



**STATEMENT BY MR. MANASA VANIQI, PERMANENT SECRETARY
MINISTRY FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND MULTI ETHIC AFFAIRS
CSD IPM THEMATIC DEBATE ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT
UNITED NATIONS NEW YORK 24 FEBRUARY 2009**

Please check against delivery

Introduction

Thank you Madam Chairperson,

I have the honor to speak on behalf of the Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS) comprising of the Federated States of Micronesia , the Marshall Islands , Nauru, Palau , Papua New Guinea , Samoa , Solomon Islands , the Kingdom of Tonga, Tuvalu , Vanuatu , and my own country, Fiji.

The Pacific SIDS aligns itself with the statements delivered by the Permanent Representative of Tonga on behalf of AOSIS.

Rural Development Strategies

Chair,

This thematic debate on the barriers and constraints to rural development is an all encompassing one that must be addressed in a holistic manner, taking into account the other thematic issues such as agriculture and land. Moreover, issues such as; poverty reduction, and access to markets are also critical elements in any national or regional rural development strategy and undoubtedly these must be supported by investments in human and social capital, infrastructure development, strengthening and promotion of agro and marine-based income, non-farming employment opportunities and the proper management of our natural resources.

Ultimately, madam chairperson, the aim of any rural development strategy is to provide a living standard to our rural communities that is equal to the living standard of those living in urban areas. This will not only stem the tide of rural depopulation, it will have a positive ripple effect in other areas.

Having said that madam chair; it is our rural communities who face the most barriers, and therein lays our challenges that must be addressed through viable policy options.

Unique Challenges

At the regional level, one of the major constraints faced, is that Pacific Island Nations themselves, are scattered over millions of miles of ocean. Here, the “tyranny of distance” makes the concept of economies of scale almost unattainable. Furthermore, the geographical distribution and spread of rural communities, many of whom are maritime communities—accessible only by shipping transportation—further exacerbates this problem. Investments in physical infrastructure such as wharfs and jetties, roads and bridges, and technology infrastructure must take into account this unique challenge faced by the Pacific SIDS. As an example, the cost of fuel and energy which drives our economies is prohibitive; therefore investments in the energy sector and in renewable solar, wind, wave and geothermal energy—which I might add, are abundant in the region—must be at the forefront of policy options.

Climate Change

To further compound the constraint faced by the tyranny of distance, rural development strategies by the Pacific SIDS, must now also take into account the adverse effects of climate change, rising sea level and global warming that has resulted in frequent floods, and water clogging of arable land. Madam chair, in January this year, Fiji was hit with unprecedented flooding—the month of January alone was our wettest month in over a hundred years. Lives and homes were lost and millions of dollars of infrastructure damaged. To add salt to injury, Mother Nature inundated areas where our tourism sector is based. For the Pacific SIDS, a vibrant and diversified tourism industry is one of the pillars upon which our national rural development strategy is based. Therefore, climate change adaptation strategies and investments to “climate proof” rural development must be high on our policy option agenda.

Investment in Agriculture

Madam chair,

Agriculture development is another pillar upon which our rural development strategies are formulated. Infrastructure development, strengthening and promotion of agro-based, marine-based and non-farming employment opportunities to achieve food security, the provision of social amenities like safe drinking water, sanitation, health, education, cultural enhancement, and the proper management of our natural resources are all intertwined in this strategy—the constraints faced in these areas have also been well documented and researched.

Despite these constraints, the sustainable rural development strategies of the Pacific SIDS can be implemented through direct partnerships which strengthen national mechanisms and also address shared regional goals whilst at the same time reducing the impact of the ongoing *financial crisis* and the declining trend in ODA.

The direct partnership MOU that the Pacific SIDS have with Austria, Italy and the City of Milan, among others, serve as useful models to achieve observable benefits in local communities through “people-centered and driven” approaches that move beyond policy to activities and actual implementation on the ground.

I thank you.