

TONGA CONSULTATIONS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PACIFIC REGIONAL KAVA STRATEGY.

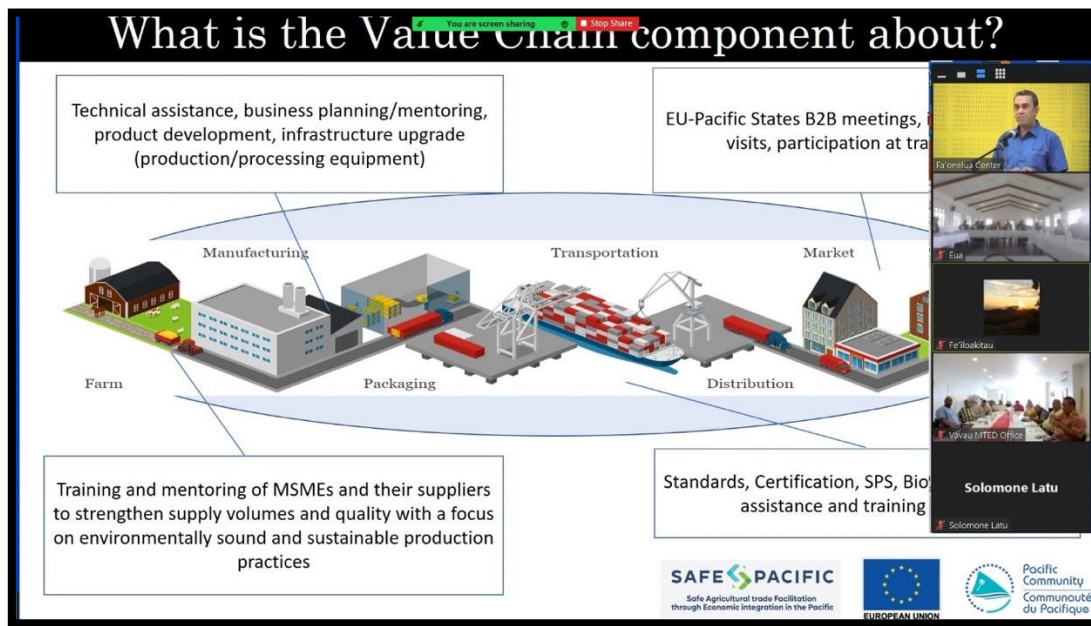
Tonga's National Kava Development Committee, facilitated and collaborated with the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat (PIFS), the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and the Pacific Horticulture and Market Access Plus programme (PHAMA Plus), in conducting a kava national consultations in the Kingdom of Tonga, to assist in the development of the Pacific Regional Kava Strategy. The consultation was conducted between the 24th-28th October 2022.

The consultations rendered progress and action to the 2021 Forum Trade Ministers Meeting's (FTMM) which endorsed the development of the Regional Kava Development Strategy, and the implementation of an agreed Action Plan by the Pacific Regional Kava Working Group meeting endorsed on 27 January 2022.

The Consultations are part of a critical process of soliciting the views of individual Pacific Island countries and kava stakeholders needed to determine the priorities for the Regional Kava Strategy (5-year period), identify and agree on regional support activities to be included in the regional strategy, and areas for resourcing, as well as protecting the geographical indications for kava.



At the opening of the National Consultation workshop, presided over by **Lord Fohe** the Minister for Agriculture, Foods and Forestry emphasized among other things, that Kava has been in Tonga for more than thousand years and the initiative to enhance Kava value addition infrastructure; marketing; investment was critical to the Kingdom. He further cautioned that in the process of developing the regional Kava Strategy, it would be wise to understudy what makes Pacific Kava unique in the global market and focus on actions that enhance the marketing the Pacific Kava in global markets.



The national consultation program included field visits to kava farms, bilateral meetings with farmer groups in Vava'u and Tongatapu and concluded with a hybrid workshop which included stakeholders from 'Eua and Vava'u participating virtually. The Team was able to reach out to over 80 stakeholders during the consultations.

Participants emphasized important key priorities to be reflected in the strategy; the importance of opening commercial markets for the exportation of the Kava to; importance of establishing a fully equipped Kava facility for the processing and packaging of Kava, the quality of the Kava to meet the requirements and standards from the overseas markets and investors to invest in other products and not Kava. They also expressed their needs from national governments, regional and international organizations to assist with finding markets for Kava and to establish a Kava Industry here in Tonga where farmers will sell them their Kava plant after harvest and they will do the processing and packaging plus export. They also suggested to have growers attend the overseas trade expo/shows and connecting growers directly with overseas markets among other things.



During the field visit and bilateral meetings with kava growers they recommended a Kava Peer Learning Platform in the Regional Strategy actions to which the Chief Executive Officer for the Ministry of Trade and Economic Development, Mrs. Distaquaine Tu'ihalama firmly supported. She emphasized that this would enhance practical approach where Kava Interest groups can be facilitated to undertake periodic peer learning visits to other interest Groups establishments and learn first-hand on sight how to manage quality and value addition and marketing strategies that are working. In addition, she suggested exploring the possibility of holding a Kava festival/expo for the region.

The preparations for the National consultations were facilitated by Tonga's National Kava Development Committee which members include representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forest (Chair), Ministry of Trade and Economic Development, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Attorney General's Office, PHAMA Plus, and the EU-SPIRIT Subregional Trade Adviser.