



PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM



WORLD BANK GROUP
Finance, Competitiveness & Innovation

Pacific Islands Regional Trade Facilitation Strategy

Report on National Consultations January - June 2022



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Purposes

Between January and July 2022, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), in partnership with the World Bank Group (WBG), conducted consultations with 12 Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) members on a proposed Regional Trade Facilitation Strategy for the Pacific region.

These consultations followed a November 2021, 3-day virtual workshop attended by representatives of PIF member countries, associate members and observer governments members at which PIFS/WBG representatives introduced the regional strategy concept and proposed specific regional actions to support PIF members in their implementation of trade facilitation measures.

At the close of the November 2021 workshop, PIFS/WBG representative agreed to consult with individual PIF members to: (i) further clarify understanding of the regional trade facilitation strategy and its elements and (ii) obtain each country's views concerning the regional activities proposed for inclusion in the strategy. These national consultations were undertaken for those purposes.

Countries Consulted

National consultations were held with the following 11 PIF members-

Table 1 National Consultations Conducted

	Country	Date
1	Cook Islands	21 January 2022
2	Federated States of Micronesia	28 January 2022
3	Fiji	23 February 2022
4	French Polynesia	10 February 2022
5	Niue	25 February 2022
6	Vanuatu	22 April 2022
7	Tuvalu	29 April 2022
8	Solomon Islands	17 May 2022
9	Tonga	19 May 2022
10	New Caledonia	30 June 2022
11	Samoa	5 July 2022

Invitations to participate in consultations were extended by PIFS to five other PIF members (Kiribati, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, and the Republic of Marshall Islands) without response.

Form of Consultation

The consultations were conducted virtually via Zoom. Generally, representatives of each PIF member participated from the same physical location in their respective national capital. The WBG

representatives participated from Washington and Geneva, and the PIFS representatives participated from Suva and Geneva.

The consultations were led by PIFS and WBG representatives. After opening remarks and statement of objectives by a PIFS and WBG representative, the WBG made a PowerPoint presentation on the regional trade facilitation strategy and, by way of illustration, a selection of the proposed regional actions to be included in the strategy. The PIFS/WBG representatives then led a discussion to solicit any views or questions of the PIF member on the strategy concept, the proposed regional actions, and/or the country's trade facilitation reform priorities and impediments. Generally, the national consultations ran from one to two hours.

Table 2 Sample Agenda National Consultation

	Estimated Time	Subject	Presenter
1	5 minutes	Introduction/Welcome	PIFS and WBG representative
2	15 minutes	Review of Regional Trade Facilitation Strategy and proposed regional activities	PIFS/WBG Trade Facilitation Expert
3	30 minutes	Discussion of proposed regional activities	PIFS/WBG Trade Facilitation Expert (Lead)
4	5 minutes	Summary of discussion and conclusions	PIFS/WBG Trade Facilitation Expert

In advance of each consultation, a PIFS representative emailed invitations to the PIF member country representative; emailed meeting reminders; and organized the Zoom connection.

A list of the representatives of PIF members who attended the national consultations is included in the Annex.

Survey

In parallel with the consultations, the WBG conducted an online survey to provide PIF members an additional opportunity to provide their views on the proposed regional strategy. The PIFS included the [link](#) to the online survey questionnaire in the national consultation email invitation sent to country representatives. During the consultation, participants were asked to complete the survey immediately following the meeting.

The survey asks PIF members for their views of the importance of each of the 21 regional actions proposed for inclusion in the strategy. To assist respondents, a PowerPoint presentation describing all 21 regional actions was included with the email containing the survey link that was sent with the meeting invitation in advance of the consultation.

Figure 1 Pacific Regional Trade Facilitation Strategy Survey

The screenshot shows a Google Forms interface for a survey titled "Pacific Regional Trade Facilitation Strategy". The form is displayed in a browser window with the URL "docs.google.com/forms/d/1US9EB5Yv23vOmEzhsLcWn2A8SkWPToVUGgdYsyJoy_M/edit". The form includes a title, a "Proposed Regional Actions" section, an "Email" field, and several questions. The questions are: "Name of your country:", "Name of your organization:", "1. A regional Model Customs Auditor Manual" with radio button options "Very Important", "Somewhat Important", "Not important", and "Don't Know/No Opinion", and "1A. Your comments" with a long answer text field.

Responses to the survey questionnaire were received by 19 persons representing seven out of the 12 countries surveyed or 63%.

PIF Members Feedback

PIF members welcomed regional action to support their implementation of trade facilitation reforms at the national level. Generally, all representatives of PIF member countries consulted expressed favorable views of both the initiative to develop a regional strategy and the 21 regional actions proposed for inclusion in the strategy.

In the consultation and survey responses, a common observation made by PIF members was that the regional actions of the kind proposed will be important to help overcome the human resource and capacity constraints they face in implementing trade facilitation measures, as well as promoting regional harmonization.

According to the survey results, the majority of survey respondents considered “somewhat important” or “very important” all 21 of the proposed regional actions. Only three regional actions were marked as “not important” by any respondent.¹

In general, the survey responses suggest that certain of the proposed regional actions may be of higher or more immediate importance to most of the PIF members, as follows –

Top 5 Regional Actions (80% or more of respondents rated “very important”)	
1.	Model legal provisions for customs clearance simplifications in trade agreements; model regulation, SOPs, practical guides; regional training programs
2.	A regional risk management framework
3.	Model legal provisions for control procedures for imported goods subject to sanitary/phytosanitary or technical measures; Joint Border Agency procedures manual; regional training programs
4.	Harmonized technical standards to enable regional exchange of data related to cross-border movement of goods
5.	Model legislation, procedures and/or guidance on regulatory impact assessment (RIA) for trade facilitation

This survey result is consistent with comments made in the national consultations in which participants indicated high priority for implementation of risk management and border coordination, as well as the importance of model procedures and guides to assist in national implementation of trade facilitation measures.

In that regard, both the survey and national consultations suggest that PIF members generally place higher importance on regional support in the form of model laws, procedures and guidelines (characterized by some participants as “best practice guides” or “information” resources) than, for example, regional action in the form of regional electronic information exchange or other more complex forms of regional integration such as regional enquiry points or mutual recognition of authorized economic operators.

¹ These are the proposed regional actions to establish a regional customs valuation database as a risk assessment tool (marked “not important” by one respondent); establish a regional procedure for customs-to-customs exchange of valuation information (2 respondents); and a legal instrument on regional mutual recognition of authorized operators (1 respondent).

Forms of Regional Action: Order of Preference²

1. Model Laws, Procedures, Guidelines
2. Regional Committee/Consultation Mechanism
3. Regional Electronic Information Exchange
4. Regional Body Implements National Obligations
5. Mutual Recognition Instrument

The following comments were commonly made in the course of consultations and/or in response to the survey -

- *Scope of Proposals*

Representatives of several PIF members suggested that the proposals to establish regional electronic exchange of risk information, a regional risk management framework, and model legal provisions for customs clearance should not be limited to the Customs administration but should include all relevant border authorities, particularly the biosecurity authorities.

Similarly, these representatives also suggested that Customs should be included within the scope of the proposed regional action to establish a regional database to notify and share test result information, rather than limiting that activity to the biosecurity authorities.

- *National Implementation before Regional Arrangements*

Some representatives stated that certain trade facilitation measures should be implemented at a national level before undertaking implementation of regional arrangements or systems. These comments were made in relation to proposals for a regional customs valuation database and customs to customs exchange of customs valuation information (*i.e.*, national implementation of customs value rules must first be implemented) and establishment of a regional committee to promote/guide harmonized development of national electronic systems (*i.e.*, national customs and single window system are prior).

- *Role of OCO and Other Implementation Partners*

Representatives stated that implementation of the regional strategy will require technical assistance and capacity building support, particularly training.

Several representatives sought clarification of the role of Pacific Region development partners in relation to the strategy.

It was also stated that the regional strategy should take into account and not duplicate the activities of these organizations' programs, particularly those of the Oceanic Customs Organization (OCO). For example, a representative indicated that he believes that most OCO countries have a standard manual for conducting a customs audit – one of the regional actions proposed in the strategy – and that it was

² This is a ranking of the general forms of those regional actions that the majority of respondents indicated are “somewhat important” or “very important”.

OCO’s aspiration to establish a procedure for customs-to-customs exchange of customs valuation information, another regional action proposed in the strategy.

- *Implementation Concerns*

Although generally supportive of the regional actions, some representatives expressed doubts about the feasibility of implementation of certain of the proposed regional actions, as indicated by the following comments received in the survey -

Regional Action	Comment
A regional mechanism to provide, upon request, expert assistance for post-clearance audits	“But time consuming and costly”
A system for regional electronic exchange of risk information	“It would be a great idea, but I am not sure given the development levels as well as different institutional and structural setups in the Pacific.”
Legal provisions, SOP and technical guidelines for establishment and administration of an advance customs rulings program Legal instrument on regional mutual recognition of advance rulings	“National Customs Agencies would still need to confirm if ... they have the necessary capacity to implement.”
Designate accredited laboratories in Pacific region authorized to carry out confirmatory tests for goods imported to any PIC	“It will be a great idea, however given the geographical location of FSM from the rest of the South Pacific, shipping may be an issue (cost & time).”
A regional or subregional enquiry point that answers trade-related questions on behalf of all participating Pacific countries	<p>“It would be useful to ensure traders get a timely and standard response, but it would be a challenge until all countries can conform to the standards or are able to publish their trade requirements online.”</p> <p>“Depend on the capacity of each country”</p> <p>“That will be useful but the enquiry point should be well-versed will all participating Pacific countries trade policy and practices.”</p> <p>“Quite difficult regarding heterogeneous PICS regulatory framework.”</p>

Further, some representatives, while supporting the proposed regional actions, expressed views as to how particular regional action should be implemented. For example, a representative stated that the regional risk management framework proposed in the strategy must be aligned with the relevant ISO standards. Another representative observed, in relation to the proposed regional action for harmonized technical standards to enable regional exchange of data, that “technical standards will vary according to

PIC and should be developed in a way that is not too onerous on PICs and the level of development of each PIC [should] be considered.”

- *Private Sector Demand*

Some representatives questioned whether there would be sufficient private sector demand to justify the regional action. This statement was made in relation to regional actions to support implementation of a Customs advance ruling program (given that such programs are successful only if business make ruling applications) and a regional agreement on mutual recognition of authorized economic operators (given that there may be few businesses that trade or operate in multiple PIF countries).

Conclusions

The key insights from the national consultations are –

- The PIF members consulted support the regional strategy initiative, welcome support for implementation of trade facilitation measures through regional action and approve (with a few reservations) the regional actions proposed for inclusion in the strategy.
- Generally, PIF members appear to place higher importance on regional action in the form of model laws, procedures, guidelines and regional consultation mechanisms, as opposed to “higher” and more complex forms of regional action, such as regional systems for electronic information exchange or regional mutual recognition agreements. This preference may reflect common immediate needs and may suggest that more complex forms of regional action should be considered in the longer term.
- Private sector views on the strategy and prioritization of the proposed regional actions should be solicited.
- The proposed regional strategy envisages that implementation will require establishment of a Regional Trade Facilitation Committee which will oversee an overall action plan that should include the agreed priorities and sequencing of implementation of the regional actions; the countries and the implementation partners to be involved in each; the main activities, and time limits for implementation of the regional actions. This implementation action plan must take into account the concerns raised by representatives in the consultations about the scope of regional actions and role and activities of the Pacific Region development partners.
- Further, the regional strategy envisages that a feasibility assessment will be required for implementation of each of the regional actions; this assessment should take into account the feasibility concerns raised by representatives of PIF members in the consultations.

ANNEX

National Consultations Participants

Cook Islands

Name	Position	Ministry/Department
Ria Arthur	Foreign Service Officer	Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Immigration
Maria Matua-loane	Senior Customs Officer	ASYCUDA World Tariff
Elizabeth	Senior Customs Officer	
Ngatoko Ngatoko	Director	Biosecurity
Pavai Taramai	Deputy Director	Biosecurity
Piriariki Maa	Senior Biosecurity Officer	
Greta Remuera	Biosecurity Officer	
Tatryanna Utanga	Trade and Pa Enuu Coordinator	Business Trade Investment Board

Federated States of Micronesia

Name	Position	Ministry/Department
Renwhick	Weilbacher	Quarantine, Officer in-Charge
Margaret May	Baekalia	Food Safety In-Charge

Fiji

Name	Position	Ministry/Department
Deepika Singh	Principal Trade Economist	Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism & Transport
Khushbu Rai	Senior Trade Economist	Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism & Transport
Jese Tuibuca	Senior Trade Economist	Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism & Transport
Taspri Kaur	Trade Policy Officer	Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism & Transport
Shayal Raj	Trade Policy Officer	Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism & Transport
Shelini Kumar		Fiji Revenue and Customs Services
Mohammad Rizwan Khan		Fiji Revenue and Customs Services
Surend Pratap	A/CEO	Biosecurity Authority of Fiji
Dr. Bhaheerathan K	A Chief Veterinary Officer	Biosecurity Authority of Fiji
Nilesh Ami Chand	Chief Plant Protection Officer	Biosecurity Authority of Fiji
Taina Rauvala		

French Polynesia

Name	Position	Ministry/Department
Mareva Lechat Kitalong	Pacific Adviser, Legal Counsel	Presidency of French Polynesia, Delegation for International, European and Pacific Affairs

New Caledonia

Name	Position	Ministry/Department
Sandrine Bellier	Senior Advisor for Economic Cooperation and Trade	Regional Cooperation and External Relations Department, Government of New Caledonia

Niue

Name	Position	Ministry/Department
Frank Sioneholo	Economics Planning Development & Statistics	Premier's Department, Govt of Niue
Aytron Tatui	Economic & Planning Officer	Economic & Planning Dept

Samoa

Name	Position	Ministry/Department
Henry Tunupopo	Assistant CEO	Trade Relations Division, MFAT
Lise Enari	Snr FSO	MFAT
Theresa Penn	Principal Foreign Service Officer	MFAT
Tilafono David Hunter	CEO	MAF
Tai Matatumua	ACEO Policy and Planning	MAF
Queenie Mikaele	Senior Trade	MFAT
Sonya Lagisi	Trade officer	MFAT
Xavier Tanielu	Trade officer	MFAT

Solomon Islands

Name	Position	Ministry/Department
Mr. George Tuti	Director of External Trade	MFAET
Mr. Kevin Meplu	Senior Trade Officer	MFAET
Ms. Janice Ashwin	Senior Trade Officer	MFAET
Mr. John Lagi	Revenue Manager	Customs
Mr. Francis Tsatsia	Director of Biosecurity	Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock
Mr Geoffrey Dan Houua	Director Price Control	MCILI
Mr. Ronnie Golopitu	Export Industry development Officer	Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce
Mr. Cornelio Duano	Branch Manager	Express Freight Management
Ms. Natalina Hong	CEO	Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce
Mr. Mark Arimalanga	Principle Environmental Health officer	Ministry of Health and Medical Services

Tonga

Name	Position	Ministry/Department
Mr. Palatasa Havea	Revenue Officer	Ministry of Revenue and Customs
Mr. Metui Falesiva	Deputy Director	Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forest
Mr. Sam Vea	President	Tonga Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Mr. Meto Vaka	General Manager	Pacific Forum Line
Mr. Halloween Kisina	General Manager Port Operation	Ports Authority Tonga
Mr. Joe Paasi	General manager	Dateline Transam Shipping
Mr. Pate Tupou	General Manager	Polynesia Shipping Agency Tonga
Mrs. Pauline Siasau	Deputy CEO-Investment & Export Promotion	Ministry of Trade and Economic Development
Mrs. Sandra Fifita	Deputy CEO-Consumer Affairs	Ministry of Trade and Economic Development
Mr. Tevita Lautaha	Deputy CEO-Business Support	Ministry of Trade and Economic Development
Mrs. Esterlina Alipate	Principal Trade Officer	Ministry of Trade and Economic Development
Mrs Mateaki Loloa	Senior Policy Analyst	Ministry of Trade and Economic Development

Mrs. Eva Liavaa	Senior Policy Analyst	Ministry of Trade and Economic Development
Miss Kathy Walters	Policy Analyst	Ministry of Trade and Economic Development
Miss Fofonga Ola Anisi	Trade Officer	Ministry of Trade and Economic Development

Tuvalu

Name	Position	Ministry/Department
Falaoa Sione	Head of Trade Department	
Alpha Satupa	Assistant Trade Officer	
Paul Simeona	Pacer Plus Officer	
Darryl Ikbal	EIF Project Manager	
Aotoa TMalaita	EIF Finance Officer	

Vanuatu

Name	Position	Ministry/Department
Jessica Tarivonda	DDC	Customs Agency
Mark Vurobaravu	Deputy Director	Ministry of Agriculture
Armstrong Sam		Biosecurity Agency
Flaviana Rory		Ministry in charge of Commerce & Industry
Beverly Marango		Bureau of Standards
Laurence Cameron		Freight Forwarders
Stanley Trief	Manager	Single Window
Bettyrose Buas	Head Multilateral	Vanuatu Trade
Dero Tawi	Snr Trade Officer	Vanuatu Trade