challenge. As one farmer from Taveuni, Fiji, expressed: *“We want someone to set the price, but we don't know where to complain about [the] increase and decrease of the price...like we don't know where to go to raise our voice.”*

C. Absent or poorly maintained roads and limited water systems constrain farmer access and efficiency.

The third most commonly noted challenge is infrastructure constraints. Smallholder farmers consistently reported difficulties reaching markets and transporting equipment and materials due to absent or poorly maintained roads, which also increased transportation costs. Some farmers noted they had been requesting Government-provided roads for over 10 years. Limited irrigation and water storage systems were another persistent issue, leaving many farmers dependent on rainfall. These infrastructure challenges, closely linked with extreme weather events, significantly affect their farming. One farmer from Tonga mentioned: *“[It is] difficult to get to the place so you have to...drive to get there, otherwise you will walk and you can't carry all the...things you're gonna take with [you].”*

Figure 5: Challenging Road Conditions in Fiji



Note. Poor road conditions pose a significant challenge to smallholder farmers' ability to transport produce to market and access agricultural support services. Photograph taken by the research team during fieldwork in June 2025.

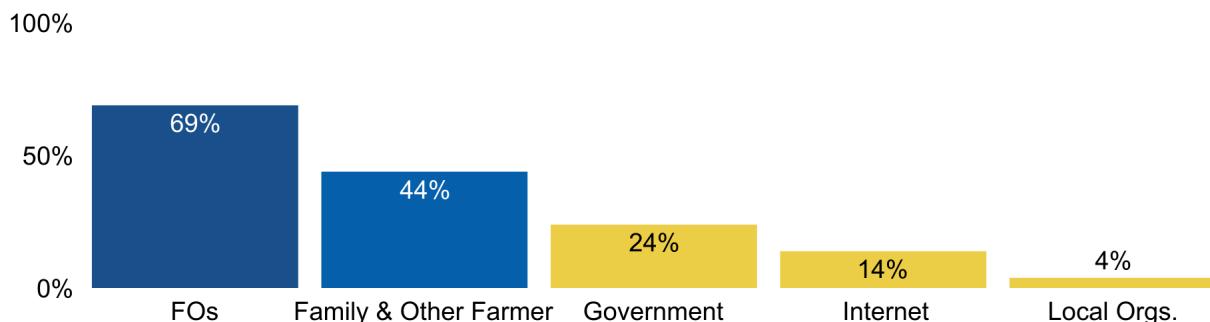


Key Finding 2: FOs are the primary support channel delivering highest satisfaction for FO-affiliated farmers.

A. Surveyed smallholder farmers primarily turn towards FOs and other farmers for advice and support.

FOs appear to be an effective delivery mechanism. As demonstrated by the survey results¹ from Fijian (n=33) and Tongan (n=100) smallholder farmers, 69% of surveyed smallholder farmers turn to FOs for advice and services to improve their farming, whereas 24% turn to Government sources, as illustrated in **Figure 6**.

Figure 6: Preferred Sources of Support for Sampled Smallholder Farmers



Note. Data compiled from 133 smallholder farmer surveys conducted in Tonga and Fiji (June–July 2025). Respondents were asked to select all sources of support they consult for advice or services to improve their farming. Because multiple selections were allowed, the percentages total over 100%.

Interestingly, surveyed smallholder farmers seek help from family or fellow farmers almost twice as often (44%) as from Government sources (24%), while engagement with local organizations remains minimal at 4%. The same trend was also evident in the FGDs, as participants discussed first turning to FOs for support, then to family or fellow farmers, and lastly to the Government.

This trend of seeking support from FOs is also evidenced in our FGDs. In our focus groups, FO-affiliated farmers also reported receiving significantly more services and resources from them than from any other actor. They primarily received support in the form of: agricultural

Among sampled smallholder farmers, 69% sought support from Farmer Organizations (FOs), 43% from family or friends, and 24% from the Government.

¹ Note that within the survey data, 118 farmers were FO-affiliated and 15 farmers were not FO-affiliated. Consult smallholders farmers survey details in the Appendix methodology section.



inputs, equipment, training, and funding. These services were delivered by multiple actors, including Donors, FOs, Government, and NGOs, but FOs were noted as a prominent source, particularly for training.

As mentioned in the study limitations, these perspectives from FGDs and surveys represent the views of a limited convenience sample of primarily FO-affiliated farmers and are not representative of all smallholder farmers. Therefore, these perspectives cannot be generalized to all smallholder farmers in Fiji and Tonga. Furthermore, there is a possible selection bias among the responses, as FO-affiliated farmers may have more positive perceptions and experiences with FOs due to their engagement, access to resources, and established relationships with them. Nonetheless, these insights provide meaningful perspectives from farmers actively involved in agricultural networks.

B. Sampled smallholder farmers consistently reported higher satisfaction with the support received from FOs compared to other service providers.

In the FGDs, sampled smallholder farmers consistently reported higher satisfaction with the support received from FOs compared to other service providers. This pattern was confirmed in the survey, as shown in **Figure 8**, where 74% of smallholder farmers who seek advice and services from FOs rated it as “very useful” and 25% as “somewhat useful.” In contrast, among those who seek Government support, only 40% considered it “very useful” and 45% “somewhat useful.” This shows higher satisfaction with agricultural advice and services provided by FOs.

FO-affiliated farmers in FGDs consistently reported that they have stronger relationships with FOs compared to other service providers. As one smallholder farmer from Nuku'alofa, Tonga illustratively recalled, **“[FO] is going everywhere, and they sit down with farmers and they talk and share opinion[s].”**

Participant smallholder farmers also highlighted that FOs are easy to access, reliable, and provide useful and helpful information, along with the direct support they offer through simplified processes. A farmer from Taveuni, Fiji, described his positive experience with an FO: **“[FO has] been supplying us with manures and farming tools, so they have really helped us so much. So it fully [meets] my needs.”**

Figure 7: FO Farm in Nuku'alofa, Tonga



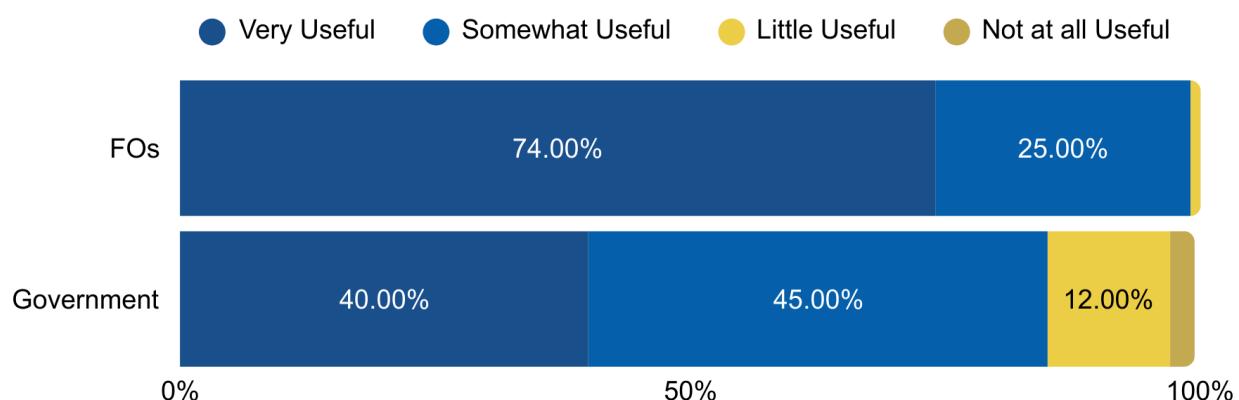
Note. This FO-managed farm serves as a direct source of resilient seedlings and agricultural inputs for the surrounding smallholder community. These operations enhance local access to resources and bolster climate adaptation efforts. Photograph taken by the research team during fieldwork (May-Jul 2025)



Smallholder farmers reported significantly higher satisfaction with services provided by Farmer Organizations (74% "very useful") than with support received from the Government (40% "very useful").

As mentioned in the study limitations, these perspectives from FGDs and surveys represent the views of a limited convenience sample of primarily FO-affiliated farmers. Therefore, these results may not be representative of all smallholder farmers, especially those not affiliated to an FO. Nonetheless, this data provides meaningful perspectives that can shed insight on what systems are currently working and offer a model for service delivery that benefits smallholder farmers.

Figure 8: Usefulness of Support from FOs and Government among Sampled Farmers



Note. Data compiled from 133 smallholder farmer surveys conducted in Tonga and Fiji (June–July 2025). The figure displays the percentage distribution of respondents who rated the services and advice received from FOs and the Government on a single-select usefulness scale, with each source totaling 100%.

C. Limited farmer-officer contact and mismatch of support result in lower farmer satisfaction and some mistrust of Government services.

During the FGDs, smallholder farmers expressed lower satisfaction and some mistrust toward Government services. They reported that the Government usually does not visit them or often relies on outdated information based on reports and statistics rather than listening to their current needs. For example, a smallholder farmer in Fiji mentioned: *“The thing is the officers, yeah, the grassroot servicing people, the extension officers, they hardly ever come to us...Then they'll supply the information to the Government based on some six or eight years [old] report.”*



The farmers also voiced that the Government expects them to initiate contact, yet they reported that this process is highly burdensome due to long travel times that cause loss of working days, high transportation costs, and the inconsistent availability of Government officials.

Sampled smallholder farmers often reported that the Government is not aware of their needs. They shared that even when support is received, it is not useful for their farming or is of poor quality, as a farmer from Fiji recalled:

[The] nursery shade provided by the Ministry of Agriculture...we [needed] the black one, [but] they gave us the green one [of lower quality].... and we have cyclone winds...and I live near the sea... so [the shade] was damaged within three months.

Another frequent cause of dissatisfaction was the process required to request support. Several farmers underscored that the procedures are usually complicated, requiring multiple documents, online applications, and involving delays, as indicated by a farmer in Taveuni, Fiji:

When you go in [to get services], it sounds so easy. And then you fill the first order. They say, oh, we need this. And then you bring that, and they say, oh, we need this ID or this....they piece feed you, and a lot of people give up. The problem now is what the Government is doing with all the applications online. So for a lot of people, it's just too complicated.

They also noted that information is often provided with insufficient time to complete the application, which discourages farmers from applying. This was seen as especially challenging for illiterate farmers.



Key Finding 3: FOs are central to knowledge sharing, resilience building, and establishing strategic partnerships, playing a vital role in supporting smallholder farmers' adaptive capacity.

A. Knowledge sharing is central to FOs' adaptive capacity efforts, yet its sustainability hinges entirely on external funding availability.

Farmer Organizations across Fiji and Tonga appear to play an important role in building smallholders' knowledge and adaptive capacity. Nearly all organizations interviewed in this study described training and knowledge exchange as central to their activities. Through workshops, farm visits, and demonstrations, FOs reported teaching practical techniques on soil management, irrigation, and crop diversification, while also facilitating peer learning among farmers. As one FO leader explained, they *"always have workshops, initial sessions and then follow-ups, so farmers are aware of everything from cultivation and planting to nursery management."*

These learning activities sometimes take the form of talanoa-style discussions, where farmers share experiences and reflect on what works in their communities. Such exchanges, according to participants, help spread useful practices and build trust among members. However, the consistency of these training sessions depends on the availability of external funding. Some FOs indicated that they are able to hold regular meetings or workshops when project funding is available, but that these activities decrease substantially when financial support ends. As one FO representative noted, *"We do have workshops, but it's hit or miss, we might not do one for a very long time."* This challenge is particularly evident for farmers in remote or outer-island areas, where travel costs and limited connectivity make participation difficult.

Figure 9: A FO's Nursery Farm Supporting Female Orchid Farmers



Note. This FO operates a specialized nursery and training farm to provide local women farmers with orchid seedlings and technical knowledge. This service aims to empower women economically by enabling access to high-value horticulture markets. Photograph taken by the authors during fieldwork in June 2025.



B. Partnerships amplify FO impact and outreach, but fragmented funding cycles impose heavy administrative burdens.

Partnerships were frequently described by respondents as essential for sustaining and expanding FO activities. Collaborations with Donors, Government agencies, and other FOs allow organizations to access technical expertise, funding, and networks that extend their reach. At the same time, FO leaders emphasized that fragmented funding cycles and differing donor requirements can create administrative burdens. Some organizations reported having to manage several small projects simultaneously, each with distinct reporting procedures, which limits their ability to maintain consistent engagement with farmers.

C. FOs are increasingly visible in policy dialogues, but their influence remains limited as farmer input rarely leads to concrete policy changes or implementation.

Some FOs in Fiji and Tonga reported being invited to participate in national consultations and policy dialogues, reflecting their growing visibility in the agricultural sector. One FO representative shared, *“[We are] invited to a lot of policy discussions as the organization representing vulnerable families... We take the voices of our farmers from our talanoa sessions and make sure they are heard when we sit with the Government.”* While these accounts suggest that FOs are increasingly included in policy-related spaces, participants also described challenges in ensuring that farmer perspectives lead to tangible policy outcomes. Several FO representatives felt that their contributions were limited to consultation and not necessarily reflected in final decisions or implementation processes. Although this perception was common among interviewees, the study did not directly observe Government decision-making processes, so these findings should be interpreted as the perspectives of FO participants rather than as conclusive evidence of exclusion.

“[We as FOs are] invited to a lot of policy discussions as the organization representing vulnerable families... We take the voices of our farmers from our talanoa sessions and make sure they are heard when we sit with the Government.”



Key Finding 4: Capacity gaps and limited awareness hinder access to support.

Beyond the role of Farmer Organisations, smallholders face broader systemic challenges that limit their ability to access the support they need. These include weak institutional capacity, limited awareness of existing support, and support structures that favor more organised and financially stable farmers.

A. Capacity constraints, stemming from funding and staffing shortages, limit support delivery and prevent necessary collaboration among actors.

Across interviews with diverse stakeholders, one message was clear: institutions tasked with supporting farmers do not have the capacity to consistently deliver resources and support. This is due to Government institutions that are underfunded, understaffed, and overburdened. The most mentioned issue was insufficient funding, followed by a shortage of qualified staff. In the Pacific as a whole, the ratio of extension officers to farmers is 1:10,000, whereas in Fiji the ratio is 1:1,000 (Sustainability Research Centre: Transforming Regions, n.d.; Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways, 2024).

In the Pacific as a whole, the ratio of extension officers to farmers is 1:10,000; in Fiji the ratio is 1:1,000.

Farmers highlighted the challenge of application processes and meeting specified reporting requirements; Donors further pointed to FOs and other smaller service providers' struggles with internal financial management and accurate financial reporting. One donor summarized the problem:

...funding bodies are looking for partners to support, but they're going to the usual suspects, because the usual suspects have all this in order. They cannot find new partners, because the new partners have not got their systems and processes strengthened to be able to meet their standards.

Hence, Donors are open to supporting new partners, including FOs, but because of the lack of capacity in meeting these requirements for many organizations, they are unable to fund them.

Lastly, with the lack of funding, inadequate staff, and limited capacity of the institutions, extension officers were often not visiting the farmers. Furthermore, farmers were often expected to take the first step in reaching out for support, which could lead to some farmers never being reached. One donor shared: *"There's a challenge with [farmers]. They can. They can get assistance whenever they need to. I think that is why he's here to help the needy. We are here to help whoever wants to come in and be assisted."*



Furthermore, the Government seemed apt to support farmers with their needs, yet because of capacity constraints and other possible reasons that would need further investigation, they expected farmers to come to them, which wasn't always possible for farmers or effective in getting the support they needed.

“...everybody knows about the challenges, and to me, the key thing is everybody is still working in silos. And until and unless we address that, we're not going to find the solution to help these smallholder farmers. And for me, they are the ones that really suffer the most.”

In addition, respondents commonly mentioned the lack of collaboration that existed among actors working and funding the agricultural space. FOs and Donors especially cited this challenge more than other stakeholders. One donor illustratively stated:

...everybody knows about the challenges, and to me, the key thing is everybody is still working in silos. And until and unless we address that, we're not going to find the solution to help these smallholder farmers. And for me, they are the ones that really suffer the most.

A Government official similarly called out the lack of collaboration when sharing: **“You preach that you work together. It's true. You are so close. The problem is you don't face each other. Your back is towards each other. How can you work together?”** Furthermore, this need to work together with different stakeholders to support smallholder farmers was consistently highlighted.

Figure 10: Partnership Signing Ceremony Between the Australian High Commissioner and an FO



Note. The Australian High Commissioner (representing Australian Aid) and a FO representative finalize a partnership agreement under the Farmer Organisations for Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (FO4ACP) Programme. This collaboration represents significant bilateral support for local agricultural development. Photograph taken by the research team during fieldwork in May 2025.



B. Limited awareness of services, combined with complex applications, creates significant access barriers for farmers facing literacy, connectivity, or financial constraints.

Beyond the barriers from service providers, farmers also struggle to know the services and support that exist. One farmer noted, ***“To me, the biggest [thing] I see is...I don’t know what to do [or] who to go to.”*** Farmers also shared that information was frequently being shared via word of mouth, so individuals were sometimes misinterpreting what they heard. Furthermore, farmers struggled to accurately know what support was available to help them and how to take the first step.

Figure 11: A Woman’s Perspective of Access to Support



Note. A close-up photograph capturing the hands of a female smallholder farmer participating in a FGD. The discussion centered on the barriers to accessing agricultural support, including low awareness of available resources and challenges related to complex application processes. The FGD was conducted by the research team during fieldwork in June 2025.

In addition, when farmers were able to become aware of available resources, additional roadblocks existed, including application challenges, lack of financial knowledge, and limited available funding. One farmer shared: ***“Some people apply, but they... can’t read. Nobody helps them [fill out the application]... And now they have to run here, run there, and they have no money. And sometimes they just give up.”*** Hence, these application processes may exclude farmers that have literacy challenges or that don't have the money to travel to service providers to receive support.

Furthermore, some application processes are also entirely online, which limit the applicant pool to those that have a stable internet connection and digital literacy. One farmer mentioned: ***“The problem now is what the Government is doing with all the applications online. So for a lot of people, it’s just too complicated. They don’t have computers or services, and they get confused.”*** Furthermore, there are barriers in the application process that inhibit some farmers from being able to receive the support they need.



C. A disparity exists in support access, where large, commercial, and organized farmers with existing networks receive priority, creating barriers for smallholder farmers who lack similar resources.

Farmers with fewer resources often got left out. On several occasions, respondents mentioned that commercial farmers and those with close Government ties received more support from Government services. One farmer shared, *“The Ministry of Agriculture and the Government, they only look at the big farmers, the ones with big farms...for the small farmers, they don't recognize us. Only the big farmers. Cause the...other big farmers have direct contact.”* Hence, in some instances, farmers perceived that smallholder farmers or those with limited Government contacts faced more challenges in accessing support.

In addition, Donors and Governments shared that to maximize their impact, they prefer to work with organized groups of farmers, such as farmers associations or farmers organizations. One donor shared, *“In any development organization, it's easier when you're working with a group of farmers that are organized, that have systems, because then it's easier as well for us, from a practical side of channeling funds, accountability, community.”*

Similarly, one donor representative explained, *“So I think one of the things that we've seen is this issue of informality. You know, you need to formalize farmer groups.”*

In addition to preferring organized farmer groups, Donors and Governments mentioned prioritizing funding for farmers that have a plan for greater financial sustainability. One local donor shared:

...all of the criteria towards funding if it's a means to an end ... because this is what I've been told from regional managers or even global managers...If it is a means to an end, then [we] can fund, meaning that if it's something that will help the communities in conservation, and [they] won't come back for funding again, it will be funded.

“If it is a means to an end, then [we] can fund, meaning that if it's something that will help the communities in conservation, and [they] won't come back for funding again, it will be funded.”

Hence, some Donors prioritize funding for initiatives where farmers demonstrate a clear vision for long-term financial sustainability, which they see as achievable by helping smallholder farmers become semi-commercial or commercial and thus less dependent on external funding.



Key Finding 5: Despite strong regional political recognition of climate vulnerability, national-level implementation gaps and structural barriers prevent effective support from reaching smallholder farmers.

While each finding is explained in detail below, the following table summarizes the priority level of smallholder farmers in Tonga, Fiji, and the Pacific region, as well as key enablers and inhibitors that explain that prioritization level.

Table 3. The Priority Level and Corresponding Enablers and Inhibitors for Agriculture and Climate Vulnerability in Tonga, Fiji, and the Pacific Region

	Priority Level	Enabler (What Helps)	Inhibitor (What Stops Progress)
Regional	Moderately high	Outside Funding Bodies and Coordinated Policy Platforms (e.g., formal events)	Disconnect from Local Needs and Resource Bottlenecks (implementation difficulties)
Tonga	Moderately low	Royal Partnerships and Proven Success (visible projects/FO leadership)	Budget Gaps and Flawed Support Systems (excluding individual farmers)
Fiji	Low	Strong FO Networks and Supportive Government System (providing unused potential)	Lack of FO Consensus (limiting advocacy role)

Note. Table created by the research team



A. Regional prioritization of smallholder farmers: regional focus is strong, but disconnects and bottlenecks prevent effective support for smallholder farmers.

Based on interviews and events, regional leaders demonstrate a **moderately high commitment** to agriculture and climate vulnerability. This strong focus is driven by the severe climate impact on the region, a reality confirmed by the UN Secretary-General: "...the Pacific's vulnerability to climate change, with the region suffering disproportionate impacts despite contributing only 0.02% of global emissions" (SPC, 2025, p. 11).

As a result of this attention, agriculture and farmers are frequently discussed at the regional level. For example, at the Pacific Week of Agriculture and other decision-making forums, farmer organizations are increasingly brought to the table. As mentioned by a regional organization, *"We also then have an annual meeting with the heads of agriculture and forestry, which also has farmers organizations, civil society at the table, so we understand priorities there..."*

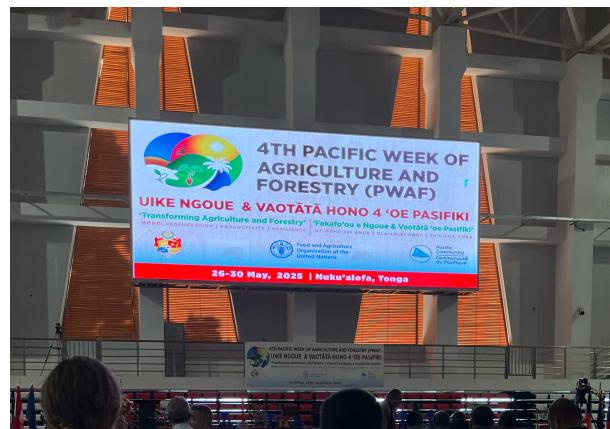
Regional enablers: What helps? Regional bodies and coordinated events drive regional policy attention.

Two main factors help regional leaders focus strongly on smallholder farmers:

1. **Regional organizations that can provide funding and support:** International groups and regional organizations, like SPC, PFO, and PIANGO, provide funding, resources, and technical help. Furthermore, these groups work with local groups to get money and resources directly to smallholder farmers.
2. **Coordinated meetings and events:** Frequent, major events bring new attention to climate and farming issues, which mobilizes action. The Pacific Week of Agriculture is one such biannual event that helps leaders discuss common challenges. These forums

Furthermore, this commitment to supporting smallholder farmers is supported and challenged by the reasons below.

Figure 12: 4th Pacific Week of Agriculture and Forestry (PAWF)



Note. The opening ceremony of the Fourth Pacific Week on Agriculture and Forestry (PAWF), held in Nuakualufa (Tonga) from May 26 to 30, 2025. This event brings together regional, government, and civil society leaders from Pacific countries. Photograph taken by the research team during fieldwork in May 2025.



create a clear path for defining priorities and directing resources. These efforts successfully ensure farmer needs become a formal part of regional strategy. For instance, one regional organization noted:

We just got the word farmer organizations [are] mentioned in SPC LRD's (Land Resource Division) business plan...and then we just had the first ever paper introduced into the Pacific heads of agriculture, talking specifically about farmer organizations and things like that.

Regional inhibitors: What stops progress? Disconnect from local needs and resource bottlenecks limit effective support.

While leaders view agriculture as a priority, this focus is undermined by challenges in knowing the needs of farmers and reaching them, and the gap between available resources and local capacity.

1. **The disconnect from smallholder needs:** although policy makers generally believe that supporting smallholder farmers in adapting to climate change is important, they lack clarity on the specific help needed. As a regional organization member explained:

Policymakers...see the needs of small farmers to adapt to climate change as a priority. But really knowing what those needs are is notIf you were to ask me, do they, do they really know what those needs are and what some of the solutions [are], then I'd say that's where the gap is.

This gap stems from difficulty in implementation and a communication failure between national agricultural policies and the reality on farms. This disconnect might not be intentional, but various factors make it challenging to have close communication with smallholder farmers, resulting in a system that struggles to provide relevant and effective support.

2. **The resource bottleneck:** regional organizations, many of which are Donors, have significant funds to allocate based on National Development Plans. However, two issues create a bottleneck. First, there is a gap between the available regional funds and the capacity of national governments to access them and manage the programs. In addition, even when resources for climate change are secured, they are often distributed for commercial farmers or those that belong to organized groups. This means the support frequently fails to materialize for the smallholder farmers who need it most, creating a bottleneck that stifles progress.



B. Tongan prioritization of smallholder farmers: Strong partnerships provide effective program models, yet overall commitment remains moderately low due to budget gaps and systems that exclude vulnerable farmers.

The Kingdom of Tonga shows a case of **moderately low commitment** to smallholder farmers. Tonga is a constitutional monarchy where the Government works directly with some Farmer Organizations (FOs), such as MORDI Tonga Trust, to make sure farmers' needs are considered in decisions. However, the FOs currently in place do not represent all of the country's farmers. Because of this limitation, we cannot confirm that the needs of all small farmers are being considered or prioritized, which results in the overall low commitment level.

Tongan enablers: What helps? Royal partnerships and proven success enable effective farmer support in Tonga.

Two factors strongly help focus attention on smallholder farmers in Tonga: strong institutional leadership and visible, proven results.

- Strong partnerships and leading organizations:** the Tongan Government and Her Majesty Queen Nanasipau'u Tuku'aho work closely with specific Farmer Organizations (FOs), such as the MORDI Tonga Trust, to support agriculture and smallholder farmers' livelihoods. This strong partnership places FOs in a strategic position to lead and implement programs that directly benefit farmers. The Government recognizes the crucial role of these groups, as confirmed by the Ministry of Agriculture of Tonga, *"To me, Farmer Organizations have a key role to play in agriculture..."*

Figure 12: MORDI Tonga Trust floriculture nursery



Note. MORDI Tonga Trust headquarters - Nuku'alofa, Tonga. Floriculture project. Photograph taken by the research team during fieldwork in May - July 2025.

- Demonstrated Success:** partnerships have resulted in successful, visible projects that prove interventions can work. For example, Her Majesty Queen Nanasipau'u Tuku'aho worked with MORDI Tonga Trust on programs like the Floriculture Initiative to support rural women. In addition, the joint development of Community Development Plans by the Ministry of Agriculture and MORDI helped identify specific local needs, such as poor soil health, machinery needs, or climate resilience, *which has also been shown to be successful.*



Tongan inhibitors: What stops progress? Budget gaps and system design cause farmer exclusion.

Prioritization for smallholder farmers is undermined by a gap between perceived importance and funding, and by structural issues that exclude the most vulnerable farmers.

1. **The budgetary gap:** despite agriculture being the recognized backbone of the country, this importance is not reflected in the Government's budgets, which limits the support available for smallholder farmers. One respondent shared their frustration that the sector's financial reality does not match its policy status.
2. **Conflicting goals and exclusion:** the system for support is structured in a way that excludes some smallholder farmers who are not part of organized groups. Institutions often want to help organized farmer groups, but many small farmers lack the resources or time to fulfill the requirements to join an organized group or remain a member. This preference for organized groups over individual farmers acts as a conflicting goal, requiring farmers to choose between meeting institutional requirements and focusing on daily needs like food security. This results in a cycle of mismatched aid and eroding trust, which is a significant barrier to effective climate adaptation for vulnerable communities.



C. Fijian prioritization of smallholder farmers: despite high potential from strong FO networks and supportive government systems, commitment remains low due to lack of FO consensus on their advocacy role.

Based on interviews and discussions, the Republic of Fiji shows a low commitment level for smallholder farmers overall. While it was difficult to find clear examples demonstrating high levels of commitment, there are positive conditions that could lead to improvement. For instance, the agricultural sector budget has recently been increased, indicating strong dedication to supporting farmers.

The budget includes a specific allocation of “\$1.4 million (FJD) [earmarked] for the construction and maintaining farm roads to enhance farmers’ access to essential agricultural resources... This development aims to improve productivity, reduce post-harvest losses, and ensure that fresh produce reaches consumers efficiently...” (Ministry of Agriculture And Waterways, 2025).

Fiji latent enablers: Strong FO networks and Government systems provide potential to boost support.

The potential for supporting smallholder farmers in Fiji is very high, even though the current level of commitment is low. These factors are considered latent because they are present but not yet fully utilized.

1. **Strong network of FOs:** Fiji has the largest number of FOs in the regional network, which creates a powerful base for support. This network allows FOs to act as partners to the Government, helping to bring resources and information directly to the farmers—a “bottom-up approach.” One donor representative explained that FOs can solve the problem of staff shortages by acting as an extra layer of support, *“So what we’re seeing is that farmer organizations can be another set of extension actors... So it’s about them working together.”*
2. **Supportive Government system:** Government institutions are aware of the importance of farmers and the agricultural sector. The Ministry of Agriculture has a system of extension officers who are actively encouraged to work with FOs. As one official noted, *“We work in collaborations with them (FOs), we work together with them. Whatever they address, it can be the same of the things that we work with, but [they] work with the help of Donors.”*



Fiji inhibitors: What stops progress? Effectiveness limited by lack of consensus among FOs regarding their advocacy role

Fiji faces difficulty in implementation, which is consistent with the other Pacific countries. However, the unique barrier with Fiji is the lack of consensus among FOs regarding their role in advocacy. Because Fiji relies on its strong FO network to deliver support, this lack of cohesion weakens the entire system. Some FOs are unwilling to take on the responsibility of representing smallholder farmers' political interests. One Farmer Organization explicitly stated their preference for practical, not political, work:

Because, as I say, most of us are farmers, and we've got our plates already full at home with a farm... we're not going to pursue that... road. Put it that way, I'm quite happy just advocating sustainable farming, helping farmers that way, connecting them to the right places.

This lack of coordination prevents Fiji from utilizing its high potential to increase commitment to smallholder farmers.

Figure 14: FO representative interview



Note. Interview held with an FO representative, where they discussed the advocacy role of FOs. Photograph taken by the research team during fieldwork in May - July 2025.



Recommendations

The research findings show that Farmer Organizations play a critical role in supporting smallholder farmers but face significant challenges related to limited funding, coordination, and recognition. To strengthen how farmers access support and ensure that their needs are reflected in national priorities, this white paper proposes five key actions for Governments, Donors, and development partners.



Recommendation 1: Formalize farmer organizations as co-delivery partners

Governments and Donors should formally recognize and fund FOs as co-delivery partners for agricultural training, extension, and climate adaptation programs. Within our sample of farmers affiliated with FOs, farmers shared that FOs provided effective and consistent support, which could be used to assist the Government in delivering services to farmers. Furthermore, formal partnerships would expand reach and reduce overlap between institutions. These partnerships should include multi-year funding so that FOs can maintain staff and regular training schedules. By working through trusted, community-based organizations, Governments and donors can make sure support reaches the farmers who need it most.

We recognize that for this recommendation, there may be political and logistical factors that may impede its realistic implementation. Therefore, it is essential that the proof of concept for partnerships with FOs be developed, that FOs and Governments develop better relationships and closer coordination, and that Governments better understand the value-add of FO partners.



Recommendation 2: Invest in institutional capacity strengthening to address key gaps

Governments and development partners should invest in strengthening the institutional capacity of FOs, NGOs, and extension offices not just in short-term projects but through sustained operational support.

Our findings highlight the need for FOs and NGOs to strengthen their financial management capacity to meet specified reporting requirements and receive additional funding. Hence, we recommend that FOs and smaller NGOs affiliate with a large sub-granting NGO, an INGO, or create and/or utilize an umbrella organization, such as PFO, to handle the disbursement of



funding. Furthermore, while building the individual capacity of each small organization is the ultimate goal, in the short-term, it is essential that other larger organization(s) support their capacity needs so these FOs and smaller NGOs can access funding. In addition, the larger NGO, INGO, or umbrella organization can further accompany and train smaller organizations on building their financial management and reporting capacity so they can eventually seek out their own funding.



Recommendation 3: Strengthen coordination and collaboration

The findings mentioned above highlight the interest in understanding the needs and voices of smallholder farmers, recognizing that this group does not feel heard, as shown in finding. Furthermore, we propose a formal space where different stakeholders can share experiences, interests, and concerns, which will be taken into account in future decision-making. Initially, we recommend regional organizations such as PFO, SPC, among others, to host formal, regular, participatory, and diverse gatherings to establish closer and stronger relationships between these stakeholders. It may also be effective to have a national or local agricultural support committee comprising representatives from various sectors, including farmers, FOs, NGOs, Governments, and Donors to more effectively determine and support the needs of smallholder farmers.

The aim is to build trust and create spaces for joint knowledge to strengthen relationships and reduce duplication of efforts. A deeper understanding of the capacities and opportunities offered by others would enable a clear definition of joint participation and implementation that benefits the largest possible population, while also listening to the voices of different sectors.



Recommendation 4: Tailor the services provided according to farmers needs

As demonstrated in Finding 1.1, farmers who are financially sustainable are prioritized by Donors. While we understand and recognize the importance of valuing farmers with long-term plans and financially sustainable visions, we believe that this might lead a subset of very poor farmers to lack the services they need. Therefore, we believe it is important to segment the population so service providers can more effectively support farmers with their unique needs.

Given this distinction, we recommend that service providers prioritize financial training that can help farmers become more literate in financial planning, financial sustainability, and profitability.



To receive funding, Donors are prioritizing farmers who have this knowledge, so it is essential to provide these services to help farmers have greater financial independence.

However, while these financial planning workshops may be effective for a subset of farmers who already have some capacity, for the poorest farmers, providing these workshops alone is unlikely to be effective. Previous research suggests significant benefits of cash transfers, technical support, and mentorship to help them become more financially sustainable. The graduation model is one method that provides wrap-around support, which has been shown to effectively support the ultra-poor in improving their income, food security, and health, while being cost-effective (Banerjee et al, 2021). Furthermore, we recommend that Pacific countries utilize the graduation model in providing tailored support to the poorest farmers to strengthen their resilience and help them out of poverty traps.



Recommendation 5: Improve representation and advocacy for smallholder farmers

Having diverse representation from a variety of stakeholders at local, national, and regional levels is essential for accurately knowing the needs of smallholder farmers and effectively supporting them. Through a coordinated effort, these needs can then be translated into concrete policy action. We believe that smallholder farmers and FOs must be present in decision-making spaces with the capacity to influence outcomes. This ensures their concerns and perspectives are heard, acknowledged, and incorporated when determining the best ways to serve the agricultural sector, especially smallholder farmers. This requires coordinated advocacy and grassroots alignment guided by FOs to create a unified voice. This collective strength amplifies farmer participation, driving greater engagement with decision-makers and ensuring meaningful responses to farmers' needs.

In addition, during our data collection process, we identified some effective service delivery mechanisms, which were rooted in strong relationships between smallholder farmers and service providers (especially FOs.) Therefore, we believe that collecting and sharing these "best practices" of service delivery and effective partnerships through a framework or guide would be helpful for replicating these "best practices" by other service providers or in other geographical areas.



Conclusion

This study shows that while smallholder farmers in Fiji and Tonga face serious climate, market, and infrastructure challenges, Farmer Organizations are the most reliable source of support. Sampled farmers consistently reported higher satisfaction, more consistent access to training and inputs, and stronger relationships than with any other service provider. These findings reinforce the critical role of FOs as locally grounded institutions capable of delivering climate adaptation services where Government capacity and funding are limited.

At the same time, the research highlights systemic barriers that restrict equitable access to adaptation support, including fragmented funding, complex application processes, limited awareness of available services, and institutional bias toward larger or more organized farmers. Weak extension capacity and lack of coordination across actors further constrain the reach of existing programs. Strengthening FO capacity, improving coordination, clarifying the roles of FOs as co-delivery partners, and bolstering political leadership and advocacy offer clear opportunities to expand support to a broader base of smallholders across the Pacific.

This study is based primarily on a sample of FO-affiliated farmers, and the experiences of unaffiliated or remote farmers remain less understood. Further research is needed to explore the perspectives of farmers outside formal organizations and to assess how access barriers differ for more vulnerable groups.

Overall, the findings underscore that effective climate adaptation requires not only technical solutions but stronger, better-resourced local institutions. Enhancing the role of FOs and addressing systemic barriers are essential steps toward building a more resilient and inclusive long term adaptation system for Pacific smallholder farmers.

Enhancing the role of FOs and addressing systemic barriers are essential steps toward building a more resilient and inclusive long term adaptation system for Pacific smallholder farmers.



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Appendix

Methodology

To answer our key research questions, we employed a mixed methods approach, consisting of both qualitative and quantitative data. To collect qualitative data, the research team conducted Key Informant Interviews (KII) and Focus Group Discussions (FGD). To collect the quantitative data, the research team administered a farmer survey. Detailed explanations of each of the data collection methods is explained below.

Key Informant Interviews (KII)

Our research team conducted semi-structured interviews with different stakeholders, such as FO leaders from different countries in the Pacific, Government officials, regional and national Donors, and non-governmental organizations representatives from Fiji and Tonga. We developed the interview questions to assess service delivery roles, policy engagement, and stakeholder perceptions of Farmers Organizations (FOs). The questions also explored each stakeholder's organizational capacity, engagement with farmers, and collaborative relationships with Government, Donors, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The research team selected Fijian and Tongan Government officials, Donors, and international and local organizations for interviews based on their direct involvement in decision-making and provision of climate adaptation resources. All of these interviews were conducted in English, primarily in person, and others via Zoom.

Table 4: Key Informant Interviews by Stakeholder Type

Stakeholder Type	Quantity
Farmer Organizations	14
Donor Organizations	9
Regional NGOs	8
Government Representatives	7
Local NGOs	5
Researchers	1
Total KII	44

Note. The breakdown of the 44 KII conducted with stakeholders in Tonga and Fiji during the fieldwork period (June–July 2025).



Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

The research team also conducted FGD with FO-affiliated smallholder farmers in Tonga and Fiji. We sought to capture the farmers' needs and desires as key actors in this research. Hence, FGDs sought to further explore how resources are being delivered, farmers' perceptions on opportunities for improving climate adaptation support services and finance, potential barriers, and the role of Government, Donors, FOs, and NGOs in knowledge and resource sharing. The FGDs in Tonga were conducted in Tongan with live translation to English, and the FGDs in Fiji were either conducted directly in English or conducted in Fijian and translated to English.

Both KIIs and FGD were transcribed with Otter.ai. After further revision by team members to ensure accuracy, the data was coded and analyzed using Dedoose.

Table 5: Focus Group Discussions by Country

Country	Quantity
Fiji	6
Tonga	4
Total KIIs	10

Note. A total of 10 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted across Tonga and Fiji during the fieldwork period (June–July 2025). The participating farmers were all associated with a local Farmer Organization (FO). Each FGD generally consisted of between 5 and 12 participants and included a mix of single-gender (only-men, only-female) and mixed-gender groups.

Smallholder Farmers Surveys

As part of this project, the research team also collected quantitative data through a smallholder farmer survey. This 2-min survey included 16 questions related to farmer demographics, the farmer's perception on climate change, where farmers access support to improve their farming, and how useful and satisfied farmers are with that support. No personally identifiable information was collected in accordance with International Review Board (IRB) compliance.

We collected 142 total survey responses from the Pacific, but excluded nine responses—one for not being a smallholder farmer and eight from five other Pacific countries due to insufficient sample size. Furthermore, our sample size for quantitative analysis was 133 with 100 responses from Tonga and 33 responses from Fiji.



This data was collected primarily through Farmer Organizations (FOs) affiliated with PFO. Furthermore, our survey was either posted by FOs via their social media channels or conducted in-person by FOs during their field visits in Fiji and Tonga.

It is important to note that this survey data is not representative of the Pacific farmer population, as survey responses are primarily from farmers associated with FOs. However, there is still insightful information exploring the descriptive statistics of the data that are important for better understanding the role of FOs in supporting farmers, as well as how Pacific farmers are currently getting support via other channels.

This quantitative survey was conducted in English using Kobo Toolbox, except in Tonga where the survey was conducted in Tongan. In addition, the data was cleaned and analyzed using Stata software. In the quantitative analysis, we explored descriptive statistics across the data.

Table 6: Smallholder Farmer Survey Responses by Country

Country	Quantity
Fiji	33
Tonga	100
Total KIIs	133

Note. The breakdown of the 133 smallholder farmer surveys conducted by Country during the fieldwork period (May–July 2025).

Table 7: Farmers Affiliation Responses

Country	FO-affiliated	Non-FO-affiliated	Total
Fiji	32	1	33
Tonga	86	14	100
Grand Total	118	15	133

Note. The breakdown of the 133 smallholder farmer surveys conducted during the fieldwork period (May–July 2025), according to their affiliation with an FO. The sample was drawn primarily from farmers associated with local FOs as 118 farmers were FO-affiliated, and 15 farmers were not FO-affiliated.



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