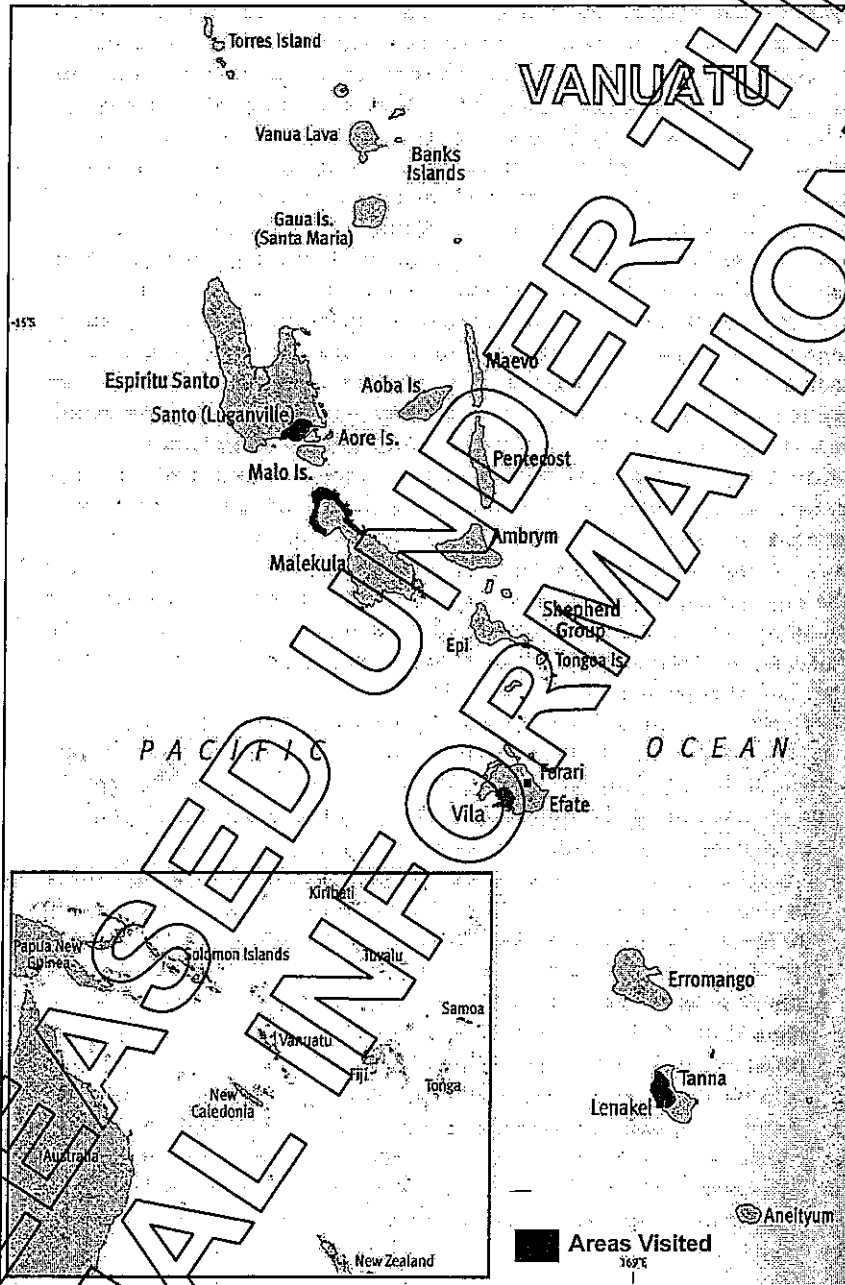


# REVIEW OF THE VANUATU FARM SUPPORT ASSOCIATION (FSA)



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## Executive Summary

### Background

Agriculture provides employment for the vast majority of people in the rural sector who make up approximately 80% of the total population. In urban areas, where possible, many residents continue to grow a portion of their food needs. Agriculture is and will remain into the foreseeable future the principal field of employment and source of livelihood.

### Positive FSA Achievements

With the relatively small resources at its disposal FSA addresses the broader issues facing the position of agriculture in Vanuatu with vision and determination. Unfortunately it was not possible to make a participatory assessment of the effectiveness of FSA work but activities observed in the field and comments volunteered by reliable informants give substance to the view that "farmers helping farmers" is more than a slogan. Besides fostering a very positive and supportive relationship with DARD FSA has undertaken valuable work designed to:

- promote the standing of agriculture in the wider community;
- off-set rural-urban migration by making it possible for farmers to secure a better livelihood and income from farming;
- develop sustainable agriculture by keeping alive knowledge relating to conservation farming relating to agro-forestry, alley cropping and the use of legumes;
- encourage food security (higher yielding root crops including wild yam);
- mentor cash cropping (spices, especially vanilla);
- secure funds so it can engage in land stabilization and rehabilitation work.

Work on the NZAID funded project with the RTCs 'Increasing Rural Incomes through Farm Innovations (IRI)' has run reasonably well to now. Work commenced with attention being given to FSA funded RTCs and women's groups on Tanna and since then units on Malekula listed under the NZAID GFA have been contacted. Promised visits have been made and inputs provided on time. Synergies with individual farmers explored in the course of field visits illustrated the hands-on approach of FSA and their commitment to building networks, spreading information relating to the processing (curing) and marketing of vanilla (not included in the GFA) and challenging students to take agriculture more seriously.

### Matters for Attention

#### IRI Performance

There are several shortfalls. Staff are being asked to do more than they can easily manage. IRI is not the only project currently on FSA books. Apart from on-going work with the spice programme FSA is running an FAO funded vegetable production project that engages them directly with farmers.

Management is a serious challenge. FSA has not used the GFA grant to optimize either efficiency or effectiveness. Reports are handed in late. Despite the call for more printed information the budget allocation to this aspect of their work is under spent. For reasons that remain unclear the allocation to administration has not been used to employ either book keeping or managerial assistance.

***Institutional Strengthening.***

If FSA had a stronger administrative and managerial capability that was less dependent on a few individuals, a clear ideological foundation provided in the form of a written constitution this would result in better planning. If FSA was a legal entity as a registered trust, association or NGO this would give potential donors more confidence in considering FSA as a partner. If funding became easier, FSA would have greater continuity of work, be able to initiate its own activities rather than fall back so frequently on contract work, its contribution to agricultural development spread more evenly over a longer period and smooth the path toward objectives in a manner that would avoid the start-stop nature of its present situation.

**Recommendations**

**NZAID.** It is recommended that NZAID give serious consideration to further investment in both the current work and future sustainability of FSA.

1. Get FSA to make a quarterly oral report to the programme office in advance of submitting a written report.
2. Negotiate a reduction in the geographical spread of target islands listed in Schedule One of the GFA
3. Clarify for FSA exactly what it must do to meet NZAID Cross-Cutting Issues
4. Provide appropriate managerial advice to enable FSA to better handle administrative tasks.
5. Assist FSA to think through the implications of employing a female extension worker by asking the advice of Dorosday Kenneth.
6. If FSA chooses to consider the future alternatives (below), provide FSA with the wherewithal to seek legal and planning advice to explore the implications of these.
7. Consider employing a consultant who could provide managerial advice and over the term of his/her appointment act as a facilitator to run a series of strategic planning sessions with FSA and its friends

**FSA.** It is recommended that FSA

8. Renegotiate the GFA to reduce the spread of target islands, make a case for including Tanna, and discuss what NZAID could do to help FSA improve their book keeping, report writing and record keeping.
9. Employ a woman extension officer to enhance the effectiveness of their work with women's groups. The implications of such a step should be discussed with Dorosday Kenneth
10. Employ or contract an administration person with book keeping skills who is literate enough in the use of computers to keep accounts, enter monitoring information and store data
11. Occasionally use participatory tools to critically monitor whether their "farmers helping farmers" approach is working in a fully interactive way.
12. Hold talks with Berton Jones of VRDTCA to coordinate the preparation of agriculture resource materials that will enable partner RTCs to do a better job of teaching the subject.

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13. Talk with James Wasi about working with DARD to publish agriculture teaching resources, both those developed with VRDTCA and those that are a part of FSA extension work.
14. Seek the advice of NZAID managers on what FSA must do to meet NZAID Cross-Cutting Issues.
15. Make sure the names and skills of FSA staff are included on the national list of experts being prepared as part of the Technical Vocational Education and Training Strengthening Program.
16. Within this year and with the help of a facilitator, friends and colleagues prepare a strategic plan for the FSA and delineate the preferred future of the Association.
17. The current goal and objectives should be evaluated as part of this review and the resulting text written into draft foundation documents
18. With the help of a business advisor adopt a programme management system based on an annual cycle of monitoring, evaluation (learning) and planning.
19. Put in place a new institutional arrangement that will provide both a framework for increased funding and enhance FSA's capacity to take on new work. The following alternatives are offered for consideration.
  - *Alternative 1. Steady as it goes.* FSA continues to work as it does now as an informal voluntary agency, and make the necessary changes to meet basic NZAID and other likely donors requirements relating to matters like basic documentation and Cross-Cutting Issues.
  - *Alternative 2 - NGO* The most direct path to establishing a firm professional identity would be to transform the institutional capacity of FSA from the current team of extension workers into a stand alone, fully registered NGO with its own office, administrative and legal infrastructure.
  - *Alternative 3 SAPV Umbrella Proposal,* work with SAPV to build on and formalise the current relationship. Under such an arrangement the SAPV may like to consider establishing two subordinate units. Under this arrangement:
    - SAPV would continue in its present form open to those who wish to pay the joining fee. SAPV would form an umbrella organisation consisting of FSA and a consulting unit.
    - FSA would become affiliated as a semi - independent, not for profit, outreach trust, or agricultural extension organisation with its own board, owned by the SAPV. SAPV would provide accommodation, administrative services such as reception, book keeping and the like for FSA and SAPV might like to also consider forming a,
    - Consulting Unit with registered consultants, listed and approved by the SAPV (and the TVET) who could choose to undertake either paid voluntary work for the FSA and, for an appropriate fee, provide professional commercial services to visiting aid agencies, commercial enterprises and the like. A portion of this fee would go towards meeting the administrative costs of the SAPV and work of FSA.

## Glossary

AGS	Rural Infrastructure and Agro-Industries Division of FAO
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CDE	Centre for the Development of Enterprise (Brussels)
CRP	Comprehensive Reform Programme (Vanuatu, 1993)
CUSO	Now CUSO-VSO Canadian member of the North American international VSO Federation
DARD	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organisation, United Nations
FSA	Farm Support Association
GEF-UNDP	United Nations Development Programme small enterprise grant fund
IBSRAM	International Board for Soil Research and Management
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IDG	International Development Group, Group within New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade which controls the NZAID programme
IFOAM	International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements
IRI	Increasing Rural Incomes through Farming Innovations Project
MAQFF	Ministry of Agriculture, Quarantine, Forestry & Fisheries
MFAT	New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
NARES	National Agricultural Research and Extension Systems
NGO	Non Government Organisation
NZAID	New Zealand International Assistance Programme
PSA	Plantation Support Association
PTC	Plantation Training Centre, Montmaro, Efate
SAPV	Syndicat Agricole et Pastoral de Vanuatu
UNELCO	Union Electrique du Vanuatu
NZODA	New Zealand Overseas Development Assistance (Used before NZAID)
PAA	Priorities and Action Agenda 2006-2015
PLA	Participatory Learning and Action
POPACA	Projet d'Organisation des Producteurs Agricoles pour la Commercialisation Associative
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
REDI	Rural Economic Development Initiative project
SPC	South Pacific Commission
IPGRI	International Plant Genetic Resources Institute
VAC	Vanuatu Agricultural College
VQLD	Vanuatu Quarantine and Livestock Department
VARTC	Vanuatu Agriculture Research and Technical Centre
VRDTCA	Vanuatu Rural Development Training Centre Association
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training Sector Strengthening Program
DSAP	Development of Sustainable Agriculture in the Pacific
RPFS-FAO	Regional Project for Food Security-FAO

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The author would like to thank all those who in the course of his visit so generously gave their time, information, advice, and considered opinions on the matters discussed in this review. The review was an extended collaboration with Peter Kaoh but I must take full responsibility for the way in which that information he provided or facilitated was interpreted and is presented here. As part of an on-going learning process I welcome comments and corrections [john.mckinnon@kinsa.co.nz](mailto:john.mckinnon@kinsa.co.nz)

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## A. BACKGROUND

1. Arrangements were made for a "joint review of FSA's work [back to 1990 and] within the first year" (Appendix 1, Point 1) of a three year Grant Funding Arrangement (GFA) signed between NZAID<sup>1</sup> and the FSA in November 2008. This review, scheduled for September – November 2009 was delayed by a medical emergency. The task was rescheduled and carried out between 13 March and 10 April, 2010 a total of 27 days in Vanuatu.
2. Rescheduling to the next most convenient time for FSA moved the visit into the end of the wet cyclone season. As a consequence several planned visits had to be abandoned on-route, one to north Tanna (muddy road) and the other Pektel Rural Training Centre (RTC) northwest Malekula (flooded river). Of the six RTCs FSA has worked with using NZAID funding only two were visited, both on Malekula (Ngaim RTC, Uripiv Island; Morobian RTC, Wowo). Three projects visited on Tanna have been funded by FSA from their own resources (Lomae RTC, Napit RTC in Middle Bush; and Lorakou not far from Lenakel). Only one women's group was visited (Brenue, not far from Lakatoro, Malekula).

### Purpose & Objectives

3. FSA wanted the review to make an assessment of their work over the past two decades that would provide them with an independent evaluation that might be used to:
  - recommend FSA's work to other donors and extension agencies;
  - further promote proven innovations developed and/or trialed in Vanuatu over the years and make them more readily available to farmers;
  - lead to the wider use of sustainable agricultural practices that reward farmers with better returns; and,
  - suggest ways in which FSA's work might be improved.
4. NZAID had several objectives (outlined in the GFA Appendix 1) to review the current MFAT funded FSA work plan, where necessary adjust it, and give attention to "informal plans for a longer term partnership between FSA and NZAID". As part of this work FSA activities would be subject to examination under the protocols to which NZAID works including:
  - OECD/ DAC Evaluation Criteria relating to effectiveness, efficiency (including timely and optimum use of human and capital resources), relevance to farmer needs and government planning priorities, sustainability of introduced innovations, impact of the investment (Appendix 2: 39-40);

<sup>1</sup> Since 2010 NZAID is used to describe New Zealand's programme for international aid and development rather than the group that manages the programme. The NZAID programme is managed by the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT). NZAID remains the acronym by which the aid programme is known.

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- NZAID Cross – Cutting Issues relating to humans rights, gender equality, environmental sustainability, peace building, conflict prevention, governance, HIV/AIDS and disabilities (Appendix 2: 40-41);
- Meeting the five Objectives written into the proposed *Participatory Evaluation Plan* (Appendix 2: 41-44) prepared in advance of the consultant's arrival in Vanuatu in negotiation with the NZAID Evaluation Unit which includes the rationale to place FSA work in the Bennett Hierarchy in which "Evidence of program impact becomes stronger as the hierarchy is ascended" (Bennett 1975: 10).

### Methodology

5. The review was carried out jointly by Dr John McKinnon for NZAID and Mr Peter Kaoh for FSA. Field visits were made to Malekula (4 overnights), Santo (3) and Tanna (3). The balance of the consultants' time (17 overnights) was spent largely in Port Vila visiting interested parties and writing the first draft of this report for circulation to, and discussion with the Vanuatu Steering Committee<sup>2</sup> before the NZAID consultant left Vanuatu.
6. The visits around Vanuatu were scheduled and facilitated by Peter Kaoh who:
  - accompanied the consultant throughout the visit;
  - arranged village stop-overs and visits to farmers, government officers, NGO staff and other interested people;
  - where necessary provided translation from English to Bislama;
  - listened to critical comments made by the consultant throughout the tour and provided informed feed-back; and,
  - was himself a major source of information on the work of FSA.
7. To allow for open discussion Peter did not participate in most interviews. People interviewed spoke critically and were constrained neither by loyalty nor fear of offence to state their views about what they had received and what they wanted from FSA. Much of the advice given to the visiting consultant was written into this report and first discussed with him.
8. When the review proposal was written it was the visiting consultants opinion that the work of FSA could best be evaluated by following a participatory approach using tools drawn from Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) in which communities of client farmers would be asked to:-
  - Prepare a social map so the socioeconomic and well-being ranking of beneficiary households could be identified to test for bias towards the better off and those most capable of helping themselves;
  - construct a Venn diagram to give an institutional position for FSA, RTC's and women's groups to find out where they sit within the community and what people think of them;
  - use pair-wise ranking and matrix scoring to prioritise and rank FSA's innovations within the context of crop and husbandry choices made by farmers themselves rather than what FSA considers, if not best for

<sup>2</sup> For NZAID: Jimmy Nipo. For FSA: Charles Rogers, Peter Koah.



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farmers, what FSA happens to be in a position to offer as proven technologies.

9. Very soon after the consultant started face to face discussions with FSA it became apparent that FSA did not support the use of PLA tools as originally planned and it was agreed that they would only be used selectively as time and relationships permitted.<sup>3</sup> As it turned out the places in which provision had been made to stage participatory exercises could not be reached because of a flooded river (Pektel RTC, northwest Malekula) and poor road conditions (north Tanna). The following observations were made in the course of early visits which anticipated findings and became part of an incremental approach in which the interaction between deliberately pursued tasks and the existential realities of fieldwork constantly changed the platform on which the evaluation was conducted.

- FSA staff may not be familiar with PLA/PRA approaches or tools but nevertheless the attitudes and behaviours they bring to the field and the willingness of field staff to share information, living conditions, and as ni-Vanuatu, respect local customs and practices, is exemplary.
- Field staff visit rural areas as holders of special knowledge, experts whose job it is to share this information with those less well informed: what in participatory discourse is called a top-down approach. The relationship is between the bearer of special knowledge and those who lack it. All interactions observed were marked by a mutual familiarity and respect.
- In the past FSA has worked with clusters of farmers and villages but always as an agency wanting to share special agricultural knowledge rather than as a development agency faced with the challenge of finding out what people want. As a farmers organization FSA listens to farmers and on the basis of this on-going dialogue assumes it knows what farmers want. The consultant would have welcomed the opportunity to check this assumption.
- The FSA definition of the term farmer is open and clients may range from an urban dweller willing to join the Projek Belong Ek and invest in egg layers or isolated vanilla growers looking for help with the curing and marketing of a special crop such as vanilla.
- The Spice Network, a group of more than 200 certified organic producers spread over seven islands is FSA's forte. Within this group the cultivation of vanilla is the most prominent. FSA provides an umbrella organization that links small holder producers as far away as Tanna with a benevolent commercial enterprise Venui Vanilla<sup>4</sup> on Santo run by Piero Bianchessi. Apart from extension advice on cultivation, care and curing of vanilla FSA works as a facilitator and buyer which links producers to the market.

<sup>3</sup> PRA is known in Vanuatu. The NZ funded RSTP (c.1995-1999) used it extensively. The DSAP project in which FSA became an important partner commenced work in 2003 with PRA exercises. It has been used as a planning tool by agencies such as the Foundation for the Peoples of the South Pacific (FSP). FSA has always been more comfortable with agricultural work of a more technical nature.

<sup>4</sup> Venui Vanilla subsequently told the visiting consultant that it "is very hard to quantify the international market, particularly the organic one where you have a very large number of small buyers. The last price they were working to was currently fluctuating between "50 to 60 USD LANDED in Europe (packaging and freight included)" (Piero Bianchessi in an email to John McKinnon 23/04/2010

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- Assistance is given without regard for the wealth or lack of wealth of the client but a closer examination of 'beneficiaries' would likely show that it is the better educated, the better off who are most interested in working with FSA.
- The RTC's included in the FSA's International Development Group – NZAID funded project, Increasing Rural Incomes Through Farming Innovations (IRI) were chosen for the priority they give to agricultural training and are largely located in areas in which FSA has worked before.
- At least two field visits provided what could have been an opportunity to work with RTC students to do a scoring exercise but they are young, have little knowledge of previous FSA work, and speeches of welcome, brief lectures promoting a higher profile for agriculture and the silence of students advised against any likely success from such a short term engagement.
- Good participatory work must be negotiated ahead of time rather than announced and commenced immediately. The fact that FSA had several months warning but did not act to prepare the ground for the proposed PLA work is more a comment on how they work than a demonstration of neglect. Their attitude, behaviour and wish to share may stand with the best of PLA values but PLA tools are not listed among the skills they bring to extension work.

10. A decision was taken to work with traditional methods such as direct observation of farmer and trial fields, interviews, focus group discussions and review all available documentation, although this meant largely working with received opinion rather than independently gathering objective data for triangulation. As has been pointed out by those engaged in the evaluation of extension work - 'the difficulty and cost of obtaining evidence of accomplishments increases' as the evaluator attempts the ascent of the Bennett Hierarchy (1975) from basic inputs to implementation, implementation to farmer participation, farmer participation to establishing farmer reaction and opinion of what has been done, farmer reaction to establishing what knowledge, attitudes, skills, and aspirations farmers have acquired and so forth (see Appendix 2: 11). Nevertheless, the consultant believes he has recorded observations of substance in which he holds a high level of confidence and welcomes questions, critical comments and correction.

## B. CONTEXT

11. Farming is of primary importance to the people of Vanuatu. Although government economic summaries highlight the central role of tourism with the principal contribution of 72% made to GDP by the services sector<sup>5</sup> and only 18% generated by agriculture,<sup>6</sup> the monetary bias of national accounts does not indicate the true social and political significance of farming to the nation. Approximately 80% of the population of Vanuatu live in rural areas and are involved in agricultural activities which provide the larger part of domestic food needs. ni-Vanuatu resident in urban and peri-urban informal housing continue, where possible, to farm and supplement what are often quite marginal cash incomes (Chung & Hall 2002).
12. The urban market for agricultural produce is growing with the size of the towns and though limited to Port Vila and Luganville has contributed to monetary economic growth. Vanuatu has a youthful, fast growing population of which 60% is under the age of 25 years. Young people are mobile and fertility rates are high. Movement from rural to urban areas combined with this high fertility rate has resulted in a very high urban growth rate in excess of 4%. In 1999, the urban population was 40,100, or 21 per cent of the national population. In 1989 the urban total reached 26,300 people. Chung and Hall estimated that if the growth rate of 4% was maintained, the urban population would have reach 60,000 by 2008 and 80,000 by 2016 (Chung & Hall 2002)
13. The economic benefits flowing from the growth of the urban produce market is off set by the fact that an increasing number and proportion of people live in informal settlements characterised by substandard accommodation, low income, inadequate access to clean water and sanitation, education, health care and other basic services (Chung & Hall 2002). This is associated with an extremely high Gini coefficient which measures income inequality. According to Blazeley and Mullen (2006) the "Vanuatu coefficient has been calculated at between 0.56 and 0.58 – the highest in the world". These conditions indicate the emergence of a classic dual economy which presents a considerable challenge to the nation to improve links to, an opportunities in, the market or in Port Vila and Luganville risk becoming "overwhelmed by social, economic and environmental problems" (Chung & Hall 2002). High levels of income inequality are "bad for growth ...create conflicts, social tensions and instability" (Blazeley & Mullen 2006: 4)
14. The importance of the rural agricultural sector cannot be measured using only monetary criteria and the systems of analysis which apply to the formal economy. Adequate links to markets in the form of the basic infrastructure of roads, transport, and marketing services are largely absent. In such a situation it makes sense for farmers to focus their attention on subsistence

<sup>5</sup>As referenced in the government report immediately below "Increased tourism has had direct and indirect contributions to the service sector, with the flow on to local labour and producers of goods and services used in transport, communication, wholesale and retail trade, banking and insurance and hotel and accommodation services."

<sup>6</sup><http://www.governmentofvanuatu.gov.vu/component/content/article/74-2010-budget.html>

<sup>7</sup>The Gini coefficient is used to measure income inequality. Zero represents perfect equality and 1 represents infinite income inequality. A coefficient above 0.5 indicates the potential challenge to stable and sustained growth

production, secure their own food supply and optimise food security. The on-going need for cash to cover costs relating to anything from schooling, imported food and kerosene to the purchase of mobile phones, chainsaws, outboard motors, other vehicles and fuel provides a constant incentive to increased participation in the formal economy and potential innovators can always be found who are willing to try something new.

15. For many reasons it remains worthwhile to invest in agriculture. In Vanuatu FSA has trained young people, found employment for them, placed them in situations in which they can get experience relating to new farming systems, forged links to successful commercial enterprises like Vanui Vanilla on Santo; for a small commission FSA acts as a buyer to whom farmers can sell their cured vanilla. FSA extension workers employed on IRI business keep an eye out for vanilla growers and curers on Tanna who have been unable to find a market and go out of their way to recruit them into the FSA spices network field service. This positive and largely voluntary investment of time and effort is pioneering a place for vanilla in the economy of Vanuatu. It is useful to be reminded on a formal, general international level as Blazeley and Mullen report investment resulting in agricultural growth has a disproportionate, positive impact on the poorest segments of a rural population: "every 1% increase in per capita agricultural output reportedly leads to a 1.6% increase in the incomes of the poorest 20% of the population" (Source: Gallup, Radelet & Warner 1997). Using its limited resources to the full, it is not difficult to see FSA as an important investor in the future of agriculture in Vanuatu and therefore rural wellbeing.

### **C. FSA: THE ORGANISATION**

#### **History**

16. The lean organisation known today as FSA grew out of an earlier group, the Plantation Support Association (PSA). PSA was set up in 1983 with aid and national development support funds to assist ni-Vanuatu landowners run plantations returned to them when Independence was declared. The PSA was set up within a post colonial situation in which the old French planters union/federation (cooperative the SAPV et Pastoral de Vanuatu (SAPV) remained in place though many of its members had departed. The PSA had a constitution and board but was not formally registered as an association. It was committed to providing technical support for farmers unfamiliar with all the skills required to run copra/beef plantations. Financial support was provided by the government, USAID, the Catholic Church and PSA was run by an expatriate manager provided by the Canadian volunteer service CUSO. Gradually it became clear that the new managers were not interested in continuing to run plantations as single on-going enterprises and opted to divide their holdings into smaller units that could be run by extended kin groups or families.
17. This was easier said than done. Traditional owners did not always agree with each other on how the land should be divided and this left a legacy of unsettled disputes which are occasionally manifest in association with public works. For example the Norsup airstrip on Malekula could not be used for some time after it was built because only one of the three claimant landowners had been paid by the government for the land. Following the formal opening of the Chinese donated Agricultural College on Santo in

2007 a similar dispute between landowners delayed the start of teaching. PSA did not become involved in land issues, found it difficult to work with landowning communities and tended to focus on purely technical and managerial aspects of agriculture.

18. By the early 1990s government and foreign funding for PSA was drying up. It was difficult to maintain the overhead costs of a full time manager and bringing the Board together for periodic meetings. In 1992 the Board took an executive decision to continue as an informal, voluntary organization, focus on maintaining field extension work, help individual farmers and families as best they could, cut overheads to a minimum, and operate under a new name, the Farm Support Association (FSA). As financial support further diminished staff took up work with other agencies, FSA activities were scaled back but FSA survived. Over the remainder of the decade, as funding permitted FSA revived their work with projects such as International Board for Soil Research and Management (IBSRAM), Development of Sustainable for Agriculture in the Pacific (DSAP) and Projet d'Organisation des Producteurs Agricoles pour la Commercialisation Associative (POPACA) supported by foreign aid grants.
19. As pointed out by Andrew McGregor in his 1998 review of FSA, the PSA had been closely linked to the Plantation Training Centre (PTC) at Montmarte which was established in 1982 with the help of the USAID International Human Assistance Program. The Director of the PTC was Charles Rogers who was also Vice President of the PSA. Under his influence many PTC graduates became members of the FSA and men like Peter Kaoh and Billy Homai who still work with the organization alongside Charles Rogers remain the key driving force behind the FSA. They and others like John Peter have accepted both redundancy from, and work with, FSA as dictated by the availability of funds. This has built a tough, lean organization with a remarkable cadre of loyal followers who are sometimes employed by FSA and when they are not employed by FSA have found work as government employees and independent farmers. This is not the most effective or efficient way to work and though FSA has reason to be proud of the stalwart manner in which it has gone about helping farmers it also reflects on the severe way FSA staff have been treated rather than managed.

### The Organisation

20. Throughout Vanuatu FSA is held in extremely high regard by all those professionally engaged in agricultural science and extension work. All the senior people in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) have nothing but praise for the complementary role FSA personnel play in extension work<sup>8</sup>. In a country in which by far the majority of citizens are relatively self sufficient, bush fallow farmers who enjoy what has been described as subsistence affluence, then in a general way anybody who cultivates a small garden like many DARD government officials and urban dwellers remain farmers. In a loose way DARD officials can speak not only as experienced professional agriculturalists but as farmers. The banner

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<sup>8</sup> This praise is repeated in FAO documents. In reference to how few farmer based organisations are active in Vanuatu a FAO/AGS official writes "Not one of them gets close to the level and capacity of FSA to reach out to small farmers and provide advice." The note goes on to make favourable comments about its cost efficiency and how its good reputation was "confirmed by Government as well as private sector stakeholders". (Rome, Sept. 2009)

under which FSA works "farmers helping farmers" is properly inclusive but what does it mean? Farmers speaking with one voice? From a critical sociological point of view it can also be interpreted as giving agricultural extension workers trained in agricultural science the right to speak on behalf of farmers rather than advising them what to do on the basis of what these clients think. Although the consultant witnessed no such failure in communication the absence of a deliberately interactive approach needs to be critically monitored from time to time using participatory tools.

21. Above all FSA has a reputation for its practical, utilitarian approach to getting things done. Those employed from time to time by FSA have a variable range of academic qualifications and what distinguishes them from formally, usually better qualified senior government extension officers is their apprenticeship training at La Source Plantation at Montmartre, some 5 km east of Vila which on a drastically reduced scale has taken over the function of the earlier Plantation training Centre (PTC). There under the direction of Charles Rogers apprentices are schooled not only in the technical aspects of plant cultivation, animal husbandry and farming systems including alley cropping, sustainable agriculture and land rehabilitation they are taught a culture of "action speaks louder than words".

The role of Charles Rogers as the manager of La Source Plantation in conducting agricultural field trials, providing training for school leavers, setting up and keeping FSA going is absolutely central to what FSA has achieved. Without Charles Rogers it is unlikely that FSA would exist.

#### Foundation Documents

22. FSA carried over the PSA Articles of Association (1983). These were to:
- i Provide support and technical advice for types of locally operated farms, who are members.
  - ii Assist members in forming development programmes for their farms.
  - iii Advise and assist members with management and accounts.
  - iv Support and encourage Ni-Vanuatu initiative, including the provision of a forum and lobby for members aspirations.
23. By 1992 PSA had a membership of 60 paid up members. The formation of FSA however marked more than a departure from an agency run under a conventional administrative structure, although provision for paid up membership was retained by FSA this was never core business. The sparse functional culture of the organization which emerged, as if to eschew any form of self promotion came to count all the farmers they worked with as members regardless of whether they had paid a membership fee or not. The objective of spreading good information was more important than financial independence.
24. From the outset PSA worked alongside Syndicat Agricole et Pastoral de Vanuatu (SAPV). Before Independence SAPV, a legally registered organization which largely represented expatriate planters interests to government, imported farm equipment and other inputs and on-sold them where possible, at a price below that of other commercial retailers. Following Independence SAPV membership came to include ni-Vanuatu plantation owners who were new to the business of running plantations. This move was supported by PSA. In a commercial sense nothing had changed. The new plantation managers required continuing access to reasonably priced inputs. With the passing of PSA, SAPV continued to assist FSA clients. Today many on the Board of SAPV continue to have a

close relationship with FSA. The current chairman of SAPV is Charles Rogers who is also the Coordinating Director of FSA. It was a logical extension of this affective tie for SAPV to provide office space to FSA. The relationship of both organisations is closely entwined. For example 'Projek Belong Ek' among the innovations currently promoted by FSA under the NZ sponsored IRI project was first developed on La Source Plantation and recommended to the wider public in a pamphlet issued under the EU sponsored NSA Programme entitled *S.A.P.V. Guide to Layer Management* in 2003. A good case could be constructed to argue that FSA is already an out-reach, not for profit arm of the SAPV.

25. Other agencies provided support for PSA. The PTC at Montmartre had been established just a year before PSA in 1982 with Charles Rogers as director. When it was also subject to budget cuts, Charles Rogers continued to give support to the coterminous FSA by shifting his attention to the La Source Plantation also based at Montmartre to promote the best of science tested agricultural innovations. At La Source work continued on crops, animals, and agricultural technologies and systems that could contribute to the environmental and economic sustainability of farming in Vanuatu. The wide set of activities covered food security to cash cropping: any innovations that would enhance the livelihood of farmers.

### **Goal, Objectives and (Activities)**

In the course of the consultation the following goal and objectives were agreed on. The FSA goal which has been refined over the years has become:

- Under the banner of "farmers helping farmers" make a substantial contribution to the enhancement of environmentally sustainable agriculture in Vanuatu.

26. FSA objectives and (activities) are to get farmers to:

- adopt new, better, appropriate, and environmentally sustainable farming technologies. (Identify, gather and farm trial the best of sustainable, science tested, agricultural innovations and as they are proven make them available to farmers);
- build and maintain a first rate team of agricultural extension advisors (Train agricultural extension staff in the best both technical aspects and practical procedures available so they in turn can become not only excellent agricultural extension workers but also trainers in their own right);
- produce more and better both food and commercial products (Facilitate and support both the dissemination of information relating to sustainable production and marketing of agricultural outputs);
- raise the standing of farming as a profession (Promote a positive attitude towards agriculture by example, through education and concrete profitable achievements that will replace the current negative view that contributes to rural urban migration).
- Achieve (through a sustained engagement with capable farmers) sustained material increases in:
  - rural household incomes;
  - import substitution and/or export of agricultural produce;
  - production of high value commodities.

## Contracts & Projects

27. **Over the past two decades** FSA has sometimes struggled to survive. The number of paid up members has never been great and from time to time FSA has acted decisively to adjust the number of both staff and client farmers to fit its financial situation. What it clearly has achieved by working with outside agencies is an international reputation as a partner NGO with a capacity to deliver inputs on time; place well trained staff in the field who, although they are not paid a per diem, make scheduled field visits; undertake promised tasks and achieve agreed outputs.<sup>9</sup> It has also remained quite small (an extension staff of no more than three at a time); worked well within its capacity; kept overheads to a minimum (no full time administrators, no vehicles). A high price has been paid for this: parsimoniousness: the loyalty of staff has been seriously tested and employees given no option but from time to time accept financial hardship; FSA is not well managed, has not kept good records, does not follow normal NGO management practices, not developed a plan for growth and if anything has deliberately limited its role, and as staff age, may well lose momentum<sup>10</sup>.

The list of contracts entered into and projects completed is impressive though not always rewarding for FSA<sup>11</sup>.

- **Management Advisory Services to Mapbest Plantation (1993 – 1997)** In 1993 the Vanuatu Cooperative Federation bought this copra, cocoa cattle and vanilla plantation in eastern Malekula. FSA was retained to provide technical advice in exchange for 2% of the plantation revenue and a fee of 5,000 vt/day. Although the financial performance of the plantation improved FSA was never paid for its input. Largely because of the lack of administrative staff to follow the matter up FSA did not pursue the issue and in 1997 discontinued the service.

According to the district agricultural officer based at Lakatoro since then Malekula has become a centre of cocoa production in Vanuatu, small holders produce 80% of exports and the island is home to the umbrella organization the Cocoa Growers Association and the Vanuatu Organic Cocoa Trading group sponsored from the Philippines and certified as a Fair Trade operation. Although FSA did not play a role in this on-going success, the role FSA has played in the promotion of cocoa as a Bio-Gro

<sup>9</sup> In the course of an interview Francois Japiot, former manager of POPACA II and currently the French government supported advisor to the Ministry of Agriculture, Quarantine, Forestry and Fisheries provided an apt hyperbole, that it would be possible to transform agriculture practice in Vanuatu with an extension service made up of ten Billy Homai's, one of the FSA's three extension workers engaged in ISI work

<sup>10</sup> Two senior extension staff now have wives and children based in Port Vila and this makes it increasingly difficult for them to spend long periods in the field

<sup>11</sup> Not all the projects supported by international aid agencies in which FSA has played a part are detailed. Those left out include: Taro Genetic Resources: Conservation and Utilization Project for IPGRI funded by AusAID and SPC, 1999 – 2002; PEP Project; shared farming arrangement for the production of yams and off season pineapples; North Ambrym fruit fly bait spray project and work with REDI. See McGregor 1998 for a description.



licence holder for farmers on Santo and Malo should not be over looked. FSA has played a central role in a similar project centred on spices especially vanilla which replicates this success<sup>12</sup>.

- **Organic Agricultural Certificate for Small Holder Groups: an Internal Control service Offered by Farm Support Association (1998 & on-going)** FSA provides a field service for Venui Vanilla which offers vanilla farmers access to organic certification. This enables farmers to sell on a more lucrative market. Full documentation is required, the total cost of bringing in an inspector (usually from overseas) must be met and "each production unit, or farm, has to be inspected...in order for the farm to become certified by a duly recognized and competent body....[it must be possible to trace a] clear and transparent trail from the point of export back to the point of production". Farms producing large quantities earn enough to cover this cost but individual small producers are unable to do so, hence the service offered by FSA in Tanna as a collaboration with Venui Vanilla on Santo. Since 1998 for a cost recovery fee charged against the price paid for the finished product FSA has located and continues to locate farmers, prepare the necessary documentation for Ecocert to carry out field checks and provide certification. FSA has followed this up by buying and on-selling organic vanilla to Venui Vanilla whose direct purchases before this were largely limited to Malo and Santo.
- **Cooperation with Venui Vanilla (1996 & on-going)**. The operation described above links growers well to the south (Tanna) with a sophisticated commercial buyer Venui Vanilla<sup>13</sup>. This remarkable example of cooperation could not operate in the absence of Venui Vanilla's strong commitment to growth. The consultant was told that Venui Vanilla has paid and is currently paying for the actual certification and most of what is called the Internal Control necessary to ensure that participating farmers can be traced and checked for organic integrity. In the past Venui Vanilla has received some assistance here and there (ie POPACA). As is pointed out above, being able to brand a crop as organic makes a critical difference to profitability. An organic product sells at approximately 10% higher than its non organic counterpart and this makes it possible to cover the higher transport costs incurred in Vanuatu. Properly processed organic vanilla in good condition is currently purchased from Vanuatu farmers for over 3,000vt/kg. (NZD46). Venui Vanilla told the consultant that it "is very hard to quantify the international market, particularly the organic one where you have a very large number of small buyers. The current price Venui Vanilla is working to fluctuates between "50 to 60 USD LANDED in Europe (packaging and freight included)" (Piero Bianchessi in email to John McKinnon 23/04/2010) [www.venuivanilla.com](http://www.venuivanilla.com)
- **IBSRAM (1990 – 1997) Alley Cropping for Better Soil Management**  
The International Board for Soil Research and Management (IBSRAM) is an international organization with an independent Board of Trustees,

<sup>12</sup> This arrangement with Bio-Gro has apparently lapsed. Other hoped for development partnership such as with the Credit Union which was discussed in 1998 as likely arrangement also dropped out of the frame.

<sup>13</sup> Venui Vanilla has received some support in the past from the Brussels based Centre for the Development of Enterprise (CDE)

## REVIEW OF THE VANUATU FARM SUPPORT ASSOCIATION

created in 1983 with the aim of promoting soil management research with National Agricultural Research and Extension Systems (NARES) organizations in developing countries. FSA was engaged in work as a NARES agency, focused on fieldwork with farmers and trialed alley-cropping on Santo and north Pentecost.

The work in Vanuatu was part of the first phase Pacificland Network project which started in 1990. This first phase was funded by the Asian Development Bank, AusAID and the United Kingdom Overseas Development Administration. Since then additional support and assistance has been provided by the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation, New Zealand ODA through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Crawford Fund of Australia, and from the EU Pacific Regional Agricultural Programme. The project set up and pioneered work that was followed up by the EU funded project on the Development of Sustainable Agriculture in the Pacific (DSAP) With the help of partners such as the Vanuatu Agriculture Research and Training Centre (VARTC), FSA and the Department of the Environment working with IBSRAM carried out:

- o “Research: to test and validate existing knowledge on soil and land management, to investigate factors determining the sustainability land management, and to assist in the development of appropriate technologies and packages.
- o “Capacity-building: to strengthen the capability of national research agencies in undertaking research on sustainable land management.
- o “Network and information: - to strengthen the existing *PACIFICLAND* Network to provide information on sustainable land management. <http://www.fap.org/docrep/x0625e/X0625e11.htm>

In the second phase extension work with FSA was given a higher profile. Peter Kach prepared written reports for publication in the *PACIFICLAND SERIES*. It was in this second phase that IBSRAM was encouraged to enhance a sense of local ownership by giving more attention to participatory planning (Pretty, J.N., 1996. *Sustainability: people's participation and sustainable agriculture*. In: Proceedings of *PACIFICLAND* annual meeting and workshop on sustainable land management in the South Pacific). FSA has continued to put into practice the sustainable techniques first advocated under IBSRAM.

• **DSAP (2003 – 2006)** The programme Development of Sustainable Agriculture in the Pacific (DSAP) was set up to promote and implement sustainable agriculture that will improve food production thereby enhancing food security and income generation in the Pacific. [http://www.spc.int/dsap/about\\_dsap.htm](http://www.spc.int/dsap/about_dsap.htm) It was funded by the European Union and managed by SPC. The programme commenced in 2003 and was implemented in 16 Pacific countries including Vanuatu. From the literature and information available to the consultant at the time of writing it is not clear when it came to an end but given the three year limit placed on EU projects DSAP most probably closed toward the end of 2005 or early in 2006<sup>14</sup>. The project had three components

<sup>14</sup> Information available on the internet (April 2010) does not indicate a termination date.