

**Government of the Federated States of Micronesia**

**SUBMISSION OF CONCEPTUAL CHANGE-ENABLERS TO THE UN FOOD SYSTEMS SUMMIT**

**September 15, 2021**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This submission presents the major transformative growth-enablers identified by stakeholders of the Federated States of Micronesia during nation-wide stakeholder dialogues to address the current state of FSM food systems relative to the major challenges facing the nation in its SDG aspirations, to submit to the forthcoming United Nations Food Systems Summit for international coalition support.

Their origin lies in a very focused, vigorous and introspective series of interactive and participatory discussions by broad stakeholder groups across the nation on a limited set of major food systems themes and seemingly intractable issues that continue to afflict FSM communities without clear progress of mitigation.

The FSM growth enablers are presented conceptually with the understanding that further work will be required after the Summit to articulate these further in association with international coalitions of support. That will also enable further, more focused, consultation and dialogue by FSM stakeholders, based on the raised awareness generated by the initial dialogues.

The growth enablers and new processes proposed reflect a strong desire to adopt a new approach to addressing these food systems issues through a community-level behavioral lens and adopting a more pronounced community-led approach. The role of women and youth are important and would be integrated into forward measures and broad community inclusivity will ensure that no disadvantaged groups are left behind.

Our realization is that sustained transformation must be built on a solid foundation of (1) Good Information (2) Appropriate Education and Capacity Building (3) Appropriate Innovation, and (4) Robust Community Participation. All these enablers are to be under-pinned by (5) a firm commitment to sustain the transformational effort over the long term of at least 10 years and preferably longer. These are the strong foundational pillars with which each community will have the opportunity to build long-term responses and practices tailored to meet their specific situation and preferences.

High-level commitment of support for the food systems process and assurance of long-term support was received from FSM President, HE David W. Panuelo in his statements to the national dialog and to the UN Food Systems Summit. All four State Governors (Kosrae Acting Governor) delivered opening statements to their respective state dialogues pledging support and the chiefs of Woleai Atoll strongly commended the community-level dialog conducted on that Atoll as a better way forward.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS SUBMISSION

This submission will:

1. Briefly describe the governmental context and diversity of the FSM and reflect on the typical governmental and programmatic approach to production, health and social issues in FSM.
2. Explain factors which formed the basis for the approach taken by the FSM Government in its response to the invitation to participate in the Summit and its preceding dialogues.
3. Describe the critical food systems issues that confront the FSM in the modern era.
4. Briefly describe the dialogues held in the 5 government centers of the nation and one outer island atoll between July 20 and September 8, 2021, engaging more than 400 stakeholders over 17 days of dialogue.
5. Finally, it will present 9 major cross-cutting growth enablers that were identified across these dialogues, and present conceptual proposals to address the 5 major growth enablers for transformative change to the FSM food systems that are not being adequately addressed by other programs at the current time.

1. THE CONTEXT

The Federated States of Micronesia is a constitutional federal republic consisting of a national government with specifically mandate and responsibilities and four state governments (Kosrae, Pohnpei, Chuuk and Yap) that are responsible for all other governmental functions, in particular the regulation and management of land and the Exclusive 12 mile fisheries zone, under US style democratic government systems with three independent branches. In addition, each State Constitution provides for elected local governments that are principally based on historical polities, except for Yap where traditional leadership systems are recognized instead. The official language of government is English, but only Kosrae is relatively homogenous while the other states have more than one socio-cultural dialect or language group.

Geographically, the FSM is comprised of 607 islands with a total land area of 271 square miles dispersed over 1,003,866 square miles of ocean EEZ, consisting of 8 higher volcanic or limestone islands and the remainder being primarily atoll reef islands. Of the total population of 114,000, 47% resides in Chuuk State although the largest island is Pohnpei, with a land area of 129 square miles and home to 34% of the population. Lying along the equatorial region in the western central Pacific Ocean the islands are periodically subject to ENSO conditions that affect the climate and economy, and fairly regular tropical cyclonic systems that affect the mid and north-western areas of the country with degrees of devastating impact to crop production and occasional infrastructural damage.

The FSM has a political relationship of Free Association with the United States, which accords the US certain defense rights and responsibilities in exchange for a discrete amount of economic assistance and technical assistance programs to the FSM. Significantly, that relationship entitles FSM citizens to travel, school, work and reside in the United States without a visa, which has led to increasing rates of emigration from FSM and remittances from the US. The FSM has also relied significantly on other foreign assistance to supplement local funds. In the past 10 years the FSM national government has been the recipient of significant new domestic revenues from fishing access fees as well as corporate taxes on overseas financial programs, creating a relative disparity of funding and technical capacity between the states and national governments. Altogether, this funding structure has promoted a relatively transient, project-driven and externally oriented approach to many government services.

1. FACTORS CONSIDERED IN THE FSM APPROACH TO THE FOOD SYSTEMS DIALOGUES

The decentralized nature of the FSM nation and its constituent states, the diverse socio-cultural groupings, geophysical landforms and climatic exposure, and the current political economy and fiscal structure of the nation, underpin the nature of the dialogues required to address the diverse challenges and solution pathways relative to the major food systems issues.

The FSM national planning process also had to take account of the limited time available to it, the existing silo approach in government sectors and the relative unfamiliarity with collective, broad stakeholder, consultations and integrated approaches.

Very importantly the planners also had to take account of the experience of existing and past national programs and be very sensitive to community wariness and fatigue of more government and externally-led programs and consultations that fail to deliver tangible, sustained community benefits and progress.

Given all of these factors the national planning team agreed on 5 organizing principles:

1. The dialog process, challenges and solution pathways must be owned by the State Governments and by the local communities of the FSM, and not simply be a nominal response to external prescriptions and exhortations. Accordingly, the dialogues would have to be held as face-to-face events within each state.
2. The Food Systems Dialogue approach should be used as an opportunity to facilitate a transformative change in food systems dynamics to achieve definitive change and not to just hype incremental and nominal change,
3. The initial dialogues should only address a limited set of the most confronting food systems related challenges that have real and significant impact across most communities.
4. With the plethora of existing and past programs to address different challenges within the food system, the dialogues and any subsequent international engagement on food systems would focus on identifying gaps and aligning existing programs to new approaches.
5. The 5 action tracks proposed by the UN Food Systems Summit Secretariat were too broad for FSM purposes and were reduced to three relevant themes instead: Food and Health, Food and Livelihood, and Food and Security.

1. THE MAJOR FOOD SYSTEMS FOCUS

Within the three themes a more specific set of issues were identified as the most relevant and likely to seize community attention and commitment to action.

With regard to Food and Health, the organizing focus for the first FSM food systems dialogues was Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), principally diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease, but with recognition also of obesity, child malnutrition, and related cancers. NCDs have a significant nutrition linkage and have an immediate impact on all FSM communities. FSM has the second highest rates of overweight and obese persons in the Pacific region and commensurately high rates of diabetes affliction.

NCDs have been the target of numerous mitigation programs but the extent of the affliction has remained relatively intractable. A quick review of those programs suggests a heavy focus on project technical and service elements. Addressing the key question of “Why do we continue to eat unhealthy food that we know is invariably bad for our health in such catastrophic ways?”, it was suggested that the dialogue should propose a more behavioral approach. In that regard it would be important to ask the community dialogues to focus on identifying influencers of consumption behavior and enabling changes in those and other family and community consumption preferences.

The thematic area of Food and Livelihood was in turn framed around addressing the supply and accessibility to healthier nutrition, especially from enhanced local food production. While expanded household food production would play a useful dietary role it was acknowledged that the expansion of local commercial and semi-subsistence production could play a larger role in addressing reliable and convenient access to nutritional local food for both domestic and export consumption. It would also address the broader SDG objectives of improved income and fairer livelihood for rural producers and communities. The key questions asked were therefore around how to facilitate expanded family and local commercial green and blue production, while taking account of nature-friendly practices and fairer and equitable livelihood of producers and rural communities.

With regard to Food and Security, it was noted that FSM has a relatively good reputation in the PIC region for disaster preparedness and response as well as technical competence and leadership in global climate issues. Therefore, in framing this thematic area it was considered opportune to instead focus on the habitat, economic and social resilience implications of expanded and sustainable local food production.

The fundamental theory of change is that a community-level behavioral lens, focused on discrete food-related issues that have profound existential relevance for our communities, would resonate with those local communities and motivate individual, household and community responsibility to address those and other food systems challenges in more creative and sustainable ways that work, in accordance with the overall interests and needs of each community.

1. THE FSM DIALOGUES

The FSM Food Systems Summit Dialogues were conducted between July 7 to September 9, 2021 and involved a total of more than 400 persons in 17 full days of discussions. The process commenced with an initial nation-wide Zoom conference of the national task force with the four state organizing teams, that discussed the issue areas and agreed on the recommended approach. To encourage State Government buy-in, each State team was encouraged to use a national template of thematic PowerPoint slides and discussion topics to develop contextualized State presentations that would be more relatable for the state participants.

The first State Dialogue was held in Pohnpei State on July 20-22. A technical problem with the air service delayed subsequent dialogues until August 4-6 in Weno, Chuuk State, August 10-12 in Colonia, Yap State, August 13 in Woleai Atoll, Yap, and August 17-19 in Tofol, Kosrae State. All four State Dialogs were opened by their respective Governors (Kosrae, Acting Governor) and followed a similar format, with a modified version adapted for Woleai. All participants were invited by the respective State Leads. Responses of youth in a nation-wide teleconference discussion on World Youth Day were enthusiastic event reaffirm hope for the future. Finally, a national-level dialog in Kolonia, Pohnpei, to which FSM national government technical program staff, NGOs and diplomatic missions were invited, affirmed the possibility to align those programs with the thematic issues and dialog outcomes from the four states to enable quick delivery on some of the issues raised in the dialogs, and highlighted the synergistic opportunities of utilizing a unified channel for community engagement.

The most common and significant outcomes distilled from the state dialogs were:

1. Tackling food systems issues will require a long-term commitment from governments and partners, even more so since community-led responses are to be an essential element of that change.
2. Timely and relevant Information generation and dissemination as well as general and focused public awareness needs to be improved.
3. Improved governance and accountability of programs is essential to maintain community confidence, improve efficiency and ensure progress.
4. The first 1000 days of life are recognized to be critical to longer-term health and child nutrition provides a powerful catalyst to sensitize and motivate communities to address broader and longer term food related health issues.
5. Education, training and technical support are essential to ensure capacity to support improved food systems.
6. Innovation, including traditional adaptation, will be an important change-enabler to improve productivity, usability, improved values, and reduced waste.
7. Value-added product development and safe food standards will significantly improve preservation, accessibility, usability, waste reduction and producer incomes.
8. Community-led management and change will require effective and sustained community organization.
9. Suitable financing to be available for (a) community social investments (b) alternate income generation, and (c) for private production investment.
10. FSM TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE-ENABLER CONCEPTS SUBMITTED FOR SUMMIT SUPPORT.

The FSM Government understands that at this stage the UN Food Systems Summit Secretariat recommends party states to submit a short list of 3 or 4 Change-Enabler concepts that can be further articulated in conjunction with international technical support and submitted for wider support by international coalitions, development partners and national policy makers to help drive transformative pathways for change in national food systems in the first 3 years.

The process of preparing for the Food Systems Summit has given the FSM governments and communities a momentous opportunity to transform our food systems to more effectively address key social, economic and environmental challenges in ways that can truly create a better future for our people.

Amongst the 9 cross-cutting growth enablers listed above, 5 that are deemed to be very important that are not being appropriately addressed by current programs in FSM are hereby submitted to the Summit secretariat for assistance:

1. The need for improved Information Systems for decision-making was identified across all the major issue areas discussed. Sound science and reliable information is essential for good decision making. Some of this information is available but currently have problems with completeness, timeliness, dissemination, and effective utilization. This investment would include ascertaining the types and timeframes of information required by key stakeholders in the key issue areas, designing appropriate and verifiable data collection systems, designing appropriate analytic products for key stakeholder use, and addressing modes of dissemination and archive. Extensive use of the Internet is anticipated. Data collection and statistical analysis would require close coordination with state and national statistics offices, and, for policy analysis, with key system managers and policy makers.

1. The availability of a flexible and responsive Innovation system (“Innovation Center”) would significantly assist to improve all aspects of the food systems. For trial and development and incubation purposes the Center would have physical premises for major work but should have state and regional satellite hubs if required and feasible. Internet based work would be an important component. Innovation activities would possibly range from conducting detailed electronic searches for new products and processes, collaboration with regional and international Innovation programs, undertaking new trial and development, research into and adaptation of traditional practices, demonstration and training of new products, development of value-added products to improve usability for targeted market needs, and possibly monitoring of safety and quality standards.
2. Education, training, and technical support are essential to ensure capacity to support improved food systems. An assessment would be made of the key areas of technical and management capacity that are required in target areas, as well as of institutional arrangements for employment and placement of graduates. Long term partnerships with appropriate institutions to offer the required education and training should also have broader benefits. Capacity building of agriculture, nutrition, fisheries and information management technical support staff for community areas would be amongst the initial priorities.
3. To support communities to establish and maintain appropriate community management and policy advocacy capability to participate effectively in on-going community level dialogs as well as to effectively manage local production and ecosystems in accordance with good governance practices including transparency and accountability.
4. Underpinning all these foundation programs is the need for government, donor and community funding, technical and operating commitment to support a long-term (at least 10 years), multi-level (national, state, local, community), dialogue process to reinforce, modify and monitor food system progress.

The proposed game-changing pathways submitted by FSM Government to the Food System Summit for support from the broad international coalitions may seem rather basic and uncreative. However, we seek to embark on an institutionalized pathway for social behavioral transformation that is new and challenging in its scope and ambition. To engender community confidence and participation this institutional pathway must be built on a solid foundation of good information, appropriate education and capacity building, appropriate innovation, good governance and accountability and robust community participation, all under-pinned by a firm commitment to sustain the transformational effort over the long term of at least 10 years and preferably longer. These are elements identified by our communities as currently being inadequate. These are the strong foundational pillars with which each community will have the opportunity to build long term responses and practices tailored to their specific context and preferences, to more effectively address their challenges and own their future.

Finally, the 5 growth enablers highlighted in this submission are those that we feel can, and should, be established within the three-year timeframe of initial investments envisaged in the call for the UN Food Systems Summit. The remaining items on the longer list of enablers are also very important, and, while some aspects are being dealt with under existing programs, any offers of assistance with achieving those growth enablers would be looked at favorably by the FSM government.

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