

Minutes

Second meeting of the Action Coordination Committee of the Western Pacific NARI EU-ARD project

18 July 2012, Port Vila, Vanuatu

Present on the meeting were:

1. Dr Raghunath Ghodake, NARI, chairperson
2. Permanent Secretary Franck Wickham, MAL, invited
3. Mr. Ruben Markward, DARD, project sub-coordinator for VU, member
4. Dr. Dominik Ruffeis, Representing BOKU-NARI, water systems expert, member
5. Dr. Workneh Ayalew, NARI, action coordinator & leader of the livestock comp., member
6. Mr. Jimmie Saelea, MAL, project senior scientist, SI, member
7. Mrs. Marie Melteras, CEO, VARTC, invited
8. Mr. James Wasi, DARD, project senior scientist, VU, member
9. Mr. Jules Damutalau, MAL, acting project sub-coordinator for SI, member
10. Dr. Birte Komolong, NARI, leader of crop improvement component of the project, member
11. Dr. Peter Gendua, NARI, leader of the crop diversification component, member
12. Mr. Joshua Ryan, NARI, M&E expert, member

Apologies received:

1. Dr. Norah Omot, NARI, leader of socio-economics component of the project, member
2. Mr. Joshua Ryan, NARI, M&E expert, member.

Meeting called to order at 3:15pm.

Agenda

The following agenda items were tabled and approved for deliberation, apart from two.

1. Follow up of outstanding administrative matters from the last meeting:
2. Year 1 project technical report submitted to the European Union
3. Overall progress of the project so far
4. Technical matters that require guidance from the Committee (gender, HIV/AIDS, conflict resolution):
5. Year 1 project expenditure verification report:
6. The need to review budget structure for local and international travel expenses
7. AOB
 - 7.1 Involvement of Mr Roland Treitler of BOKU in the project
 - 7.2 Planned activities and budget for year 2 in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands
 - 7.3 Further institutional collaboration other related projects

Agenda 1: Follow up of outstanding administrative matters from the last meeting:

Briefing:

- a. Opening project accounts: done
- b. Set up of project offices: done
- c. Nomination of country sub-coordinators and senior scientists: done. Replacement made for departed MAL senior scientist, albeit after a long delay and some effect on project progress

Resolution and Actions Arising (if any): acknowledged completion of outstanding matters and noted that there are no pending or arising matters under this agenda item.

Agenda 2: Year 1 project technical report submitted to the European Union

Briefing:

- a. Report was prepared and submitted in the format provided by European Union (Annex 1).
- b. Overall project performance remained per plan and timeframe. No major departures from plan.
- c. Some methodological refinements foreseen for year two as the views of participating communities are taken into account in designing specific actions of the project at project sites. For example:
 - i. Crop and livestock diversification opportunities proposed in the project design document have been revisited in consideration of needs and preferences of participating communities.
 - ii. The proposed water supply developments have been revisited to ensure that interventions have direct relevance to food security needs of the target communities.
 - iii. Some target communities are experiencing more than one of the key constraints – soil water deficit, excess soil moisture and excessive soil saline conditions. For instance, the site selected to represent wet agricultural areas in Vanuatu – Middle Bush – have seasonal excessive soil moisture (wet season) as well as seasonal soil water deficit (dry season), requiring that a combination of contrasting technological options be considered to address priority community needs.
- d. The planned sub-contracting of specific tasks to VARTC, Kastom Gaden Association and World Vision during Year 1 have not eventuated until the village level actions are developed and planned in full. These will be completed during Year 2.

- e. All partner and Associate institutions have been actively involved during Year 1 and no constraints of any kind were encountered with regard to cooperation. Mention should be made of the additional technical support received from BOKU through the deployment of five graduate students across the three countries to handle essential baseline data collection tasks at site level. Not only have the students collected substantial raw data for purposes of the project while also meeting their own academic requirements, but also demonstrated field research and good workmanship to local staff to contribute to capacity building. They have initiated essential work that may need to continue in the future as part of the water resource related works of the project, even though at time the students may not have received enough logistical support in the conduct of their field works.
- f. Additional institutions not mentioned in the project design document also started collaborating with the project:

PNG:

- Fresh Produce Development Agency was informed and expressed interest?? to be engaged on matters pertaining to the production and marketing of fresh produce of vegetables and fruits.
- The Highland Piggery and Farmers and Association is a farmers' cooperative active in facilitating service delivery to members. Some of their members have been actively involved in the project activities so far, and through them other members outside the project site will be able to benefit from lessons learnt and experiences.

Solomon Islands:

- Vois Blong Meri Solomons; a local women-focused NGO in Solomon Islands with good networks to advance women-focused services. A few of their staff have been actively involved in project activities and will continue to do so around project sites where they are active to promote active participation of women in the project.

Vanuatu:

- Department of Livestock & Quarantine; a department managing all livestock and quarantine related activities of the Ministry in Vanuatu. A few of their officers have been involved in site appraisal and baseline surveys and are set to continue participating in project activities related to livestock.
- SPC-GIZ project on Coping with Climate Change in the Pacific Islands Region by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ); this is a regional climate change related multi-country and multi-institutional project operating under the Vanuatu Meteorological Service. This project has several activities relevant for our project and the collaboration will continue. It was represented at the project inception workshop.
- Farm Support Association; a local NGO involved in extension of agricultural technologies at village level, and represented at the project

inception workshop. This NGO will be involved in the dissemination of proven technologies to communities outside the project sites.

- Live and Learn; another local NGO delivering extension services to farming communities. They were represented at the project inception workshop. It will assist in disseminating information and knowledge to farming communities outside the project sites.

Resolutions and Actions Arising (if any):

- a. Acknowledged good progress made on planned activities, especially the extensive effort made in the community reporting back workshop as part of the details operational planning processes.
- b. Committee acknowledges and appreciates the technical input that five graduate students from BOKU made in the collection of baselines data on water resources around the project sites across the project countries.
- c. There was an unfortunate incident of a computer belonging to the student assigned to Vanuatu (Helmut) that crushed during the assignment, which the project found it difficult to assist in its repair on the ground that it was a private property. It was then suggested that the project should have more flexibility in its budget use to handle matters like this, which obviously affected progress of planned activities.
- d. The Committee also requested BOKU through Dr. Ruffeis to continue to encourage similar student assignments within the framework of the water component of the project.
- e. Committee decided to put on record its appreciation of the effort made by Dr. Birte Komolong and Dr. Norah Omot in developing and guiding the implementation of the participatory action planning process in organizing and conducting the community reporting back workshops.

Agenda 3: Overall progress of the project so far:

Briefing:

- a. Overall project performance remained very good and it remained consistent with set timeframe. There are no major departures from the approved schedule of activities (Table 1).
- b. Need emerged for making adjustments to a few elements of the activity plans to better reflect needs and preferences of participating communities as captured through baseline surveys and reporting back workshops. These include:
 - iv. Refining specific site level activities based on outcomes of the extensive needs assessment conducted during the baseline surveys.
 - v. Toning down the emphasis on water supply interventions to better align activities with food security needs of the target communities.
- c. A few months of delay in rolling out of specific activities at site level due to the more than expected time taken for verifying results of baseline surveys through series of reporting back workshops carried out from April to July 2012. The project core technical team had to travel to each of the project sites to ensure

consistent application of the modified and new procedures of reporting back workshops.

- d. The scope and size of the project has made it more imperative to ensure direct and full participation of partner and associate institutions in the planning and implementation processes at site level. This is essential to promote local ownership of the project as well as promote building up on local comparative advantages in implementing activities.

Resolution and Action Arising:

- a. The Committee appreciates the longer than expected time taken for conducting the reporting back workshops. This is a critical stage of detailed operational project planning of the project in which the needs, preferences and opinions of the participating communities need to be duly considered. In some cases communities wished a much broader scope for the project, as for instance at Middle Bush in Vanuatu, where a very strong need for developing water supply systems was consistently voiced by the communities. Even though the project is unable to make major departures from its design in addressing emerging needs like this, it can assist communities technically in tapping into other funding sources.
- b. The Committee also emphasized that project teams should continue to encourage other stakeholder institutions to be directly involved in the implementation of preferred interventions within the project framework, given that local institutions have the information, resources and networks to be able to support community needs.
- c. It was also noted that the long process has certainly raised expectations of communities, in some cases beyond scope of the project, and hence further actions of the project need to be pragmatic. Furthermore, it is essential to maintain the focus of this project on adapting smallholder agriculture to climate change related risks and that it is a research for development project and not one on merely extending available technologies.

Table 1: Schedule of planned activities of the project during the first two years

Western Pacific NARI EU-ARD Project Timelines of Activities

		Year 1												Year 2
		Semester 1						Semester 2						
Activity		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	3
Project coordination	1.1 Action coordination, planning and review –SC meetings													
	1.2 Action offices established, staffed, equipped and managed for 5 years													
	1.3 Action Inception Workshops													
Socio-economics	2.1 Identification of target community groups in areas of PNG, SI and Vu at risk from drought, excess rainfall or sea water inundation													
	2.2 Baseline surveys in target communities and Farmer participatory workshops to assess needs, identify pilot sites													
	2.3 End of Action surveys & stakeholder workshops													
Soil & water mgmt	3.1 Rural appraisal surveys to assess water accessibility and current water/use management by target communities in PNG, SI and Vu, and to identify pilot sites													
	3.2 Development of integrated water management concepts for target groups based on local water balances and water accounting													
	3.3 Assess water harvesting methods, ground water availability & dynamics, irrigation techniques and water conservation strategies at pilot sites in target comm's in PNG SI & Vu													
Crop improvement (sweet potato)	4.1 Source alternative sweet potato varieties from national and international collections which are tolerant of moisture excesses deficits or saline conditions													
	4.2 Development of elite breeding material of sweet potato for screening for drought, excess moisture and salinity tolerances via the on-going breeding programme in PNG													
	4.3 Screening indigenous germplasm, locally bred and imported varieties of sweet potato, using in vivo and in vitro simulation methods, to assess tolerance to drought, moisture excess and salinity, and identify promising varieties													
Crop diversification	4.4 Sourcing other crop species/varieties with tolerance to excess precipitation, moisture deficit and soil salinity conditions													
	4.5 Evaluating the performance of selected promising sweet potato varieties under simulated moisture excess and moisture deficit conditions													
	4.6 Evaluating the performance of selected potentially stress tolerant crops, under simulated stress conditions													
	4.7 Validation and testing of sweet potato (and other crops adaptability to different stresses at pilot sites in target comm's in PNG, SI and Vu													
	4.8 Assessment of existing mechanisms for provision of quality seed to farming communities in PNG, SI, Vu and recommendations for improvement													

Table 1: Continued.

	Activity	Year 1												Year2
		Semester 1						Semester 2						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	3
Livestock diversification	5.1 Assessing the potential for improving farm productivity through diversifying livestock assets and improved cyclical use of crop and livestock inputs in stress situations													
	5.2 Sourcing and identifying forages tolerant of excess moisture and salinity													
	5.3 Evaluate the nutritive value of local feed resources and conduct feeding trials													
	5.4 Pilot test diversified livestock feeding systems in smallholder communities in target communities in PNG, SI and Vu													
	5.5 Assessing existing mechanisms for supplying breeding stock and demonstr'g institutional or community breeding facilities													
Information exchange & networking	6.1 Promotion of internet based discussion forums/blogs relating to crops/cropping systems, livestock and water management													
	6.2 Establishment/ strengthening of annual regional multi stakeholder and researcher-extension provider forums in PNG, SI and Vu													
	6.3 Resources and methods developed for the dissemination of adaptation information to vulnerable communities in PNG, SI and Vu													

Agenda 4: Technical matters that require guidance from the Committee (gender, HIV/AIDS, conflict resolution):

Briefing:

- a. The baseline survey duly considered these cross-cutting issues and essential basic data is at hand.
- b. To date there are no cases of emerging issues on these matters at all the eleven project sites.
- c. The project core technical team will continue to monitor such issues as appropriate.

Resolution:

- a. It was suggested that apart from gender, HIV/AIDS and conflict resolution, the project core research team should also consider environmental degradation as a cross-cutting issue to be actively monitored at project site level.
- b. The Committee acknowledges that the main focus of the project with respect to these cross-cutting issues is on upholding equity and sustainability principles in the implementation of project activities, especially gender and HIV/AIDS. It is recognised that gender related issues can be serious challenges in traditional Melanesian cultures of the project countries.
- c. The project can endeavour to monitor the gender dimension of food security in the participating communities to allow assessment of gender related changes in food security status.

Agenda 5: Year 1 project expenditure verification report:

Briefing:

- a. Report delivered to EU Delegation Office in Port Moresby.
- b. The report provided very positive verification of expenditure.
- c. The only comment received was some overpayment to partner institutions for a few budget lines due to oversight, which the project office confirmed can be rectified during year 2.
- d. EU response on the report being awaited.
- e. Release of further project budget (pre-financing) is expected after review of the report.

Resolution:

The Committee acknowledged the expenditure verification report and its status.

Agenda 6: The need to review budget structure for local and international travel expenses

Briefing:

- a. In view of the unfavourable currency exchange rates (Euro to PNG Kina). The PGK has appreciated against the EUR by as much as 33%, effectively reducing the PGK equivalent of total budget received from EU by the same amount.
- b. Given that up to 40% of the project budget is allocated and being used to cover travel expenses.
- c. The project per diem rates are different from official government rates of partner institutions, and were based on average expected hotel accommodation and living expenses of the respective countries. The project local travel expense allowances are the same across the three countries, despite differences in living expenses. But international travel allowances are divergent - €109 in Solomon Islands, €135 in PNG and €214 in Vanuatu.
- d. The local and international travel expense allowances of the project are better aligned with the official government travel allowance rates in order not to create unnecessary concerns. Furthermore, the average hotel accommodation rates considered in setting international travel per diems have now changed as travellers now choose to stay at other cheaper accommodation options. These are taken into account in suggesting the following more realistic local and international per diem rates (Table 2). Approval of this change is sought from the Committee.

Table 2: Current per diem rates as specified in project design document

Category	Current rate	Suggested rate	Remark
Expatriate resource person in PNG	€135.00	Same	
Expatriate resource person in SI	€109.00	Same	
Expatriate resource person in Vu	€214.00	€164	Reasonable
Local per diem rate in PNG	€70.00	PGK 90 plus accomm.	NARI Official rate
Local per diem rate in SI	€70.00	SBD300 plus accomm	MAL suggested
Local per diem rate in Vu	€70.00	Vatu 10,000, accomm. included	VU Government rate
Day trip lunch allowance in PNG		PGK40 (€13)	NARI official rate
Day trip lunch allowance in SI		SBD200 (€20)	Suggested
Day trip lunch allowance in Vu		Vatu2000 (€20)	Suggested

Resolution:

- a. Subject to approval from the contracting authority of the European Union, the suggested rates can be implemented on the premise that the applicable rate should not put unnecessary pressure on travelling staff in terms of their travel expenses, and that this issue should not be a source of concern at all levels.
- b. The Committee acknowledges that once the reporting back workshops are over, there will be less international travel expenditure, and much of the necessary travel will be domestic.
- c. Issues that may emerge from the evaluation of the expenditure verification report will be communicated to the Committee in due course.

Agenda 7: AOB:**7.1 Involvement of Mr Roland Treitler of BOKU in the project:**

Dr. Ruffeis briefed the committee that BOKU would like to have further clarification on the involvement of the BOKU economist, Mr. Roland Treitler. He also mentioned that BOKU has nominated Mr. Helmut Berrer to replace Mr. Treitler on this work.

The Committee was briefed on previous project communications with Mr. Treitler and BOKU and on the understanding established that Mr. Treitler will be actively involved in the formulation and implementation of the M&E framework of the project, which is still pending due to the extended needs assessment work being undertaken by the project. This assessment is the basis for elaboration of the M&E framework of the project. On that basis, it was resolved that Dr. Norah Omot in her capacity as the component leader of the socio-economics component of the project will inform the same to Mr. Treitler and have his replacement, Mr. Berrer, involved in the elaboration of the project M&E framework.

7.2 Planned activities and budget for year 2 in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands:

DARD and MAL requested information on the planned activities and allocated budget for Year 2 of the project.

The Committee noted that planned activities and aggregate budget are as specified in the project document. However, the budget available for Year 2 is not yet determined, pending response from European Union on the expenditure verification report. The project is operating on balance budget from the first pre-financing instalment which basically covers Year 1 activities. As a result no budget transfer has as yet been done for Year 2. The project team will communicate partner institutions as soon as further budget is released from the European Union. It was also suggested that the project co-ordinator seek advice

from the EU on how to secure contingency of other such funding to help manage cost escalation arising from the unfavourable currency exchange rate.

7.3 Further institutional collaboration other related projects

Dr. Ghodake, on behalf of NARI, reported to the meeting that NARI has received research grant from the European Union to implement two collaborative agricultural research projects – one on genetic improvement of sweet potato and Aibika, and another on basic farm mechanisation. These projects are about to be launched and NARI will seek strong collaboration in the delivery of these projects with the same partner institutions. A third project proposal focusing on women in agriculture was submitted for funding and decision on this is being awaited.

On behalf of MAL, Mr. Frank Wickham, welcomed the good news about the new projects and expressed his institution's readiness to collaborate with NARI on the new projects. Also, he pointed out the needs to explore further institutional collaboration in agriculture and rural development with the view to making available funding opportunities as complementary and synergistic as possible.

Dr. Ghodake also mentioned emerging bilateral funding opportunities to support capacity building and institutional development towards establishing statutory national agricultural research institutions such as NARI for Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Representatives of MAL, DARD and VARTC welcomed this opportunity and affirmed their readiness to work towards strengthening their existing capacity and structures and establish robust agricultural research institutions.

After having covered all agenda items, without leaving pending matters, the meeting was adjourned at 6:35pm, after having received official dinner invitation from DARD.
