

Between “Tristes Tropiques” and Gardens of Eden: Pacific Islands striving for food security



➔ Solomon Islands: Almost one thousand islands ...

The typical image of an island in the Pacific Ocean is one of paradise—azure water, palm trees, and other tourist-brochure clichés. In reality, small island developing states in the Pacific face serious and unique development challenges that render them as vulnerable as the poorest nations of Africa. The limited and extremely fragile natural resource base of these islands leaves no room for error in management decisions. Disasters related to climate, such as tropical cyclones, flash floods, and drought impose serious constraints on development.

With increasing global temperatures, rising sea levels and more frequent and intense extreme weather events, islands in the Pacific, especially those in the warmer latitudes, are the most vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change. “It seems obvious that any significant change in climate in global scale will impact local agriculture,” warns a recently released FAO study. “In a changing climate regime, the need to strengthen food security is, therefore, paramount.”

The **Solomon Islands** is one of the poorest island nations in the Pacific, with a per capita Gross National Income of US\$ 643. More than 80% of Solomon Islanders depend on subsistence agriculture and fishing for their livelihoods. Smallholder vegetable gardens are sources of food and income for rural and urban populations, yet the

area cultivated with vegetables is small compared to major staple starchy crops. Local production is limited and supplies cannot meet year-round domestic demands.

In May 2007 AVRDC – The World Vegetable Center launched a four-year project to enhance economic conditions in the Solomon Islands by developing and promoting integrated and improved crop management packages for smallholder vegetable gardens. The R&D activities can be applied to other poor island nations in Oceania. Apart from assessing the socioeconomic dimension of smallholder gardens, the project is looking at the market potential for new vegetable species and varieties, as well as creating marketing networks.

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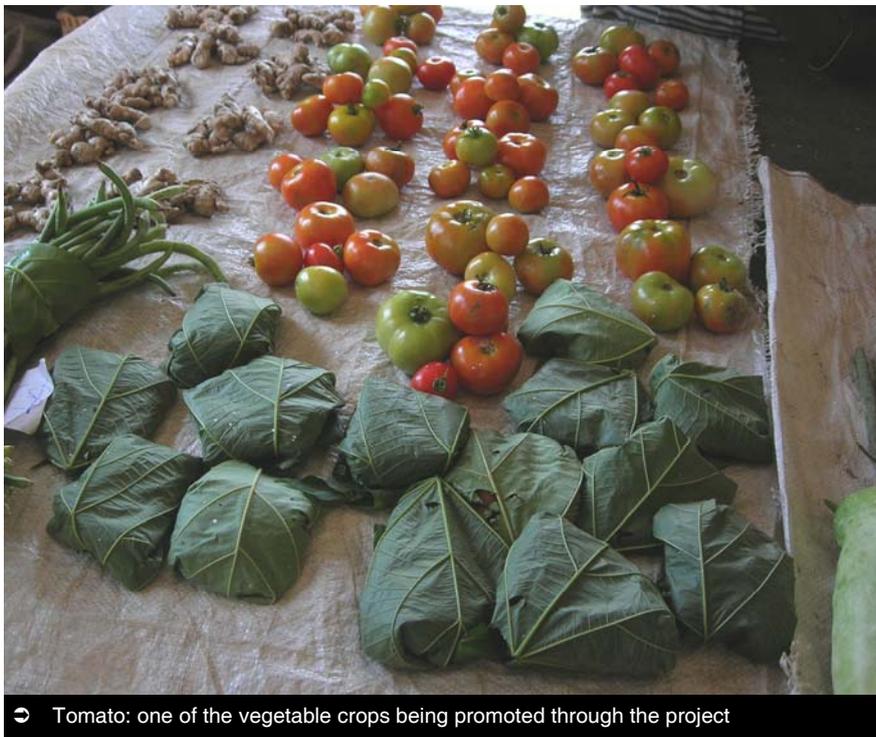
... with a weak horticultural sector

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“We evaluate selected vegetable varieties, including indigenous vegetables, for adaptability, quality, and market potential, and ensure the seed of these varieties is available to farmers at reasonable cost,” says Dr. Manuel Palada, Project Manager and AVRDC’s expert for Crop & Ecosystem Management.

Other important steps include the evaluation of low-input crop management practices such as low-cost drip irrigation and starter fertilizer, and using Integrated Pest Management technology to manage major insect pests and diseases.

“The project is based on participatory and multidisciplinary rural appraisals as well as on-farm participatory research,” explains Dr. Ravi Joshi, the project’s site coordinator. “A major objective is to build and strengthen the capacity of local partners and collaborating



institutions.” The project is funded by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) and involves research and extension partners from Solomon Islands, Australia and the Pacific.

Further reading:

Climate Change and Food Security in Pacific Islands Countries, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 2008.