



Synergistic linkages between green trade and sustainable development in Solomon Islands

Green trade for sustainable development in Pacific small island developing States of the Melanesian Spearhead Group

Technical cooperation outcome

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Abbreviations

FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GAP	Good Agricultural Practices
IFOAM	International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements
MSG	Melanesian Spearhead Group
NDS	National Development Strategy
NTM	Non-tariff measures
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SIDS	Small Island Developing State
SPC	Pacific Community
SPS	Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures
TBT	Technical Barriers to Trade
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
VNR	Voluntary National Review
VSS	Voluntary Sustainability Standards
WTO	World Trade Organization



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Glossary

Synergistic Linkages

Synergistic linkages are connections or relationships between different components, entities, or processes that result in a combined effect greater than the sum of their individual effects. Put more simply, it is ***when multiple elements work together in a way that enhances overall impact or effectiveness.***

Synergistic linkages might refer to **partnerships** between **companies, government and the international community** where **each partner contributes resources, expertise, or market access**, leading to increased **sales, cost savings, or other benefits** that ***would not be achievable without this coordination.***

In the specific context of the **MSG Green Trade Project**, examples of connections that can lead to **synergistic linkages** include farmers, trading agencies/companies, the governments and the international community engaged in quality infrastructure and market access. In Solomon Islands, an example includes the development of good agricultural practices for kava farming, which can potentially increase small farmers' access to foreign markets and enhance their economic empowerment.

Green Trade

Green trade, while not having a universally agreed-upon definition, broadly **refers to the exchange of goods and services that are produced, marketed, and consumed in a manner that ensures environmental sustainability and economic viability.**

Within the framework of the **MSG Green Trade Project**, green trade specifically encompasses agricultural goods that are produced sustainably. This sustainable production not only minimizes the environmental impact but also supports and reinforces local communities, contributing to economic and social well-being. By focusing on agricultural goods produced in such a manner, the MSG Green Trade Project aligns closely with the principles of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It particularly emphasized the objective of "Leaving No One Behind" ensuring that the benefits of trade and sustainable agricultural practices are equitably distributed among all stakeholders, including marginalized and vulnerable groups within society.



Note

The report on *Synergistic linkages between green trade sustainable development in Solomon Islands* is part of the **Green trade for sustainable development in Pacific small island developing States of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG)** project,¹ referred to as the MSG Green Trade Project. The objective of this project conducted by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the MSG Secretariat² is to identify and strengthen synergistic linkages between green trade promotion and the Sustainable Development Strategies (SDS) of MSG member States – Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu – in a regionally collaborative manner.

This report was prepared jointly by UNCTAD, the MSG Secretariat and the Government of Solomon Islands and is the final output for Solomon Islands of Phase 1 of the project. Phase 1 comprises all national activities to identify potential synergistic linkages and to promote green trade. This report draws on the Phase 1 activities, notably:

- 1) Organizing two national workshops in Solomon Islands.
- 2) Collecting and publishing Non-Tariff Measures (NTM) data for Solomon Islands.
- 3) Publishing an assessment of Voluntary Sustainability Standards (VSS) for kava.
- 4) Publishing a guide for exporting kava from Solomon Islands.

The Phase 1 activities and reports laid the foundation for Phase 2, which entailed the creation of a *Subregional Action Plan for Green Trade Promotion* at the MSG level.

¹ The project website and project document can be accessed at: <https://unctad.org/project/green-trade-sustainable-development-pacific-small-island-developing-states-melanesian>

² For more information, see: <https://msgsec.info/about-msg/>



Executive summary

This report explores potential synergistic linkages between green trade and sustainable development in Solomon Islands and creates a matrix identifying these links. As a Small Island Developing State (SIDS), Solomon Islands faces specific challenges and opportunities in its pursuit of sustainable development. Smallness, remoteness, a narrow export base, and high exposure to external economic shocks together with global environmental challenges represent exceptional vulnerabilities. Green trade can be an integral element for overcoming some of the challenges and achieving sustainable development. The importance of green trade lies in two areas. First, it opens doors to specialized markets that value sustainability, creating enhanced economic prospects. Secondly, it offers notable social and environmental benefits.

The Solomon Islands Synergistic Linkages Matrix contains three policy recommendations for green trade and describes how green trade can contribute to the country's national sustainable development strategies and further the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This matrix is built on data related to Non-Tariff Measures (NTMs) and a comprehensive assessment of Voluntary Sustainability Standards (VSS) for the Solomon Islands kava sector, developed as part of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Green Trade Project.³ NTMs, i.e. regulations other than tariffs that can affect trade, and VSS, i.e. voluntary standards setting specific economic, social, and environmental criteria, are identified as instrumental in fostering environmental protection, social inclusion, and economic prosperity. Table 1 presents a summary of the policy recommendations and expected benefits, which are some of the key insights from this report.

While green trade policies present potential synergies with the “Leaving No One Behind” principle and Solomon Islands’ national development priorities of inclusive growth through fostering opportunities to enhance rural inclusion, women empowerment and youth engagement, several challenges remain and need to be addressed for these synergies to materialize. In particular, many rural communities in Solomon Islands face barriers related to inadequate infrastructure and limited access to markets, as well as the lack of regulatory frameworks (World Bank, 2015). Green trade policies may not yield their full potential if rural areas lack proper transportation, storage facilities, and market linkages, and if they are not supported by adequate public policies. Addressing these deficits is crucial to unlock the benefits of green trade for rural communities.

The report offers a way forward through specific policy recommendations and a matrix of synergistic linkages, emphasizing the significance of regional integration in the Pacific region and guiding the creation of a sub-regional action plan for MSG countries. The comprehensive approach outlined underscores the potential of green trade as a tool for achieving sustainable development in Solomon Islands, leveraging the strengths of NTMs and VSS while addressing the challenges that are unique to SIDS.

³ See: <https://unctad.org/project/green-trade-sustainable-development-pacific-small-island-developing-states-melanesian>



Table 1
Policy recommendations for Solomon Islands and expected benefits

Policy recommendation	Expected benefit
1. Revise the Pure Food (Food Control) Regulations to include the National Kava Quality Standards and/or the kava regulations.	Including these kava standards will guarantee the quality of kava, securing consumer health and improving the credibility of kava products in foreign markets.
2. Develop Good Agriculture Practices (GAP) for kava.	Developing a GAP code will complement the inclusion of a kava Standard to the Pure Food (Food Control) Regulations and support the Implementation of the National Kava Policy and Agriculture Sector Growth Strategy and Investment Plan 2021-2030. This development can potentially increase farmers' access to foreign markets, enabling them to secure better prices for their produce. Additionally, it will promote more sustainable farming methods.
3. Publish trade-related regulations in a more systemic manner.	Better access to regulatory information will allow policymakers and researchers to undertake policy review across individual ministries' domains, as well as reducing the cost of private sector to find the information on and comply with regulations.

Source: UNCTAD.





1. Introduction

This report identifies a matrix of synergistic linkages between green trade and sustainable development in Solomon Islands. As a Small Island Developing State (SIDS), Solomon Islands faces a specific set of challenges and opportunities in its pursuit of sustainable development. Smallness, remoteness, a narrow export base, a high level of exposure to global environmental challenges and external economic shocks come as “unique and particular vulnerabilities” to SIDS (United Nations, 2012).

Green trade is an integral element of overcoming some of the challenges and achieving sustainable development. Its importance lies in two areas. First, it opens doors to specialized markets that value “sustainability”, creating new economic opportunities. Secondly, it offers notable social and environmental benefits. In this context, Non-Tariff Measures (NTMs) and Voluntary Sustainability Standards (VSS) are useful as they help enable green trade and align it with Solomon Islands’ national sustainable development strategies and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015).

The matrix of synergistic linkages for Solomon Islands presents how the policy recommendations, identified by this project and aiming at fostering green trade, can contribute to achieving the country’s national sustainable development plan. The matrix is based on a foundation of data related to NTMs, as well as a comprehensive assessment of VSS relevant to the kava sector for Solomon Islands, which were developed as part of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Green Trade Project funded by the United Nations.⁴ NTMs and VSS are key instruments to shape the country’s green trade. NTMs, being mandatory trade requirements

stipulated in regulations often for public objectives, form the essential framework which enables green trade. Meanwhile, VSS, which are voluntary private standards, or requirements, set out to meet specific economic, social and environmental metrics, create an extended sphere that increases the value of green trade. Ultimately, NTMs and VSS serve as tools for enhancing environmental protection, social inclusion, and economic prosperity.

Section 2 provides an overview of Solomon Islands’ sustainable development strategies. Based on the confirmed linkage between Solomon Islands’ strategies and the 2030 Agenda, and section 3 examines the potential of NTMs in Solomon Islands and VSS for promoting green trade and achieving the SDGs, with a specific focus on kava as an example of the transformative potential of VSS. Section 4 assesses potential opportunities and challenges arising from green trade promotion from the perspective of rural communities and of women and youth, highlighting the importance of “leaving no one behind”. Section 5 points the way forward by making three green trade policy recommendations for Solomon Islands and presenting the matrix of synergistic linkages between the country’s sustainable development strategy

⁴ See project’s webpage: <https://unctad.org/project/green-trade-sustainable-development-pacific-small-island-developing-states-melanesian>



and the policy recommendations suggested by this project.

This report was drafted jointly by UNCTAD and the MSG Secretariat, with involvement from the Solomon Islands Government in the process. It incorporates feedback and inputs from participants of the “Second Solomon Islands national MSG Green Trade Project” workshop held in Honiara, Solomon Islands, on 19-20 June 2023.

This report also acknowledges the significance of regional integration in the Pacific region. The three policy recommendations and the matrix of linkages presented in Section 5 – together with similar matrices for Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu – was used to guide the creation of a *Subregional Action Plan for Green Trade Promotion* for MSG countries.



2. Solomon Islands national sustainable development strategies and plans

2.1 National Development Strategy 2016–2035

The *National Development Strategy 2016 to 2035 Improving the Social and Economic Livelihoods of all Solomon Islanders* (NDS) is a visionary action plan that provides strategic direction for the twenty-year development of Solomon Islands from 2016 to 2035.⁵ The NDS states that the national mission is “Improving the Social and Economic Livelihoods of all Solomon Islanders”, stressing sustainable economic development as the key to the growth and progress of the people of Solomon Islands (Solomon Islands Government, 2016).

The NDS is structured around five long-term objectives, namely:

- Objective 1: Sustainable and inclusive economic growth
- Objective 2: Poverty alleviation
- Objective 3: Access to quality health and education services
- Objective 4: Resilient and environmentally sustainable development
- Objective 5: Stable and effective governance and public order.

The NDS underlines the need for an improvement in the economy, emphasizing

the role of the private sector and advocating making rural and customary lands⁶ available for agricultural and commercial development. Addressing challenges such as climate change, disaster risks, and improving governance are also central. The NDS aims for broad-based economic and social advancement, targeting inclusive growth as a way to alleviate poverty, enhance food security, and provide quality social services. Effective management, accountability, and a unified national vision are seen as crucial for fostering a stable environment conducive to growth and improvement in living standards. Successful implementation of the NDS is expected to result in substantial economic growth, increased investment opportunities, poverty reduction, a sustainable environment, and improved access to essential services and infrastructure for all Solomon Islanders (Solomon Islands Government, 2016).

The NDS aligns closely with the SDGs. Each NDS objective corresponds to specific SDGs, and where possible, NDS performance indicators are similar to individual SDG targets, facilitating the monitoring and reporting on both. A table of the link between the NDS objectives and corresponding SDGs can be found in Table 5 of Annex 2. The Voluntary National Review (VNR) of Solomon Islands on the SDGs, released in 2020, identified institutional capacity and effectiveness to manage rapidly changing development context as

⁵ For more information, see: <https://solomons.gov.sb/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/National-Development-Strategy-2016.pdf>

⁶ Customary land is land that “[...] is owned by all the community members and not by one individual” (Solomon Islands Government, 2016).

a challenge to achieving the SDGs. For that, the VNR mentions a need for deeper integration of legislation, policies, plans, budgets and activities for transformative change (Solomon Islands Government, 2020).

2.2 Medium Term Development Plan 2016-2020

The NDS is implemented through a Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP), which has a 5-year horizon. The most recent MTDP is the plan for 2016-2020. As of April 2024, the new MTDP following the 2016-2020 plan has yet to be published.

While the NDS gives a general direction for the development of Solomon Islands, the MTDP has specific targets, detailed budgets and a series of programmes and projects planned by various ministries (Solomon Islands Government, 2015). These projects, ranging from infrastructure development to improvement in health and medical services to disaster risk management, mitigation and preparedness, are listed under 15 medium-term strategies.

Table 2 shows the mapping between the long-term objectives of the NDP and the medium-term strategies that elaborate a detailed action plan to implement the 5 NDS objectives.

Table 2
NDS objectives and MTDP strategies

Medium Term Development Strategies	1: Reinvigorate and increase the rate of economic growth.	2: Improve the environment for private sector development and increase investment opportunities for all Solomon Islanders.	3: Build and upgrade physical infrastructure and utilities with an emphasis on access to productive resources and markets, and to ensure all Solomon Islanders have access to essential services.	4: Strengthen land reform and other programs to encourage economic development in urban, rural and customary lands.
NDS Objective 2	Poverty alleviated across the whole of Solomon Islands, basic needs addressed and food security improved; benefits of development more equitably distributed.			
Medium Term Development Strategies	5: Alleviate poverty, improve provision of basic needs and increase food security.	6: increase employment opportunities and improve the livelihoods of all Solomon Islanders.	7: support the disadvantaged and the vulnerable and; improve gender equality.	
NDS Objective 3	All Solomon Islanders have access to quality health and education.			
Medium Term Development Strategies	8: Ensure all Solomon Islanders have access to quality health care and; combat communicable and non-communicable diseases.	9: Ensure all Solomon Islanders can access quality education and the nation's manpower needs are sustainably met.		
NDS Objective 4	Resilient and environmentally sustainable development with effective disaster risk management, response and recovery.			
Medium Term Development Strategies	10: Improve disaster risk management, mitigation and preparedness Medium Term Strategy.	11: Manage the environment in a sustainable resilient way and effectively respond to climate change.		
NDS Objective 5	Unified nation with stable and effective governance and public order.			
Medium Term Development Strategies	12: Efficient and effective public service with a sound corporate culture.	13: Reduce corruption and improve governance at national, provincial and community levels.	14: Improve national unity, peace and stability at all levels.	15: Improve national security, law and order and foreign relations.

Source: UNCTAD.

3. Solomon Islands NTMs and VSS for green trade and sustainable development

The NDS objectives set out a pathway for development in Solomon Islands. Trade is embedded in many elements of the NDS. In particular, NDS Objective 1 calls for improving the enabling environment for business, trade and private sector led growth. It also mentions reinvigorating productive and resource centres, specifically agriculture, agro-forestry, and marine resources, to increase value added export earnings and to achieve sustained growth. Some of the medium-term strategies also entail pursuing a stronger engagement with the global trading system to expand trade opportunities (Solomon Islands Government, 2016). One practical way to operationalise these strategies could involve identifying niche markets, including sustainability-oriented markets. These markets demand products and services that are proven to be “sustainable” economically, socially and environmentally (UNCTAD, 2023). Subsequently, learnings from NTMs and VSS could be leveraged to build policy frameworks for green export promotion which would enhance economic growth in an inclusive and environmentally sustainable manner. Subsections 3.1 and 3.2 below explore the current state of NTMs and VSS respectively in Solomon Islands and, more importantly, the potential for NTMs and VSS to contribute to enhancing green trade.

3.1 The potential for NTMs

NTMs are policy measures, other than tariffs, that can potentially affect international trade (UNCTAD, 2010). According to the methodology of UNCTAD’s NTM data collection, which was rolled out in Solomon Islands under this MSG Green Trade project, NTMs are mandatory and substantive requirements stipulated in regulatory documents. For example, NTMs include sanitary and phytosanitary measures (SPS) and technical barriers to trade (TBT) measures; quantitative restrictions; and

fees and charges. NTMs contrast with VSS, which are voluntary rather than mandatory; and procedural requirements, which are non-substantive rules. Therefore, NTMs and VSS complement each other by addressing different aspects of trade requirements.

NTMs can provide significant opportunities for Solomon Islands to align its trade practices with the sustainable development goals. On the one hand, NTMs can be designed and implemented in ways that directly support sustainable development objectives. For example, hygienic



requirements for imported food help protect public health and emission level requirements for imported cars can prevent air pollution, ultimately supporting SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). These measures have great leverage because Solomon Islands is highly dependent on imported foods, machines and vehicles, energy and pharmaceuticals. Moreover, NTMs could be particularly relevant for the kava sector of the Solomon Islands, where maintaining high standards of production could facilitate access to international niche markets and promote sustainable practices within the industry.

While NTMs hold potential for advancing sustainable development, their design and implementation need to be carefully managed. Poorly designed or implemented NTMs can create trade distortions, increase the cost of trade, and potentially have negative impacts on sustainable development. With the trend towards tariff liberalization, NTMs have emerged as a main obstacle to trade. They are known to be up to three times more restrictive to trade than tariffs (UNCTAD, 2013). Therefore, when designing regulations, it is critical to ensure that they are transparent, non-discriminatory, so that the NTMs they create do not constitute unnecessary obstacles to trade.

UNCTAD collected data on NTMs in Solomon Islands for the first time under this MSG Green Trade project, examining regulatory documents from that were active at end of 2021. UNCTAD identified 388 NTMs from 64 regulations governed by 16 different ministries and departments.⁷ Below is the summary of Solomon Islands NTMs:

- 233 measures targeted import products
- 155 measures targeted export products.

- The largest group of NTMs are SPS and TBT measures (294 measures), such as requirements on hygiene, quality, production, post-production, transport, storage, labelling, packaging, inspection, testing and certificate. It was followed by quantitative restrictions (44 measures), such as quotas and prohibitions. The third largest group is fees, charges, and taxes (20 measures).
- 3 per cent of NTMs apply to all products horizontally. For example, use of a designated port; furnishing of a return of sales or stocks; and payment of consumption tax on goods.
- Based on the number of regulations, the most regulated product groups are animals and animal products; plants and plant products; and fish.
- Based on the number of regulations, the least regulated product groups are telecommunication equipment; land transport (used cars); and hazardous substances and wastes.

Over two thirds of NTMs in Solomon Islands (70 per cent) have a positive and direct linkage to one or more of the SDGs.⁸ This share is higher than the average share of MSG member States, SIDS and the world, which are, 57 per cent, 48 per cent and 46 per cent respectively.

Figure 1 offers a detailed analysis of the alignment between NTMs in Solomon Islands and the SDGs. It quantifies the percentage of NTMs linked to each SDG, noting that some NTMs may relate to multiple SDGs. For context, the analysis includes comparisons with the average shares of MSG member States, SIDS, and the global average.

⁷ UNCTAD also identified 11 NTMs that had been repealed before end-2021. Including the repealed NTMs, UNCTAD identified 399 NTMs in total. They were from 69 regulations and governed by 16 different ministries and departments.

⁸ The methodology of calculating the share of NTMs that are linked to the SDGs takes only the NTMs under Chapters A to F and P into account. The NTMs under Chapters G to O are excluded from the calculation. In Solomon Islands, 379 NTMs under Chapter A to F and P were used for the calculation (see UNCTAD, 2019).



The figure illustrates that:

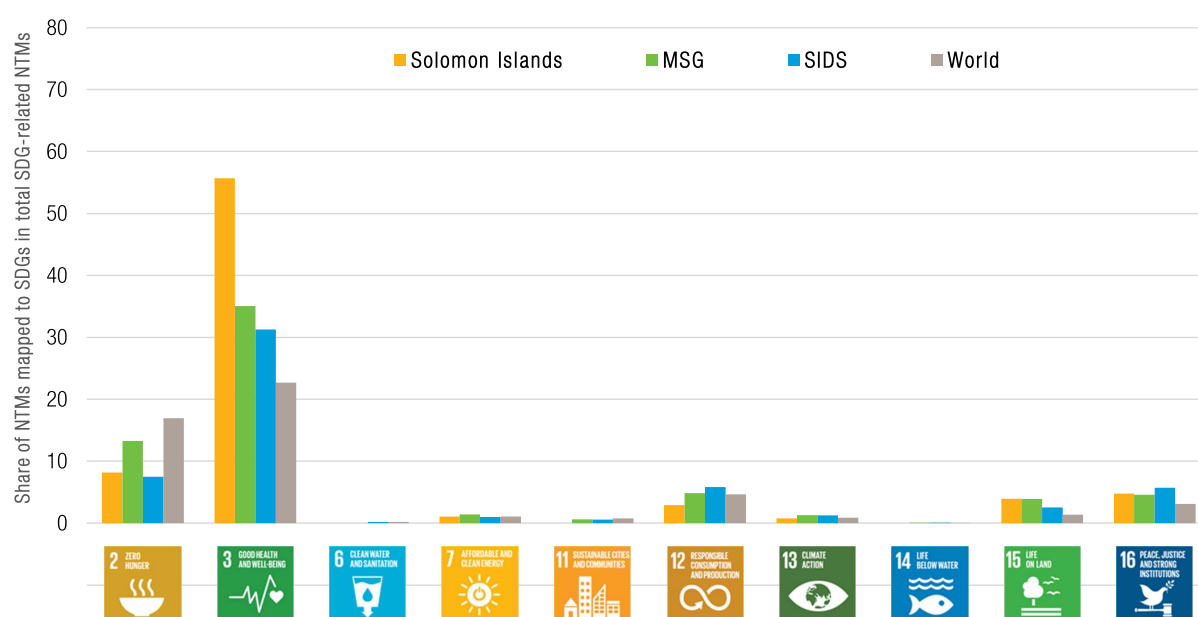
- More than 55 per cent of NTMs in Solomon Islands directly support SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being). This share of NTMs is considerably higher than those of the reference groups. It is driven by the requirements on exported and imported food under the Pure Food (Food Control) Regulations 2010 which are designed to ensure food safety and good nutrition. They are more detailed and specific to each sub-group of food, compared with the country's regulations on other product groups, leading to a large count of NTMs. In addition, Solomon Islands has NTMs which contribute to implementing the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, controlling the use of narcotic drugs and ensuring the efficacy and safety of medicines for the fight against diseases and reducing mortality levels.
- Slightly more than 8 per cent of NTMs directly support SDG 2 (Zero Hunger). SPS measures on agricultural products and vehicles that may carry biosecurity risks help ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices. Although this is the second largest share of NTMs in Solomon Islands, it is lower than the average share of the MSG member States.
- Almost 5 per cent of NTMs directly serve SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) by controlling the flow of firearms and explosives. This is the third largest share of NTMs in Solomon Islands and it is marginally higher than the average share of the MSG member States.
- Albeit in small numbers, NTMs in Solomon Islands also contribute to:
 - SDG 15 (Life on Land) through the implementation of the Convention on



Figure 1

The impact of Solomon Islands' NTMs on SDGs

Share of NTMs in Solomon Islands that address each SDG, including comparisons with MSG member States, SIDS, and global averages



Source: UNCTAD and UN ESCAP calculation, October 2023.⁹

⁹ The methodology was developed between UN ESCAP and UNCTAD and the calculation was undertaken by UN ESCAP based on the NTM data collected by UNCTAD.



International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora and the export prohibition of certain tree species in specific forms.

- o SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) by specifying sustainable processes and production methods of some food and tree species and regulating trade of ozone depleting substances and the products using such substances in the pursuit of implementation of the Montreal Protocol.
- o SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) by ensuring energy efficiency of electrical appliances.

The detailed analysis of Solomon Islands NTMs revealed five potential areas where Solomon Islands can further promote green trade and synergistically support sustainable development through good NTMs:

- Although Solomon Islands have NTMs that address key SDG-related issues, as mentioned above, there is a room for the country to extend the NTMs to a wider range of product groups or increase the degree of complexity, referring to other countries' best practices. For example, in relation to SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), NTMs in Solomon Islands target firearms and explosives but often, the NTMs extend to radioactive materials or biological and chemical weapons. Another example concerns the pursuit of the Montreal Protocol under the SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production). Solomon Islands impose a full ban and a license requirement on ozone-depleting substances selectively under the Customs and Excise Act. Meanwhile, other countries tend to manage these NTMs under different laws such as the Environment Protection Act and set additional requirements such as traceability and transportation requirements.

- One of the least regulated product groups by NTMs in the country is hazardous wastes and chemicals. Solomon Islands has ratified two of the three international conventions that address the cross-border management of hazardous wastes and chemicals, namely, the Basel Convention and Stockholm Convention. The country can consider establishing TBT measures and quantitative restrictions to implement these Conventions and better control the export and import of hazardous wastes and chemicals. Such NTMs would support SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production).
- Another least regulated product group was land transport. Although imported second-hand vehicles are the main means of land transportation in Solomon Islands, the country does not have measures concerning used cars, other than the SPS measures from the perspective of biosecurity risk. Solomon Islands can consider establishing TBT measures to ensure emission levels and the safety of used cars. Such measures can support SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities).
- As Figure 1 showed, Solomon Islands does not have any NTMs that are linked to SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitization). Albeit small, some countries in the reference groups of SIDS and the World have put in place such NTMs. The country can consider establishing TBT measures to ensure water efficiency of certain machines, taps, baths, sinks, water basins and other sanitary parts to support this SDG.
- Solomon Islands does not have a central legal depository. Instead, regulations and NTMs are accessible through individual agency-level webpages. This makes it difficult to have an overview of the country's regulatory framework including NTMs. Increasing the transparency would contribute to implementing good NTMs efficiently and effectively.

One of the least regulated product groups by NTMs in the country is hazardous wastes and chemicals.



3.2 The potential for VSS

VSS have emerged as a transnational tool in the governance of global value chains, addressing sustainability concerns towards advancing sustainable development (Marx et al., 2022). VSS can support economic, social and environmental goals. For example, VSS are often linked to higher wages and benefit from a price premium often benefitting the producers in developing countries. Due to their environmental requirements such as the avoidance of certain pesticides, they can contribute to environmental related SDGs. Over the past decade, the use of VSS has grown for many products, resulting in considerable growth in the share of the global market covered by VSS. For example, around 25 per cent of global cocoa production and 16 per cent of global cotton production is certified by some sustainability standard (Bissinger et al., 2020). Currently, there are around over 300 VSS operating globally, out of which 50 are used in Solomon Islands (according to the International Trade Centre Standards Map). Some examples of VSS active in Solomon Islands are the Aquaculture Stewardship Council; Fairtrade International; and Pacific Organic Standard.¹⁰

Recent research examined 232 VSS. The findings indicates that VSS have the potential to contribute to SDG 12 (Responsible Production and Consumption), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 1 (No Poverty), although the contribution of a VSS to the SDGs depends on its design and specific requirements (Bissinger et al., 2020; Schleifer et al., 2022).

With respect to the VSS on organic products, studies on the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM)

Standard (Version 2)¹¹ have demonstrated its potential to address SDGs 2, 6, 8, 12, and 15 (Kosolapova et al., 2023). IFOAM is the “Global umbrella organization of organic agriculture”. Although national and regional organic standards differ, substantive requirements across organic standards tend to be largely similar. The potential impact of the IFOAM Standard, one of the most prominent organic standards, on the SDGs implies that the existing organic standards in Solomon Islands, such as the Pacific Organic Standard would have similar impact on the SDG.

The report indicates that approximately 40 to 80 per cent of the requirements prescribed in the IFOAM Organic Standard can:

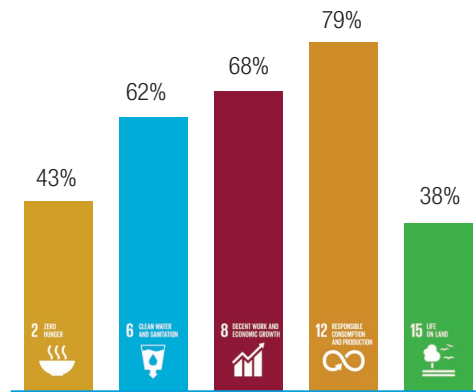
1. Advance SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) by supporting agricultural productivity, farmers’ livelihoods, and sustainable food production.
2. Advance SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) by improving water quality and water-use efficiency.
3. Advance SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by promoting ethical practices and labour rights.
4. Advance SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) by supporting environmentally sound management of chemicals and waste.
5. Advance SDG 15 (Life on Land) by supporting sustainable forest management, conservation of forests, and biodiversity protection.

Figure 2 illustrates the extent to which the requirements prescribed in the IFOAM address selected SDGs.

¹⁰ For more information, see: <https://www.standardsmap.org/en/identify?destination=&origin=Solomon%20Islands>

¹¹ Standard document available at: <https://www.ifoam.bio/our-work/how/standards-certification/organic-guarantee-system/ifoam-standard>

Figure 2
Linking VSS with the SDGs
 Extent to which IFOAM standard requirements address selected SDGs, average degree of coverage



Source: UNCTAD based on Kosolapova *et al.* (2023).

In Solomon Islands, the area dedicated to organic agriculture has experienced significant growth, expanding from 3,367 hectares in 2020 to 8,231 hectares in

2021, marking an impressive 144 per cent increase within a year and representing 7 per cent of the total area cultivated (Willer *et al.*, 2023). Moreover, in 2020, Solomon Islands exported 31 metric tonnes of organic products to the European Union, demonstrating the country's existing presence in the organic market. This remarkable growth in organic agriculture presents Solomon Islands with a valuable opportunity to harness VSS, particularly in the organic sector. Emerging sectors, such as the kava sector, have not yet fully realized the potential benefits of VSS (see Box 1). By aligning its development strategies with these standards, Solomon Islands can improve national prosperity by increasing exports and farmers' revenue, promoting sustainable development, safeguarding the environment, and enhancing the well-being of its citizens and contributing to the achievement of the SDGs.



Box 1

Case study: VSS and the kava sector in Solomon Islands

Kava was introduced in Solomon Islands in 1961 from Vanuatu and was first grown in the Santa Isabel province. However, for almost 40 years, the crop did not have a significant national market demand and exports began only in 2000 (UNCTAD, 2024). Despite the absence of appropriate legislations and regulations, by 2010, Solomon Islands managed to export up to 50 metric tonnes per year of dried kava powder to Kiribati, Fiji and, more recently, to the United States of America (UNCTAD, 2024).

In recent years, many small farmers have begun to cultivate kava in combination with traditional crops, such as coconut. Whereas farmers are generally very knowledgeable about traditional crops, there is a gap in technical knowledge regarding kava, which is relatively new to the Solomon Islands. Appropriate post-harvest care is one of the factors that is critical to growing high-quality kava. To address this, the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL) has been conducting training programs throughout Solomon Islands to enhance farmers' output, particularly to ensure farmers meet requirements for overseas markets (Solomon Islands Government, 2021). Moreover, the government is in the process of formulating a Regional Kava Development Strategy to support the sector's growth (Solomon Islands Government, 2023).

Given the attractive prices of kava in export markets, there is an interest among farmers to cultivate the crop, a sentiment encouraged by the government. Recently, the national government, through its 2021 "Redirection Policy and the Covid-19 Economic Stimulus Package", recognized kava as a commercial crop (UNCTAD, 2024). Furthermore, with the support of the Pacific Horticultural and Agricultural Market Access Plus (PHAMA Plus) program, funded by Australia and New Zealand, in 2022 Solomon Islands launched a National Kava Quality Standard and a Kava Industry Working Group in 2022 (PHAMA Plus, n.d.). The Standard sets the minimum requirements for kava products intended for consumption as food or beverage when mixed with water, whilst the Working Group will coordinate its implementation, presenting an opportunity to enhance kava quality in Solomon Islands and expand its trade and export markets (PHAMA Plus, n.d.).

UNCTAD's analysis of the kava value chain in Solomon Islands identified the absence of regulations and lack of education among farmers as large hurdles to accessing overseas markets for kava (UNCTAD, 2024). To boost the kava industry in Solomon Islands, the following recommendations were made:

- 1. Endorse and implement the National Kava Policy;**
- 2. Strengthen legislation, certification, and farmer support services;**
- 3. Invest in rural infrastructure development and improve logistics;**
- 4. Encourage sustainable practices and certification.**

UNCTAD's assessment of the kava value chain (2024) could not identify any certified kava producers in Solomon Islands. Limited data on kava production, consumption, and especially for VSS certified kava made it complicated to assess the current landscape for certified kava. As a relatively "new" producer of kava, Solomon Islands could benefit from certification which would guarantee the quality of the kava produced, especially for export markets.





4. Synergistic linkages in green trade: Leaving no one behind

There are synergistic linkages between green trade promotion through NTMs and organic certification and Solomon Islands national sustainable development strategies. These linkages are particularly relevant from the perspective of “Leaving No One Behind”, one of the overarching principles of the SDGs, which lines up with Solomon Islands’ NDS first objective of “Sustained and Inclusive Economic Growth”. This section explores the interplay between green trade and rural communities, women empowerment, and youth engagement, underscoring their significance within the context of the Solomon Islands sustainable development framework, where inclusivity is underlined.

First, rural communities are central to green trade promotion. Rural communities represent 74 per cent of Solomon Islands’ population (World Bank, 2023a) and play a central role in agriculture, which accounts for about 34 per cent of the country’s gross domestic product (World Bank, 2023b). Promoting green trade through NTMs and organic certification in agriculture can hence significantly contribute to achieving SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production). More specifically, promoting these measures in the kava sector as a promising export sector can improve knowledge and good agricultural practices, enhance product safety and quality, and encourage scaling up as well as professionalization of the sector. In turn, this can foster trade opportunities for rural communities through accessing export markets for kava products. Green trade promotion in agriculture and more specifically in the kava sector can hence be a leverage for socio-economic development

of rural communities, in line with Solomon Islands’ national development objective to ensure inclusive growth.

Secondly, green trade policies can further encourage women’s empowerment and help achieve Solomon Islands national development priorities on inclusive growth. Green trade policies can generate economic opportunities enhancing both women’s participation as well as revenues, and encouraging skill development. In kava production more specifically, organic certification and the ensuing benefits can empower women especially as they play an important role in agricultural production (UN Women, 2022). Certification can hence support their professionalization in kava production but also in other skill areas such as administrative and management tasks required by VSS.

Thirdly, the promotion of green trade in agriculture presents synergies with engaging youth for the future. The youth play a vital role in innovation such as adopting VSS and implementing sustainable production practices through their energy, adaptability, and digital proficiency. Youth participation can hence contribute to the diversification of agriculture by exploring new crop varieties, markets, and value-added agricultural activities. Their engagement not only benefits the agricultural sector and their long-term economic opportunities but also aligns with Solomon Islands’ national development priorities on inclusive growth. Green trade policies can hence foster opportunities for engaging and empowering the youth by calling for adaptation and innovation.



While green trade policies present potential synergies with the “Leaving No One Behind” principle and Solomon Islands’ national development priorities of inclusive growth through fostering opportunities to enhance rural inclusion, women empowerment and youth engagement, several challenges remain and need to be addressed for these synergies to materialize. In particular, many rural communities in Solomon Islands face barriers related to inadequate infrastructure and limited access to markets, as well as the lack of regulatory frameworks (World Bank, 2015). Green trade policies may not yield their full potential if rural areas lack proper transportation, storage facilities, and market linkages, and if they are not supported by adequate public policies. Addressing these deficits is crucial to unlock the benefits of green trade for rural communities.

In addition, gender inequalities remain prevalent in Solomon Islands (UN Women, 2022) and ensuring equitable participation of women in green trade initiatives requires targeted efforts, capacity-building, and policy adjustments to promote gender balance in the sector.

Lastly, encouraging youth to stay in Solomon Islands and in rural areas and actively engage in agriculture and green trade is a complex challenge. Many young people migrate to urban centers or overseas in search of better economic opportunities and modern lifestyles. Customary land ownership also remains a hurdle for their participation in higher value economic activities. Retaining youth in Solomon Islands’ rural areas necessitates a multifaceted approach, which may involve providing them with education, training, access to modern amenities, and securing land ownership, while preserving their cultural heritage (Asian Development Bank, 2023).

By addressing these challenges and embracing inclusivity, green trade in Solomon Islands can become a pivotal tool for enhancing rural livelihoods, empowering women, and engaging the youth in shaping a more sustainable and equitable future, while advancing the nation’s commitment to the SDGs and its “Leaving No One Behind” principle as well as achieving national development priorities.

Green trade in Solomon Islands can become a pivotal tool for enhancing rural livelihoods, empowering women, and engaging the youth in shaping a more sustainable and equitable future, while advancing the nation’s commitment to SDGs.



5. The way forward – Three policy recommendations

Sections 3 discussed how Solomon Islands can use NTMs and VSS to enhance green trade, while also supporting the sustainable development priorities set forth in the NDS. Additionally, Section 4 examined the interaction between green trade promotion and its effects on rural communities, women, and youth, highlighting both opportunities and challenges. This section outlines three key recommendations for promoting green trade through NTMs and VSS and describes how these can synergize with efforts to achieve the goals of *National Development Strategy 2016-2035: Improving the Social and Economic Livelihoods of all Solomon Islanders*. A more comprehensive version can be found in Table 4 of Annex 1.

Policy areas and specific recommendations for action

1. Implement NTMs and VSS to enhance kava quality and market confidence

Alignment with national development priorities:

This recommendation supports the national objectives related to ensuring the health and safety of kava products, bolstering the confidence of international buyers, and enhancing the agricultural sector's economic potential.

Action recommendation:

Revise the Pure Food (Food Control) Regulations to include the National Kava Quality Standards and/or the Kava regulations.

Expected benefit:

Including these kava standards will guarantee the quality of kava, securing consumer health and improving the credibility of kava products in foreign markets. Additionally, conducting stakeholder awareness sessions and establishing a monitoring mechanism will help to ensure compliance and enable the kava community in Solomon Islands to keep up with changes in international rules as they evolve.

Which bodies/organizations can help:

- In Solomon Islands: "Solomon Commodities", Ministry of Health and Medical Services, Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL), Ministry of Commerce, Industry, Labour, and Immigration (MCILI), Biosecurity, Kava Industry Working Group, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade (MFAET).
- Other regional and international organizations: FAO, SPC, UNCTAD, PHAMA Plus.

2. Foster Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) to support kava sector growth

Alignment with national development priorities:

Aligning with the National Kava Policy and Agriculture Sector Growth Strategy and Investment Plan 2021-2030, this recommendation focuses on sustainable agricultural practices, broad-based growth, and productive employment opportunities.



Action recommendation:

Develop and implement a GAP code for kava, considering international standards and local practices. Engage in stakeholder consultations to ensure the code's applicability and extend training to farmers and producers about the benefits and compliance with the GAP code. A designated national management body should oversee the development of the GAP code, potentially extending it to other commodities.

Expected benefit:

Developing a GAP code will complement the inclusion of a Kava Standard to Pure Food (Food Control) Regulations. Also, it potentially increases farmers' access to foreign markets and help them get a better price for their produce. It will promote more sustainable farming methods.

Which bodies/organizations can help:

- In Solomon Islands: Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Commerce, Industry, Labour, and Immigration, Biosecurity, National Kava Quality Standard and Kava Industry Working Group, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade.
- Supporting external organizations: SPC, FAO, UNCTAD, Pacific Organic and Ethical Trade Community

3. Facilitate decision-making by streamlining data on NTMs and VSS for policymakers and the private sector

Alignment with national development priorities:

Consistent with the national goals for enhancing decision-making capabilities

and increasing access to information technologies, this recommendation aims to make NTMs and VSS more accessible to policymakers and the private sector.

Action recommendation:

Publish trade-related regulations in a more systemic manner. Define a centralized format for publication, such as an Online Gazette or the Pacific Islands Legal Information Institute (PACLI), and document the plan for implementation once appropriate funding is identified.

Expected benefit:

Better access to regulatory information will allow policymakers and researchers to undertake policy review across individual ministries' domains, as well as reducing the cost of private sector to find the information on and comply with regulations.

Which bodies/organizations can help:

- In Solomon Islands: Attorney General's Chambers, All Ministries publishing trade-related legislations.
- Supporting external organizations: UNCTAD, WTO.

Table 3 presents the synergistic linkages in matrix form, outlining how the policy recommendations create synergistic linkages with Solomon Islands' national development priorities.

By integrating these policy recommendations into their strategies, Solomon Islands can harness the potential of NTMs and VSS to advance its sustainable agriculture and rural development priorities, foster sustainable practices, and create an enabling environment for trade that aligns with the NDS and global sustainability goals.





Table 3

Matrix of synergistic linkages between green trade policy recommendations and Solomon Islands national development plan

	Policy recommendation National development strategy	Implement NTMs and VSS to enhance kava quality and market confidence	Foster Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) to support kava sector growth	Facilitate decision-making by streamlining data on NTMs and VSS for policymakers and the private sector
1.	Sustained and inclusive economic growth	X	X	X
2.	Poverty alleviation	X	X	
3.	Access to quality health and education services			
4.	Resilient and environmentally sustainable development	X	X	
5.	Stable and effective governance and public order	X		X

Source: UNCTAD.



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Annex 1: Policy recommendations

Table 4
Summary of policy recommendations for Solomon Islands

Objective	Policy options	Workplan steps	Who needs to be involved	Expected benefit
I. Use Non-tariff measures (NTMs) and voluntary sustainability standards (VSS) to Promote Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development	(1) Revise the Pure Food (Food Control) Regulations to include the National Kava Quality Standards and/or the Kava regulations.	1. Finalize the Kava Regulation and National Kava Quality Standards. 2. Review the existing Pure Food (Food Control) Regulations and include the developed Kava Regulations and, if needed, the National Kava Quality Standard. 3. Conduct stakeholder awareness raising sessions to inform about the new standards. 4. Establish a monitoring mechanism to ensure compliance with the Act. 5. Follow international developments to update the Kava Regulations based on the Regional Kava Standard.	Coordinating Entity: Solomon Commodities Participating Entities: Ministry of Health & Medical Services, MAL, MCILI, Biosecurity, Kava Industry Working Group, MFAET Stakeholders in the Kava industry Supporting Organizations: FAO, SPC, UNCTAD, Pharma Plus	The inclusion of the Standard will guarantee the minimum marketable quality of Kava to international buyers, ensuring the health and safety of consumers.
II. Foster Good Agriculture Practices (GAP) to support kava sector growth	(2) Develop Good Agriculture Practices (GAP) for kava.	1. Develop the GAP code for kava: Look at international standards and develop the draft code, while keeping local practices in mind. 2. Conduct stakeholder consultations to validate the applicability of the GAP code. This includes leveraging the experience and knowledge of certified farmers. 3. Establish or designate a national management body, that should supervise and pursue the development of the GAP code, maybe extending it to other commodities. 4. Conduct trainings to familiarize farmers and producers about the benefits and compliance with the GAP code, eventually combining it with other VSS.	Coordinating Entity: Ministry of Agriculture Participating Entities: MCILI, Biosecurity, National Kava Quality Standard and Kava Industry Working Group, MFAET Stakeholders in the Kava industry Supporting Organizations: POETCom, SPC, FAO, UNCTAD	Developing a GAP code will complement the inclusion of a kava Standard to the Pure Food (Food Control) Regulations and support the Implementation of the National Kava Policy and Agriculture Sector Growth Strategy and Investment Plan 2021-2030. This development can potentially increase farmers' access to foreign markets, enabling them to secure better prices for their produce. Additionally, it will promote more sustainable farming methods.
II. Ensure NTMs and VSS support the decision making of policy makers and businesses on promoting trade	(3) Publish trade-related regulations in a more systemic manner.	1. Review the publication system of each Ministry and propose a common publication system. 2. Agree on a format of centralized publication (e.g. Online Gazette, PACLII, Dashboard of all the ministries' publication page). 3. Document the plan (estimated resource, involved officials, etc.) and implement when appropriate funding source is identified.	Coordinating Entity: Attorney General's Chambers Participating Entities: All Ministries publishing trade-related legislations. Supporting Organizations: UNCTAD, WTO	Better access to regulatory information will allow policymakers and researchers to undertake policy review across individual ministries' domains, as well as reducing the cost of private sector to find the information on and comply with regulations.

Source: UNCTAD.

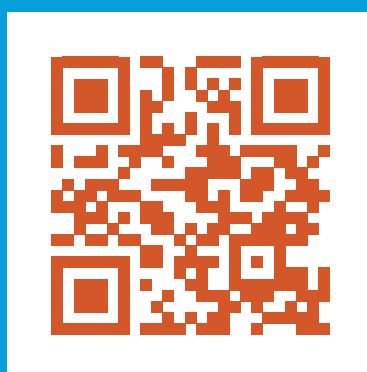
Annex 2: Solomon Islands' development goals and the SDGs

Table 5

Mapping of the National Sustainable Development Strategy of Solomon Islands with the SDGs

SDG		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
National development priority																		
1.	Sustained and inclusive economic growth								X	X								
2.	Poverty alleviation	X	X			X	X				X							
3.	Access to quality health and education services			X	X													
4.	Resilient and environmental sustainable development							X				X	X	X	X	X		
5.	Stable and effective governance and public order																X	X

Source: UNCTAD.



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