

PIRAS LINKAGES

PIRAS is linked to the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS) and its regional network affiliations (Figure 1). GFRAS is a global platform for extension services. It provides advocacy and support for an enabling policy environment and appropriate investment in rural advisory services. In addition, it also supports the professionalization of rural advisory services, as well as the facilitation and enhancement of effective, constructive, and continuous knowledge and information exchange.



Figure 1. GFRAS Regional Networks

CONTACT US

For more information on PIRAS, please contact PIRAS Secretariat: Mr Gibson Susumu, Participatory Extension Specialist, Land Resource Division, The Pacific Community, Suva Regional Office, Email: GibsonS@spc.int

OR

lrldhelpdesk@spc.int

OR

SPC – The Pacific Community
3 Luke Street, Nabua
Private Mail Bag, Suva, Fiji

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PACIFIC ISLANDS RURAL ADVISORY SERVICES NETWORK (PIRAS)



Extension Excellence for Prosperous and Resilient Communities in the Pacific



PIRAS Annual Forum, 24 – 28 August 2015, Apia, Samoa

BACKGROUND

The Pacific Islands Rural Advisory Services (PIRAS) was formed in response to a demand by Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) to establish a network of agricultural extension and rural advisory services (RAS) in the Pacific to strengthen capacity of RAS through collaborative information sharing, joint activities and partnerships. It was formerly known as the Pacific Islands Extension Network (PIEN) established at the first Pacific Extension Summit convened by the Pacific Community (SPC) in 2005 in the Kingdom of Tonga. In 2009, PIEN was endorsed by the Pacific Heads of Agriculture Services (HOAFS) and the Pacific Ministers of Agriculture (MOAF) at their meeting in Nadi, Fiji. In 2015, at the Pacific Research and Extension Forum convened by SPC and the Government of Samoa, it was agreed to revive PIEN, change its name to PIRAS, establish a new PIRAS Board and PIRAS priority areas and recommended that PIRAS be housed within the SPC Land Resource Division (LRD).

WHY PIRAS?

The bulk of the Pacific Island populations (> 80%) depend directly or indirectly on the agricultural sector for food and nutritional security and sustainable livelihoods. The majority of this population are smallholder farmers mostly located in isolated rural areas operating on scarce resources with limited access to services. These communities also face poor access to credit and markets, low capacity for product diversification, and challenges in meeting quality standards for commercialization and exports. These challenges are compounded by a number of production constraints such as pests and diseases, declining productivity, spiralling soil fertility problems and impacts of climate change and natural disasters.

Agricultural Extension and Rural Advisory Services (RAS) play a crucial role in addressing this range of agricultural challenges. However, RAS also face their own challenges to effectively meet these increasing demands. Needs assessments on RAS across the Pacific show that these challenges are at different levels. There is limited capacity of extension workers to address and facilitate new and adapted extension processes required for more complex multi-stakeholder partnerships (e.g. required for more complex supply/value chains). There is also a lack of favourable policies to support these new processes and a declining investment in RAS. In addition, there also seems to be a lack of clarity on the different roles required of RAS with limited partnerships across various service providers. All of these challenges have resulted in RAS not being able to effectively service farmers' demands.

PIRAS PURPOSE

The **purpose** of PIRAS is to provide advocacy and leadership in RAS through collaborative information sharing, joint activities and partnerships.

VISION

The **vision** of PIRAS is to promote “Extension Excellence for Prosperous and Resilient Communities” in the PICTs.

MISSION

The **mission** of PIRAS is to strengthen capacity of RAS in the PICTs to support food security and sustainable livelihoods needs of the Pacific communities.

VALUES

To support its vision and mission, the core values of PIRAS include:

1. Champion governance and leadership in RAS through program development and efficiency in service delivery
2. Commit to regional and international cooperation to support advocacy and lobbying for more investment in RAS
3. Promote excellence and professionalism in RAS through effective partnership, learning and networking
4. Foster demand-driven information and knowledge exchange to support scaling of innovation in RAS
5. Uphold equity by adding value and creating benefits for all members.

PIRAS GOVERNANCE

PIRAS is governed by a Board which consists of three seats for the three Pacific Sub-Regionals (Micronesia, Polynesia and Melanesia), one each seat representing Research Institutions, Farmers Organizations, Private Sector, Academia, Women in Agriculture, SPC and International Linkages. The Land Resource Division (LRD) of the Pacific Community (SPC) serves as the Secretariat for PIRAS.

PIRAS MEMBERSHIP

Membership is open to RAS providers and relevant stakeholders in the Pacific including:

- Extension and rural advisory service providers (public & private)
- Non-government organisations
- Farmer organisations
- Education and training providers
- Research and Development institutions
- Civil society organisations
- Other interested bodies and individuals

PIRAS FUNCTIONS

To achieve its mission, the functions of PIRAS include:

- a. Provide representation and a voice for PIRAS at regional and international forums to promote improved investment in RAS in the PICTs
- b. Support and develop evidence-based approaches and policies for improving the effectiveness of RAS
- c. Strengthen the capacity of RAS providers through training opportunities and networking
- d. In pursuance of the above functions, PIRAS shall undertake the following strategic priority areas:
 - Advocate relevant issues related to agriculture and RAS in the Pacific
 - Develop and promote evidence-based best practices and policies for effective RAS in the PICTs
 - Support capacity building programmes for RAS across the Pacific
 - Establish PIRAS links with national, regional and global agencies, institutions and organisations
 - Collect, collate, store and translate research results to meaningful form and disseminate in the region
 - Facilitate information sharing among members and with other regional and global networks.