

2016 Tonga National Agriculture Policy Survey

Overview and Summary

The Royal Oceania Institute (ROI) undertook a brief but comprehensive survey throughout the Kingdom of Tonga to gauge awareness of government policies and the willingness of Tonga's large farming community to utilize national initiatives aimed at furthering the efficiency and resilience of the sector in the current environment.

Agriculture is among the most practiced trades in the Kingdom. This is not an accident. Since at least the 19th century, the Tongan government has engaged in formal nationwide policies to facilitate widespread subsistence farming in order to foster self-sufficiency and food security for Tongan families. This includes the guarantee of access to agricultural land enshrined in the Constitution of 1875.

The survey was conducted via written questionnaires, distributed throughout Tongatapu, Vava'u, Ha'apai, and the Niuas. About 45 questionnaires were distributed, to a wide sample that included the private (subsistence), corporate, and public sectors, including schools and other groups. Among private/subsistence farmers, as expected from a small island community, some held several roles, for example, a (subsistence) farmer who is also a civil servant (e.g., teacher at the local school), may also be a businessman who periodically sends surpluses of his produce to the local market..

A total of 26 individuals responded to the survey with 20 respondents participating from Tongatapu, two (2) from Vava'u, and three (3) from Niuafou'u. No responses (0) were returned from Ha'apai and Niuatoputapu, although questionnaires were sent there. The survey questionnaires were delivered and collected to participants personally by hard copies on Tongatapu, and via email and/or fax for those outer islands. Most were returned as were conveyed.

As for composition, English or Tongan language versions of the same questionnaire were distributed depending on the preference of the potential respondent. The tenor of the questions asked included: *how much* were farmers aware of government's current policy initiatives; *how compliant* were they of the idea of a Policy Bank; *what other resources* do they think should also be available to them; and *what methods* and media they think are most effective in communicating government's policies to them and the wider public. Lastly, the questionnaire also posed how they were willing to cooperate with and recommend the Policy Bank to fellow farmers and the wider community.

Limitations included time, the willingness to participate (in many cases a by-product of respondents' previous experience with surveys), and the perceived usefulness of the proposition, such as the so-called 'Digital Divide'. Some that didn't respond to the questionnaire later conveyed that they just didn't have enough time to do it. Some appeared over-cautious, fearing their answers might lead to insults or inconveniences. Those familiar with the 'World Wide Web', the Internet and its potential, and a general familiarity with and belief in the latest tech innovations such as computers and smartphones having any utility in their labors, were most willing to participate.

The surveyors and ROI did not impose any specific delimitations, but tried at best to reach as diverse and comprehensive a sample as possible. Men and women equally participated.

Summary

The survey revealed a willingness from the general public to cooperate with the Tongan government on its current and new policy initiatives, and a heightened interest in the upcoming Agricultural Policy Bank.

A core focus of the survey concentrated on the awareness of the community of government's policies on agriculture and, as a mitigating factor, the introduction of an online Policy Bank, or an 'Agricultural Policy Bank', which received overwhelming support from the respondents.

Section One: Policy Awareness

A majority of respondents, 62% (16/26), were *aware* that there are government policies and programs on agriculture. Equally significant is that the rest were not. More significantly, 81% (13/16) of those who affirmed awareness have not even seen a copy of government's policies or plans.

Section Two: Policy Bank

On the idea of a 'Policy Bank', 73% (19/26) of respondents thought it would make access to Tonga's National Agricultural Policies easier, while 11% (3/26) people thought it would not. A fair portion did believe it would make their farming enterprises and access to information easier however, understandably, a few honestly mentioned they hadn't heard of such a thing.

On rating from 1 to 7 (with 1 being highest and 7 being lowest), 16 respondents ranked the idea of a Policy Bank positively (ranking it 4 or less), with 8 of those 16 respondents ranking it "extremely useful". Meanwhile 3 respondents believed it would not be very useful.

A few comments are important to note. The idea of a 'Policy Bank' is not an indigenous innovation, and it doesn't smoothly import into Tonga. In the first instance, the official language in the country is Tongan. The word "policy" has no Tongan counterpart or translation. Not yet at least, until the word itself is *Tonganised* and phonetically absorbed, as has happened to other foreign words. The nearest parallel is "polokalama", which translates as "program". Secondly, the word "bank", as elsewhere, is mostly associated with the financial sector. When the idea of the *Agricultural Sector's very own 'Policy Bank'* was mentioned, a rather different vision that the one desired by the originators of the idea was conjured up. Respondents commented that it is very useful to have an actual bank dedicated to agricultural financing. When this line of thought was pursued further and respondents were asked to elaborate, they commented on the serious need for capital to finance their operations, mostly for machinery and equipment. Additionally, some have had agricultural plots seized by the commercial banks because the lands were used for securities on now non-performing loans. In some cases, the loans were intended for capital in commercial agriculture but for various reasons, including varying weather/climate, became impossible to repay within existing, non-agriculture sensitive financial structures. In other words, the very mentioning together of the words "bank" and "agriculture" excited the idea that it was an actual 'bank for the agricultural' sector.

Although those comments are beyond the purview of the survey, they are interesting to note with regards to the general interests in developing a profitable, sustainable sector, at the same time maintaining and furthering performance and addressing values and security issues unique to the Kingdom's own identity. This is important since the majority of the issues are related to food security, territorial integrity and sovereignty, as implied in the Kingdom's Land Laws and tenure system.

Section Three: What else in the Policy Bank?

Other resources respondents favored related to increasing their knowledge about the field through expert discussions (54% or 14/26 respondents), FAQs about the Policy Bank (46% or 12/26), and expert directories that included profiles. This means that respondents are actively interested in furthering their skills, knowledge, and expert networks about their trades.

When it came to interest in the services to be provided by the Policy Bank, 73% (19/26) of respondents were keen for information about increasing productivity and market access. Around 54% (14/26) wanted information about the latest research and its applications, 42% (11/26) wanted climate change adaptation information, and 38% (10/26) wanted information on finance. The last two are important and consistent, since they address the long-term threats and opportunities for farmers and the sector as a whole.

Section Four: Communication

Interestingly over half of respondents, 58% (15/26) indicated radio was their favored medium for communicating the Policy Bank to other farmers and the community. Television and workshops were rated second (both 46% or 12/26), while newspapers and active networks (partnership with Ministries, NGOs, etc) came in third at 31% (8/26).

In communicating to the youth, social media and workshops tied for first with 46% (both at 12/26) but radio was a close behind with 42% (11/26). Mobiles text messaging (SMS), television, and websites all received 27% (7/26).

Two people (8%) would not recommend the Policy Bank to others, however 85% (22/26) of respondents would personally do so.



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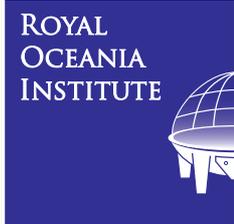
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Independent Survey - Tonga National Agriculture Policy 2016

Name:
 (Optional)
 Gender: Male Female Role:.....
 Organisation:.....

Please answer all applicable Questions 1 to 10:

Q1. Are you aware if Tonga has national agriculture policies or plans?

YES (Go to next Question) NO (Go to Question 4)

Q2. Have you seen a copy of these Agricultural policies or plans?

YES (Go to next Question) NO (Go to Question 4)

Q3. How did you access these Agricultural policies or plans?

Government Ministry Online source Regional Organisation
 Other source (please specify).....

Q4. With the launch of the new Agriculture Policy Bank, will access to Tonga's National Agricultural policies and plans be easier?

YES NO

Please explain reason for answer:.....

Q5. How would you rate the usefulness of the Agriculture Policy Bank on a scale of 1 to 7?
 (1 is extremely useful and 7 is not very useful)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Please explain reason for answer:.....

Q6. What additional resources would you like to see in the Agriculture Policy Bank?

(Please indicate top 3 preferences)

Comments section Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) section Results of agriculture discussions (e.g. PAFPNet regional e-conversations) Expertise directory and profiles Links to policy resources from other countries in the Pacific or other island states Statistics, census and survey data Other Agriculture Plans' for sub-sectors (please specify).....

Q7. Please select from the suggested topics your preference to be accessed through the Agriculture Policy Bank?

Research and Extension Production and Market Access Capacity Building Activities
 Finance Info Land Use Climate Adaptation Other (please specify).....

Q8. Which medium is the most ideal to raise awareness and use of the Agriculture Policy Bank among existing farmers?

- Radio Newspaper Television Websites and portals Social Media (FB, Twitter)
 - Mobile (SMS) Workshops Partnerships with NGOs, ministries and other organizations
 - Other (please specify).....
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Q9. Which medium is the most ideal to raise awareness and use of the Agriculture Policy Bank amongst the youth?

- Radio Newspaper Television Websites and portals Social Media (FB, Twitter)
 - Mobile (SMS) Workshops Partnerships with NGOs, ministries and other organizations
 - Other (please specify).....
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Q10. Would you recommend the Agriculture Policy Bank to others?

- YES NO

If yes, please specify to whom:.....

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**Your participation in this survey is important to us and we value your opinion.
This survey was conducted by the Royal Oceania Institute
as part of ongoing independent research and analysis.**

**Thank you
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