

Dimensions of Cooperation

Pacific Organic Policy Toolkit
<http://www.organicpasifika.com/poetcom>

Dimensions of Cooperation

Fiji

‘Bibi na se no co e mama na ka oqo’

‘Together anything is possible’

Niue

Fuhiulu mo e kau fakalataha ma e mitaki he motu.

Work together for the betterment of our nation

Palau

Oba tal tekoi

People united in pursuit of the same mission

Vanuatu

“Yumi wok tuketa yumi mo strong, yumi wok wan wan yumi no strong”

Working together we are stronger, working individually we are weak

Cooperation is an important root for formation of any policy, and particularly one for organic agriculture. Several dimensions of cooperation are available for governments engaging in organic policy development.

Intra-governmental

Government Ministries: Although one government ministry (usually Agriculture) takes the lead in developing and implementing a comprehensive organic agriculture policy, rarely is only one ministry engaged in the process. The multifunctional nature of organic agriculture indicates benefits related to the goals and objectives of other ministries. They should be included in the conversation. Agencies that may have a stake in organic action planning include Agriculture, Commerce, Education, Trade, Health, Environment, Industry, Tourism, Employment, Lands and Land Resources. This dimension of cooperation is further elaborated in the section on Strategic Planning.

State/local governments: These governmental structures operate closest to the grassroots and are especially valuable to engage for implementation of certain strategies. These governments may have their own strategic planning for development, which could include strategies to increase organic farming. Thus they can be sources of ideas and inspiration for national governments and also instruments for service delivery to implement national organic agriculture strategies. Ideally, and with early cooperation, these will well aligned and have some synergy.

Regional

The institutions of the Pacific Community can provide linkages for government-to-government cooperation in the region. Governments can share experience and knowledge on development of supportive policies and lessons learned from them. The Pacific institutions, such as SPC, can also provide centralized structure and

support services to governments collectively. For example, currently SPC houses the Pacific Organic and Ethical Trade Community, the regional umbrella organization for organic agriculture. Regional intergovernmental institutions could undertake certain useful services for governments and private sector in the regional, such as compilation of national data and compilation of regional research on organic agriculture.

International development and intergovernmental organizations

Collaboration with international development organizations can be an important component for building and implementing a national organic plan, or portions thereof. These organization can provide expertise and financial resources for both planning and implementation of organic action plans. Examples include GIZ (Germany) support to promoting organic food and agriculture to the public in Tunisia and Helvetas (Switzerland) support for developing organic production clusters and farmers markets in Lao. Intergovernmental institutions with a history of developmental work in the region can also be helpful, for example, EU, FAO and IFAD. These institutions already have a history of support to organic agriculture related projects in the region, such as this Toolkit (EU funded through PAPP). IFAD and FAO have supported the development of the Pacific Organic Standard and regional certification scheme.

Private Sector/Civil Society

Most organic agriculture policies are developed and/or implemented in cooperation with the private sector, civil society, and other citizens through consultative processes. Examples of exceptions to this rule are usually found in countries with a high degree of central political control.

This Toolkit elaborates on the public/private dimension of cooperation, drawing from a paper on the subject by the United Nations Forum on Sustainability Standards (UNFSS).

Public-Private Collaboration on Policy, Standards, Regulation and Trade Facilitation for Organic Agriculture.

Whether undertaking regulation of organic production and labelling, or playing other roles to support organic agriculture, collaboration between government and private sector stakeholders is no longer exceptional, although it is variable. It has come with increasing acceptance by governments of organic agriculture as legitimate and offering solutions for sustainability, and also with the organic sector's increasing capacity to interact successfully with government institutions and processes. In many countries there is now a confluence of the goals of the private organic sector to develop organic agriculture and markets and of governmental goals with respect to economic prosperity and sustainability. Shared goals have not only the capacity to catalyze collaboration, but they also potentially function to address tensions and resolve conflicts that naturally arise in public-private collaborative activities such as standards setting, policy prioritization, or allocation of roles. Governments that regulate organic agriculture and labelling share with the private organic sector the goals of expanding agricultural markets for their countries, including facilitation of trade and support for domestic market development. This is the original aim of regulations in the United States and Canada. Legislation or other agricultural policy instruments may support organic agriculture in order to achieve other goals shared with organic sector stakeholders, especially those related to sustainability.

Assets and complementary roles

Benefits of collaboration

The importance of engaging the civil society and citizens in forging public policy is recognized by numerous governments and intergovernmental organizations.

Benefits cited include the following :

- Creating fair policies/laws reflective of real needs enriched with additional experience and expertise;
- Facilitating cross-sector dialogue and reaching consensus;
- Adopting more forward and outward looking solutions;
- Ensuring legitimacy of proposed regulation and compliance;
- Decreasing costs, as parties can contribute with own resources;
- Increasing partnership, ownership and responsibility in implementation;
- Strengthening democracy - preventing conflict among different groups and between citizens and the government and increasing confidence in public institutions.

Government roles

There are widely divergent political philosophies and attitudes about the role that governments should take in society. Historically and to the present, governments have taken on significant policy roles for agriculture with a variety of objectives (e.g. efficiency, income distribution, food security), and through these interventions have highly impacted the structure and function of agriculture and its markets. A premise

of this paper is that both governments and the private sector have important roles to play in the further development of organic agriculture and markets. Governments have unique roles in this regard. They are the final determinants of public policy, including allocations of funds from the public purse that can facilitate and support the sector. Invested with legal authority, governments alone can exercise authoritative controls in organic production and along supply chains. This authority is exercised where mandatory regulations on organic agriculture and trade are established and enforced.

A UNEP-UNCTAD report on Best Practices for Organic Policy recommended that, “a starting point for government engagement is to give recognition and encouragement to the organic sector, and that governments should “take an enabling and facilitating role rather than a controlling one.” The report stresses that this recognition also includes establishing a close cooperation with the private sector, especially its representative organizations. This cooperation should apply across the board in the development of policies, funding allocations and the development of regulations that can be enabling rather than only controlling (CBTF 2008).

Private Sector Roles

Private sector producers, processors, traders, and NGOs gave impetus to organic farming, developed standards and certification schemes and built markets starting in the 1970s prior to any government invention. It is where virtually all the practice of organic production, processing and trading resides, and therefore a repository of most of the knowledge and expertise as well as the zeal for organic principles and practices. The production and value chain system operated by the private sector achieve most of the objectives of government policies towards organic agriculture. This includes primary production, input production (seeds, plant protection products, feed additives), manufacturing, ingredient sourcing, handling and trade, retailing and certification. It is in the private sector that the impacts of specific policy towards organic farming and markets are felt, as are general government agricultural policies that discriminate against organic agriculture and markets.¹ The private sector can offer perspectives on the feasibility and impact of implementing government policies and programs in the sector.

The private sector has produced the main innovations sustaining the sector in response to changing needs, including the original systems of standards, certification and labels, and more recently group certification of smallholders and participatory guarantee systems for local markets. The private sector is able to react more quickly to change, challenge and opportunity than government institutions and can point the way to new solutions and innovations. It is the leading edge for identifying and embracing issues that should be addressed, for example, to question the consistency of nanotechnology with organic principles, and to identify how organic agriculture should respond and adapt to the sustainability discourses such as on climate change and animal welfare.

¹ Examples of such policies are fertilizer subsidies that exclude organic inputs, ineligibility of diverse, research and promotion support favoring conventional agriculture, subsidy payments that favor large scale monocultures.

Table 1: Relative Strengths of Governments and Organic Sector for Developing Organic Agriculture

	Government	Organic Sector
Resources	Public funds can be allocated for centralized support activities for organic agriculture	Funds for centralized support activities for organic agriculture are limited
Policy	Only government can decide public policy related to organic agriculture.	Sector can formulate policy ideas, but has no decision authority.
Authority	Governments can apply legal authority where it is useful, for example in policing fraud in markets.	Sector may have self-policing mechanisms, but not to the degree of government authorities.
Visibility	Policies, directives and communications are broadly visible in the society	Sector may have more difficulty to reach broad audiences with communications.
Expertise	Government is not the primary reservoir of expertise on the sector.	The body of expertise is primarily within the sector
Implementation Capacity	Both government and the sector have implementation capacity. In the case of government, it is best applied in centralized or government-focused functions e.g. accreditation, public procurement.	The sector has better knowledge and contact with points of implementation in the supply chain, ranging from producers to retail markets.
Flexibility and Responsiveness	Government is characterized by bureaucratic structures and “red-tape”.	More flexible to respond to change and opportunity.
Innovation	Not as often viewed as the source of innovation.	Main source of innovation

Conditions for Cooperation

Collaborative roles

Some case examples in this paper and elsewhere have demonstrated that a high degree of collaboration between the government and the organic sector in formulating policies, regulations, and support programs is associated with better development of organic agriculture (Källender2008). The case examples demonstrate various approaches to collaboration and examples of relative roles played by each party. Most notable for the extent of collaboration is the case of Denmark, where the organic sector has a broadly constituted umbrella organization, Organic Denmark, which works intensely across multiple Danish government

agencies on programs that simultaneously support the development of organic agriculture and markets, and government goals and objectives. In this case, the government provides the authority, public policy and support program framework (collaboratively developed with Organic Denmark), and Organic Denmark implements most of the programs with financial resources allocated to it by the government. Organic Denmark is strongly engaged in dialogue with various government ministries and departments on policy and program recommendations and planning.

Optimally the private sector will have national umbrella organization representing all or most of the private stakeholders in organic agriculture, including producers, processors, traders, certification bodies, and retailers, and they will also include or maintain strong alliances with consumer groups, environmental, animal welfare, social justice and development aid organizations. Without such an organization, government may have difficulty knowing who legitimately represents the organic sector, and with whom to engage on supporting organic agriculture. Government may then also lack benefit of the complementary strengths that a centrally organized organic sector can bring to organic policy and program development. Sometimes, such as in the case of Moldova, another organization can fill in for the absence of an organic umbrella organization. There, a rural development organization with a high capacity and thematic focus on organic agriculture to achieve its main goal for rural development is the counterpart to the Department of Organic Agriculture in the Agricultural Ministry. In the United States, where the government program and objectives are focused on markets and marketing, the Organic Trade Association (OTA) has similar focus and is the main counterpart. The OTA is not as inclusive of or aligned with the entire group of sector actors as is Organic Denmark. In the United States, some of these other actors, which include rural development NGOs and consumer and public interest groups, give alternative voice on issues of policy and operation of the National Organic Program. On trade matters such as trade promotion, where the OTA and USDA are naturally aligned, a partnership has developed wherein the OTA implements USDA export support programs for organic agriculture, and OTA provides industry input and technical assistance to the process of equivalence assessment between the organic regulations of the United States and trade partners.

Collaboration also builds capacity of both parties. Dialogue and experience obtained in joint implementation educates government officials on the paradigm and principles of organic agriculture, organic practices, technical approaches and challenges, and also about the realities of practitioners in production, processing, certification and trade of organic products. In the case of the Danish Agriculture Ministry and the United States Department of Agriculture, the organic sector has played a role in developing structured training programs for government staff. Acquired expertise adds to quality and efficiency in government administration of regulations and support programs, and creates new synergies for further collaboration. For the organic sector, collaboration builds political and administrative knowledge of the machine of government, enhancing capacity to use government resources to accomplish goals.

Table 2: Roles of the Government and Private Organic Sector

Function	Government	Private Sector	Potentially shared or distributed role
Extension and training	x	x	x
Research	x	x	x
Standards development	x	x	x
Policy development, including program development and budgeting	x		x
Policy approval	x		
Allocation of public funds	x		x
Local market development	x	x	x
Promotion/public education	x	x	x
Regulation development	x		x
Regulation enforcement	x		
Implementation of government programs e.g. public procurement, certification cost sharing.	x		x
Operation of the organic supply chain (e.g. production, trading)		x	

Risk Management

In the scope of regulations, collaboration of the organic sector with reduces the risk that regulations will be infeasible or create undue hardship in the sector. Historically, most governments instituting regulations for organic agriculture have implemented a public comment process prior to issuing final rules. The comment approach is usually standard for the promulgation of regulations in the country, and it can include requirements for the government to publish the comments and its response to them. In some cases such as in Canada, the United States and South Africa, technical advisory boards have had a strong hand in developing the content of the regulation, while the government takes care to put it into appropriate regulatory

language including that it comports with other regulations, and it assesses regulatory impacts. Some of these advisory boards include both government and private sector members (e.g. South Africa) and others are comprised exclusively of private sector experts (e.g. Canada). In the case of the US, the National Organic Standards Board is representative of a broad array of stakeholders including producers, processors and handlers, retailers, scientists, consumers and environmental interests. Regarding listing and de-listing of input materials in the United States regulation, The National Organic Standards Board is empowered to make the final decisions, and the role of the National Organic Program in this regard is focused on the administrative rulemaking process. This is presumably a risk management approach to ensuring that decisions on inputs have the highest degree of public vetting and transparency. In the European Union situation, the process for public and sector input to the Commission on the organic regulations is affected by general guidelines for consultation, but the consultation process is not formally structured to the degree that is often found in single countries. Major proposals for changes in regulation are discussed and decided in the process involving the European Union Parliament and Council, whose members receive input from the public and the organic sector in their member state.

Collaboration also reduces the risk that policies and programs intended to support organic agriculture will be ineffective, thus failing to achieve goals and objectives. Dialogue and consultation are needed to ensure that the best ideas for effectively supporting organic agriculture are given priority in government agendas and that they are implemented in an optimal way, including the option for private sector implementation of some programs.

Future trends

A new wave of collaboration on service delivery to the organic sector is emerging wherein the public and private actors jointly implement service functions with shared goals and benefits. In Malaysia, where the Department of Agriculture has been providing no-cost certification, an arrangement with the national association, Organic Alliance Malaysia, appoints it to handle fee-based application and inspection for organic processors, while the Department of Agriculture continues to manage the no-cost producer certification program. Certification decision for all operations remains with the Department of Agriculture. Organic Alliance Malaysia is also appointed to verify the certification of imports and recommend to the Department of Agriculture if they were produced under equivalent systems according to a mutually agreed set of equivalence criteria. Expertise in the private sector can be employed while retaining the authority of government and the cost benefits to producers. Collaborative service delivery also characterizes the Danish initiative on public procurement for government canteens, where private actors facilitate linkage of the purchasing function with the supply, and an educational component for kitchen staff and customers of the canteens. The case example from the United States involves public-private collaboration on delivering export development services to United States organic businesses. The possibilities for joint service arrangements exist in other areas including agricultural extension services, market development, and regulatory compliance and surveillance. These “smart”

collaborations will be custom tailored. The nature and degree of joint service arrangements will depend on the mission of the government with respect to organic agriculture, the capacities in the public and private sectors, and the strength of the relationship between them.

For additional information, see the [full paper](#) from which this section was taken, *Public-Private Collaboration on Policy, Standards, Regulation and Trade Facilitation for Organic Agriculture*.

