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Opening of MAL's new Tulagi office.



Traditional warriors greet MAL Minister Hon. David Tome.

New agriculture office for Central Islands

After years of working in a cramped office space with up to seven officers sharing a single desk, agriculture officers in the Central Islands Province now have access to more office space with the opening of a new office in February.

The new \$931,000 office in Tulagi is a partnership between the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock and the Central Provincial Government, with the Ministry owning the building while the land is registered to the Province.

The Minister of Agriculture and Livestock, the Hon. David Tome and the Premier of Central Province, Patterson Mae, opened the new office.

The Agriculture Minister says the new building will enhance the Ministry's work in the province in enabling

extension officers to serve farmers better.

The new agriculture building contains eight offices including a large conference room.

Local builders constructed the building with the main materials sourced from the province, apart from roofing iron and fittings.

The building contains offices for Extension, Livestock, Women in Agriculture and the Rural Development Programme.

For the Province's Chief Field Officer, Andrew Kamoto, it was a dream come true after an exhaustive three-year search to find a suitable work space for his officers.

He says the Ministry of Agriculture

and Livestock approved work on the project profile for the building in 2009, and work started in 2011.

The building was completed in late 2012 despite differences between the contractor and the builders. The builders decided to put aside their disagreement with the contractor and complete the project.

"For us this project was about improving the face of Tulagi. It's an important building for the township," said th .

Agriculture officers in the Central Province serve Russell Islands, Savo, Gela and Sandfly.

Central Islands Premier Patterson Mae says the new green building adds to the developments in the old capital. ●

Coffee - Malaita's restoration crop



Coffee, bringing economic activity to the highlands of Central Malaita.

It's been dubbed Malaita's restoration crop.

As produce it is igniting economic activity where major development projects have failed to mobilise economic activity among farmers and the grassroots.

Instead, coffee as a crop has entered the province under the radar and with virtually no fanfare but is driving an agriculture transformation in Central Malaita.

Despite the fact that not a single ounce of coffee has yet to be harvested in Malaita, 300 farmers are already members of the Central Malaita Coffee Growers Association (CMCGA).

Each farmer represents a household, families, tribes and communities.

The biggest impact says the Association's chairman is the movement of people back to the highlands to plant and grow coffee.

"When Christianity came to Central Kwar'ae, people came down from the bushes to settle in the coastal area near the churches and have been here for generations.

"Now for the first time coffee is giving them an economic reason to return to their original land," said Chairman of the Central Malaita Coffee Growers Association, Barnabas Lagwai.

Coffee thrives at high altitude. While many traditional commodity crops such as cocoa and coconut struggle for survival, coffee has found a natural home in the Central Malaita highlands. With coffee fetching \$38/kg compared to cocoa's \$16/kg, Lagwai says

Malaitans have taken up the new crop with a passion.

"This crop is penetrating right down to the grassroots, to the farmers in rural areas."

Areas that were devoid of economic activity are now being offered a new lease of life through agriculture development, giving rural families an option to stay in their homes rather than moving closer to town.

In February, the executives of Malaita's main coffee growers association were in Honiara to pick up the first lot of pulp machines from the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock to allow Malaita growers to stage their first harvest.

At harvesting, farmers can use the machine to break the outer flesh of the fruit and access the coffee bean for drying.

The Association says the machines will be set up in strategic locations in Central Malaita to allow farmers to share it and harvest dried coffee beans.

"Each of our farmers is planting a minimum of 1200 plants; that is much bigger than in other parts of the country. This is because we believe we have the manpower to harvest where other communities might not."

So far 30 lots of coffee plants are flowering and will soon be ready to harvest.

According to the Chairman of the CMCGA, interest in the crop is growing by the day.

He's even had to close the door to

numerous farmers, people wanting to join the association.

"We're maintaining our current membership so we can manage it properly," says Lagwai.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock has been supporting coffee since 2009. It gives support through 'planting subsidies', by providing grants to associations around the country who pay farmers \$2 for every seedling that is planted.

Coffee growing is taking place in East Guadalcanal, West Are'are, West Guadalcanal and Isabel.

The biggest development this year is the start of export by coffee buyers Varivou as a result of the coffee planting campaign.

Martin Jaiki of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock's Research Department says coffee production will continue to grow as more Malaita growers come online.

For the Ministry of Agriculture's Under-Secretary Technical, Jimi Saelea, the ongoing coffee programme marks the success of associations.

"The Ministry's approach is to work with associations to develop commodities. The association become the eyes and hands of the Ministry in the provinces through its network of farmers. It's a win-win situation." ●



CMCGA chairman Barnabas Lagwai with new pulp machines.

Quarantine destroy contaminated goods

Officers from Quarantine's Seaport Unit coordinated the destruction of a container load of perishable goods in February.

The 12-foot container was handed over to Quarantine by the importer after a delay in shipping which led to the container arriving in the country six months after it was dispatched.

The container, which came from New Zealand, contained onions, potatoes, garlic, apples and other perishable goods.

The company's shipping agent says although some of the goods might appear fit for consumption the local business chose to destroy the containers' contents over contamination concerns.



A Quarantine officer destroys contaminated goods at Ranadi.



Perishable goods bound for destruction.

The destruction of goods was carried out at Quarantine's Ranadi facility in the presence of the shipping agent and senior Quarantine staff.

The destruction exercise is among the services that the Quarantine Division offers to the public.

In this case, Quarantine charged the local business \$23,948 for the destruction of goods and \$500 for movement of the container.

Quarantine issued a report along with photographs on the destruction of contents for the company's insurer.

Quarantine Inspector, Jordan Lavia, says extra staff from Seaports and Headquarters had to be drafted in to help with the destruction of the goods.

"We had about 10 staff working on

this. Without an incinerator we had to chop up the goods and burn them with firewood.

"Its an intensive process and one that requires a lot of staff to be on hand for."

The Quarantine Division has been without an incinerator since it was destroyed during the ethnic tension.

"If the incinerator was here it would take a single day and just three staff at the most. But today we have had to request help from headquarters," said Lavia.

The destruction of the container load of perishable goods took four weeks to complete due to lack of staff and bad weather. ●

Agriculture Fact Box

Did you know orange sweet potatoes (kumara) are in high demand overseas for health conscious consumers because of their high carotene content. Carotene produces Vitamin A which lowers the risk of developing cancer or heart disease.

Click here for more.

Agriculture partner DML: cocoa seedlings for Solomon Islands farmers



DML's Change Officer, Sebastian Ilala, at the DML nursery in Lunga.

Since 2004 Direct Management Limited has been supplying high yielding cocoa seedlings to its farmers with the aim of boosting the capacity and quality of cocoa in the country.

To date DML has distributed 750,000 seedlings to farmers in its network.

It's a free service, the only requirement is that farmers who take on new seedlings have to commit to looking after the plants and ensure they grow well.

DML's Change Officer, Sebastian Ilala, says the impact of the seedlings can be seen on national production figures with an annual increase of 1000 tonnes every year since 2008.

"We think this increase can be attributed to the new cocoa varieties being used by farmers and to the Integrated Pest and Disease Management (IPDM) work done by the Cocoa Livelihoods Improvement Project in 2009."

Ilala says apart from the new cocoa varieties and IPDM, little work has been done nationally by the Government

to account for the increase in cocoa production.

Although cocoa is third highest commodities export earner for Solomon Islands, the percentage of high yielding trees is quite low says Ilala.

The majority of cocoa trees in the country were planted at around the time of independence, most trees are underperforming and need to be grafted or cut down and replaced with higher yielding varieties says Ilala.

Every month DML distributes 6000 seedlings; that is up to 72,000 seedlings in one year.

"DML was in the right location to do the nursery because of our land at Lunga and we had road access to deliver to farmers on the Guadalcanal Plains and in Lunga," says Ilala.

The nursery at Lunga is a partnership between Australian cocoa buyer Holland Commodities and DML. Holland Commodities provides much of the funding while DML supplies the labour and the land.

Ilala says DML has the potential to expand its supplies of seedlings to more farmers around the country.

"If the Government is committed to improving cocoa varieties in the country, they should support our operations to expand to other parts of the country.

"We already have a network of farmers in place and we've been doing this for over eight years now."

Ilala says DML's is committed to the nursery because the company sees it as an integral part of the business model, for the company as well as the industry.

"Having improved cocoa varieties is beneficial for everyone on the supply chain, farmers using higher yielding plants will get better returns, exporters will send more cocoa overseas and the buyers will be able to get better quality and quantity of cocoa. Government too will get its share of the pie through export earnings."

Ilala is quick to point out that farmers who have used the seeds have grown their production capacity substantially. One grower, Jems Cocoa Enterprises, has even become an exporter in its own right says Ilala.

He says the biggest indicator of the impact of new cocoa varieties is the 45 per cent increase in production between 2008 and 2011.

"There was an increase of 2000 tonnes in exports over those two years with a value of around \$28.5 million based on today's pricing. Out of this \$9 million went to the Government in taxes and the rest went straight back to the rural farmers." ●



Bilateral talks end with a gift handover.



Bae'ara on MAL's export list.

Pineapple and slippery cabbage targeted for NZ export

Pineapple and slippery cabbage, known locally as bae'ara, have been identified as potential export commodities, during bilateral talks between the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock and the New Zealand Ministry of Primary Industries.

The bilateral talks were held at the Kitano Mendana Hotel, Honiara in late February.

It was agreed, during the talks, that officials from Solomon Islands would begin preparations towards making a submission for market access for pineapple and slippery cabbage.

Nacanieli Waqa, Senior Adviser, Pacific Market Access at the Ministry of Primary Industries in New Zealand says Solomon Islands had previously requested market access for pineapples.

"We have quite an extensive report on pineapple but the data needs to be updated before market access can be granted and exports can start."

For slippery cabbage, MAL's Research Department will need to develop a pest list before a formal request can be made to New Zealand.

The talks also discussed green coconut and cassava.

New Zealand officials say cassava can be exported but it has to be frozen at minus 10 degrees for 10 days ahead of shipment.

The talks also discussed the potential market in New Zealand for Solomon Islands produce, with Auckland's large Pacific Islands community deemed an attractive market.

During the talks, officials said farmers and suppliers have to plan on how to package their produce when they export to New Zealand.

"Rather than sending 20 kg bags of produce think about 2 kg bags so that straight from the wharf it can go to the supermarket, instead of having to be repackaged in New Zealand at higher costs," said Waqa.

He says already there is a big demand for Fiji pineapples that are sweeter than Asian imports. He is confident that Solomon Islands pineapples would attract a similar response in New Zealand.

"I encourage MAL and the government to talk amongst yourselves, set up your system. Do what needs to be done to prepare for export.

"So that the market knows that Solomon Islands is serious about exports." ●

Central Islands' agriculture potential

From its popular variety of sweet pana (lesser yam, *Dioscorea esculenta*) and taro, to its delicious watermelons and growing market for poultry, Central Islands Province is home to a wide array of agriculture activity.

The province encompasses the old capital Tulagi, Gela, Savo, Sandfly and the Russell Islands – a wide number of land types from highlands to sandy shoals.

For the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, Frank Wickham, the province's proximity to Honiara provides it with an ideal market for agriculture producers.

"For farmers in the Central Province, you have access to the biggest market in the country Honiara, which is less than an

hour away by boat.

"You are fortunate to have an available market and you should make a most of the opportunities this provides."

Wickham says the province's potential is unparalleled especially with the presence of one of the largest coconut plantations in the South Pacific, the Russell Islands Plantations Estate Limited (RIPEL).

Although RIPEL's operations have stalled since 2006, Wickham says if the current impasse is resolved and the plantation operations starts up again it should potentially give Central Islands Province agriculture sector the highest income per capita of any province in the country given its relatively small population.

On the ground, MAL's activities in the province have been focused on assisting farmers with cocoa and copra which continue to be popular cash crops.

Central Islands' Chief Field Officer, Andrew Kamoto says in Savo fruit tree, nuts and watermelons are the major agriculture produce.

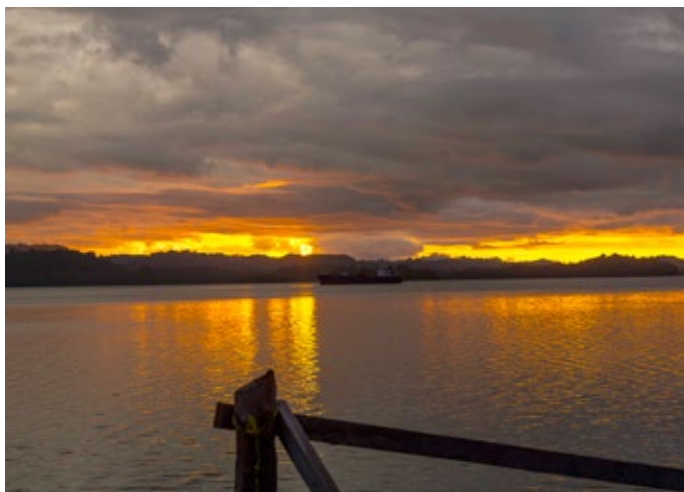
The Hakama Provincial Farm is the main centre for agriculture training in Central Islands and has been used to help train farmers on livestock, especially pig and poultry.

"In addition we have support from the Provincial

Government Support Programme to revive cattle with a \$100,000 grant for Hakama. That's a new initiative we are looking at for the coming year"

MAL is also assessing plans to set up a seed garden at Hakama to find the best variety of taro and encourage its planting in the province.

Kamoto says the Women in Agriculture programme has also been active with the support of 10 projects in the province. The projects were approved last year and materials have been procured and will get off the ground this year. ●



Central Islands Province covers Tulagi Gela, Savo, Sandfly, and Russell Islands.



Central Islands farmers sell their produce at Tulagi Market.

Farmer profile: Pig farmer of Central Islands

Twenty minutes by outboard motor from Tulagi in the tranquil waters of Central Islands Province lies the farm of Thomas Kaboa.

It's one of the main piggeries close to the old capital but a little over five years ago life was very different for its owner.

Kaboa was a chainsaw operator working in the bushes around Central Province until one fateful day a work accident landed him in hospital.

After surgery and a stay in hospital Kaboa looked for a different form of livelihood, a safer way to earn a living, feed his family and look after his children.

That was when he got into pig farming. Kaboa used it as a means of recuperating and getting back on his feet. Since then he hasn't looked back and each year his farm gets stronger and stronger.

These days his customers come from



From chainsaw operator to pig farmer - Thomas Kaboa.

Tulagi and other parts of Central Islands for his pigs.

At most he keeps up to 15 pigs in his pen. When Agrikalsa Nius visited his Central Islands farm in February, he was down to around eight pigs and

a handful of piglets after a period of heavy Christmas sales.

While most farmers struggle to find feed for their pigs Kaboa makes the most of his natural environment using the small fish found in the nearby estuary to supplement his pigs' daily meals.

"Luckily I have lots of supplies of katukatu which we catch by net. It is mixed with cassava or pana with meal run."

"To feed the pigs completely a local diet is not possible because there's not enough supply."

For Kaboa pig farming provides a very important form of financial support. Every year he prepares to sell his pigs with one purpose in mind: the payment of school fees for his children.

With his eldest studying in Honiara at the University of South Pacific Centre, another is in form one and form three Kaboa schedules his sales to coincide

with the start of the school year and the middle of the academic year when fees are due.

It's a system that has worked well for ... and meets the demand for education.

The business of running a piggery hasn't been too difficult says Kaboa, "Of course when you start there is a number of challenges but as long as you have one male and one sow, that is pretty much it. They mate and have piglets and you are in business."

Kaboa started with a single sow which he bought from White River in Honiara and was inseminated at the Hakama Provincial Farm.

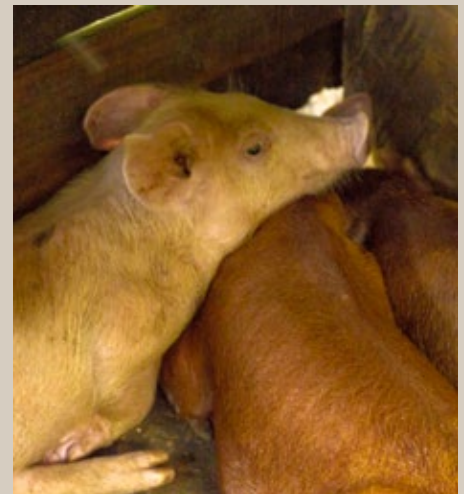
"I started small but I grew my farm over the years."

With no formal agriculture training Kaboa learnt how to look after pigs from pure interest and by asking for advice from agriculture officers in Tulagi.

"I asked officers in Tulagi to come and visit the farm whenever they could but when they were too busy to come I'd go over and find out what I needed to know, especially when the pigs got sick."

Support from the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock include \$6,185 that Kaboa used to expand his fencing and pig pen.

With his children returning to Honiara for school, Kaboa is preparing his stock for the next round of school fees, come mid year. ●



Generating a livelihood through pig farming.

Saviours of MAL

From out in the provinces to headquarters, the Rural Development Programme, Component Two team have earned themselves the reputation of being the saviours of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock.

It's a well-deserved praise considering how the assistance from the RDP team has touched many in the agriculture sector from officials to farmers. The most recent, agriculture officers in the Central Islands, where RDP stepped in to fund the completion of a much needed agriculture office.

It's a common scenario of RDP stepping in to save the day and one that has earned the RDP team its auspicious reputation.

Since 2008 the team headed by Gabriel Hiele and Dr Mark Johnston have been working on strengthening MAL.

"After the ethnic tension the Ministry was really stagnant, basically it was starved off funds and morale was pretty low," said Johnston.

"Our job was to come in and to revamp the Ministry and get programmes working again," added Hiele.

RDP's Component Two Programme is funded by the European Union, AusAid, World Bank and the International Fund For Agriculture. In 2013 the Solomon Islands Government joined the funding support with \$30million commitment to keep RDP rolling for another two years. The programme is managed by the World Bank and will run until 2014.

The success of the teamwork between the pair has seen a resurgence in agriculture projects and more importantly a boost in the morale of MAL staff.

"Our RDP work is a partnership with the Ministry as the Permanent Secretary is the accounting officer," says Hiele.



Gabriel Hiele and Mark Johnston work on the RDP hilux.

"The Ministry decides on what programme to follow while RDP facilitates the programme, depending on the need, be it funding, technical assistance or capacity building."

For Dr Johnston, one of the most rewarding parts of the job is in providing much needed RDP support to smallholder farmers and the grassroots.

"This involves working closely with rural communities to identify their agricultural needs and how best to achieve it," says Dr Johnston.

Last year RDP provided support to communities in all the provinces on improving aspects of smallholder agriculture. Closer to headquarters, RDP has taken a lead role in funding different training needs for MAL's staff.

With their office situated on the top floor of MAL's headquarters, the pair say working from within the Ministry's walls has its advantages such as making the partnership with MAL even stronger.

Hiele is the coordinator, controlling the allocation of funds and management of programmes while Johnston is the technical adviser.

Between the pair a team of international experts are brought in from time to time depending on the need on the ground.

As for Hiele and Dr Johnston both can be found out in the field as well as at the headquarters.

Hiele is well known in the agriculture sector with 15 years of experience at the School of Natural Resources at the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education.

He joined RDP at the start of the programme in 2008. His blend of agriculture and education background plus his rural business qualification has made him a natural fit for his job in overseeing RDP's agriculture work.

"When I was a lecturer in college it was all theory. Coming to RDP working under the programme enabled me to apply what I had been teaching in practise," said Hiele.

Johnston is also common face in Pacific agriculture having carved his reputation in the sector with experience in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands.

He has an array of qualifications and agriculture experience

from his crop physiology study at James Cook University, Queensland to his seven years as a coffee farmer in Australia. He gave up the farm life to work in Papua New Guinea first in Lae at Unitech before becoming the director of research at PNG's National Agriculture Research Institute. Followed by stints in Australia looking at sustainable sugar production before returning to PNG as an AusAid adviser and joining RDP in 2008.

RDP's major project for 2013 is the review and restructure of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock.

This task being handled by RDP Advisor Malcolm Bell and will set the next phase of development for the Ministry.

"It's quite a bit of work and will involve RDP working closely with stakeholders with the aim of streamlining the Ministry and make it efficient in living up to its mandate," said Dr Johnston.

Hiele says the other big task for 2013 will be on RDP assessing the impacts of its work and how their support is impacting farmers in increasing farming activities, production and if the ideas are being spread throughout communities. Hiele says the assessment will consider how RDP support is improving the lives of Solomon Islanders. ●

Forty-two get Paravet qualification

After five months of intensive training, 42 Paravets were awarded certificates by the Minister of Agriculture and Livestock, the Hon. David Tome, at an awards ceremony at Jina's Restaurant in Honiara.

The Paravets received training on how to treat livestock and to give advice to farmers on animal health.

Participants include agriculture extension officers, members of community groups, NGOs and farmers.

The latest batch of graduates brings the total number of trained Paravets in the country to 90.

The Minister of Agriculture and Livestock, the Hon. David Tome praised the graduates, saying their skills will boost the health of livestock in the country.

The Agriculture and Livestock Minister challenged the recipients to serve farmers of the country.

"You are our eyes, ears and hands in the field. Use your skills to support farmers to the best of your ability as farmers are the backbone of our beloved Solomon Islands."

MAL's Chief Veterinary Officer, Dr Emma Rooke, says that being a paravet is a journey of life-long learning.

"The training comprised of a mix of theory, exams, assignments and practical work but paravets will continue to learn on the job in the field."

While the exams were carried out in Honiara, assignments were carried out in the provinces.



Paravets prepare to receive their certificates.



MAL's Chief Vet Emma Rooke congratulates new Paravets.

Livestock Deputy Director, Hearly Atupule, said livestock officers could now treat diseases and give advice to farmers on the health care of livestock.

Atupule says extension officers need to have a high level of general knowledge as they are mostly alone in the field and

don't have other agriculture specialists to turn to.

The training was carried out with funding from the Rural Development Programme's Component Two which also provided technical assistance. ●

Interview with Paravet graduates

James Hagi

Area Manager, World Vision Solomon Islands

Malaita Area Project

World Vision deals with livestock through its livelihood projects, so the training I received will be used in assisting people raising pigs, chickens and poultry. The Paravet training has provided me with much needed technical skills. Now I can do basic assessment on illness such as diarrhoea, identify the cause, recommend drugs and most importantly advise farmers on preventive measures.



Vincent Iromea

Extension Officer, Atori Malaita

The best part about the training was learning new skills and picking up practical experiences that will help me out in the field.

Although I have over 30 years experience in agriculture the training introduced me to new areas in livestock that will improve the health care of livestock.

The Paravet training has really boosted my confidence to assist farmers and has renewed my enthusiasm in my work with MAL.

As part of the disease surveillance group this will help the Government to keep track of disease and outbreaks in the country.



Dr Ian Grant

Trainer, RDP

The aim of this training was to develop the ability of Paravets to stand on their own and undertake disease investigation and work with farmers. It allows them to be prepared for animal emergencies and develop their skills in a whole range of areas.

One of the highlights was the field trip where we spoke to farmers on animal health and farm operations. We looked at the opportunity to improve management and record keeping as well as general husbandry.

The other challenging area for Paravets was to develop a survey to find out information about what is happening at farm level in their areas of operation to enable better decisions to be made on animal health problems.



Hearly Atupule

Deputy Director Livestock

Paravet training is a new area and one that is important to develop in order to assist farmers around the country.

Stage Two of the training looked at surveillance and developed the skills of Paravets to carry out surveillance work.

It is important that officers, mostly agriculture extension officers who stay in rural areas, have these skills as they are the implementers and are at the frontline.



MAL organisational reform – column 1

One of the major developments taking place at MAL this year is an organisational review and restructuring of the Ministry.

The process is aimed at improving the efficiency and operations of MAL in delivering agriculture services to the people of Solomon Islands.

At its meeting on 18 February, MAL's Senior Management Team agreed for RDP Specialist Advisor, Malcolm Bell, to begin the process.

Bell says there will be a three-fold approach focusing on: organisational development by reviewing MAL's operations and how it functions as a ministry; a review on the Ministry's capacity to deliver its programmes; and developing the capacity of MAL's senior managers.

Bell who is well known in the Ministry for his training work outlines the process below.

Organisational development

The first part of the process is a change review and planning process known as Organizational Development.

"It will be aimed at stimulating discussion and gaining agreements on matters such as where MAL should be going, what its priorities are, how well it is set up for the future, what structure is best, is an intervention needed anywhere, what should be done to increase effectiveness, and what changes are necessary.

"The process will also consider work systems, reporting lines, job descriptions and work-process coordination. Staff consultations and involvement will be an important part of the design process."

Capacity Assessment

A key input to the organizational development will be a review of the capacity of MAL to deliver its programmes. Senior officers including heads of division and provincial chiefs will be consulted in the exercise.

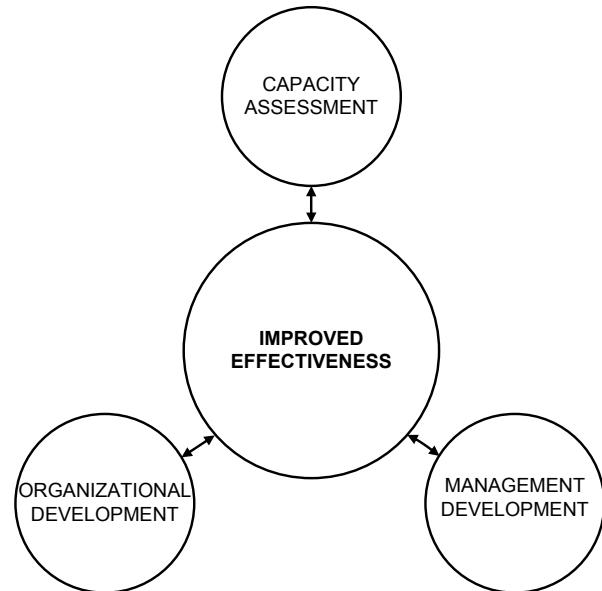


MAL headquarters.

Management Development

Management training will be carried out with MAL's senior management team involving aspects of Organisation Development and Capacity Assessment.

The whole process is portrayed in the diagram below:



MAL's Senior Management Team will participate in the process under the leadership of the Under-Secretary Administration, David Patternot.

Patternot says the review and restructure will greatly improve operations at MAL starting with better clarity and understanding for incumbents, supervisors, managers and decision makers.

"Proper balance for jobs between specialisation and multi-skilling; Opportunity for managers to ensure order and discipline; Unity of command and direction down the structure and professional and situational communication up the structure."

Further he added that "the process would ensure that jobs are designed with authority and responsibility and systems for delegation and accountability; appropriate level of centralisation or decentralisation determined to ensure the work and decisions occur at the most appropriate level and location."

Amongst the outcomes would be an "appropriate number of organisational layers and span of control; work coordination and systems to achieve efficiency and effectiveness; organisational structure designed to be adaptable yet stable and an organisational climate receptive to job security, equity and fairness, open communication, and work harmony.

A number of internal and external stakeholders will be consulted and regular reports to MAL staff will be provided through Agirkalsa Nius.

MAL Permanent Secretary, Frank Wickham, will chair a Steering Committee that will oversee the process. ●

Salt affects Santa Cruz fruit trees



Houses completely destroyed in Manoputi Village along with salt affected trees.

An initial assessment on agriculture damage caused by February's tsunami has found that fruit trees in Santa Cruz have been extensively damaged by salt while food gardens suffered some damage from landslides and earthquakes.

Fruit trees that are traditionally grown in the coastal plains bore the brunt of tsunami with waves caused by an 8.0 magnitude earthquake reaching far inland.

Food gardens that are situated on higher ground in the bush areas suffered less damage.

MAL Chief Veterinary Officer, Dr Emma Rooke, who was part of a team that visited the site says a more detailed agriculture assessment will need to be done at a later date.

She said many of the tsunami survivors are still traumatised and unable to provide detailed information at such an early date.

A survey is underway in Santa Cruz where agriculture officers report extensive damage to coconut trees and plantations.

"Fruit trees have been extensively salt affected and, one week after the tsunami, are dropping leaves and fruit."

Affected species include coconut, five-corner, akwa (*Pometia pinnata*), cut nut, breadfruit, betel nut, lemon, guava, banana, pawpaw, pineapple and sago palm.

Breadfruit is a staple food and although not yet ripe, villagers collected fallen fruit for drying and preservation.

Agriculture infrastructure such as cocoa driers/fermenters were also damaged.

Some gardens were damaged primarily by the earthquake with movement of earth exposing root crops. Others were affected by landslides.

Dr Rooke accompanied the World Society for Protection of Animals to Temotu to gauge the damage to livestock and animals.

"At the time of the tsunami, some farmers report cutting their pigs free while some report that the force of the wave broke some tethers. After the tsunami, some animals were found dead with the rest presumed to be roaming free or to have washed away."

Among the recommendations in the report was a call for the deployment of more MAL officers to support provincial extension officers who had experienced the tsunami themselves and were suffering from trauma.

Officers would also carry out a detailed survey of crop and livestock damage.

The report suggested the use of officers that had experience from the 2007 tsunami in the Western Province. ●



Talking to villagers at Nea bush camp.



Lionel from Quarantine talks to Manoputi Villagers.

Quick response to Temotu earthquake and tsunami

When a deadly magnitude eight earthquake struck Temotu, the tsunami waves it created brought devastation and destruction to communities of Santa Cruz.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock were among the core ministries that were mobilised by the National Disaster Management Office to be part of the disaster assessment team.

MAL's role was to assess the impact of the disaster on the agriculture sector in Temotu and its impact on food supply.

The disaster struck on Wednesday. By Thursday afternoon a member of MAL was onboard the Police Patrol Boat travelling with the disaster assessment team, made up of different ministries to Temotu.

While the mobilisation was smooth it was behind the scenes where MAL staff worked rapidly to get clearance and funds to support their officer.

Under updated NDMO laws, each ministry is responsible for funding their own personnel activities in the field.

MAL's Director of Extension Services, Michael Ho'ota, says when the request came in from the NDMO, the response was prioritised.

Ho'ota says in total it took only an hour turnaround

time for MAL to organise itself and source funding.

The Chief Field Officer for Temotu, George Suhara, who was on holiday in Honiara was immediately recalled for duty and dispatched to the disaster zone.

"The first thing we did was to set up a crisis meeting where we used the experience of our officers to map out the activities on the ground. What the officer will do when he hits the ground, where will he travel to and what he would need to do.

"This was budgeted and passed onto the Corporate Services for processing."

From there it was to the Under-Secretary Administration to clear before being passed onto the Ministry of Finance and Treasury.

MoFT were aware of the situation so the funds were cleared very fast.

It was only at the bank where there was a delay to get the money out because of the long line.

Ho'ota said by the time the patrol boat left Honiara, the agriculture officer was aboard with enough funds to carry out his field activities.

"It was quite an achievement to be able to clear the bureaucratic obstacles and to mobilise our officer on the ground." ●

Stone Oven Baked Stuffed Pumpkin

Ingredients

One medium size pumpkin
Tomatoes
Slippery cabbage
Shallots
Onion Garlic
Capsicum
Coconut cream
Curry powder
Chicken pieces or fillets

Method

Cut off the top of the pumpkin and scrape out the seeds.

In a large bowl mix vegetables and the coconut cream. Add the chicken and curry powder and place mixture into the pumpkin. Season with salt and pepper. Cover with the top of the pumpkin cut off earlier and wrap with banana leaves. Bake in hot stone oven for one hour.

For more information on stories in this newsletter or agriculture enquiries contact the Agriculture Information Unit within the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock.

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For the latest agriculture news and stories catch Famas Kona every week on the national broadcaster SIBC at 8.30pm on Monday and 7.30pm on Wednesday.

The Agriculture Information Unit is the public relations arm of the Ministry of Agriculture & Livestock. Its role is to disseminate agriculture information to the public and farming communities using radio, newspapers, television, online and print media.

Library

The Solomon Islands National Agriculture Information Centre is now open.

The library has a major collection of books and information on Solomon Islands agriculture. Members of the public and students are encouraged to visit the library for information on agriculture in the Solomon Islands and around the world.

Opening hours

Monday & Wednesday

1:30pm - 4:00pm

Friday

9:00am - 11:30am