

CONCEPT NOTE

Innovative and Sustainable Business Development Services (BDS) for the Informal Creative and Agriculture Sectors

23-24 February 2021
Radisson Fiji

1. Introduction

Evidence from recent Rapid Assessments (RA) on the impact of COVID-19 on employment and business and the UN Social & Economic Impact Assessment (UNSEIA)^[1] of COVID-19 in the Pacific suggests, while acknowledging the existence of a large informal sector pre COVID-19, an increasing informal sector buldge. Redundant workers from the formal sector are transitioning to the informal sector in search for income and livelihoods. **Informal sector enterprises**, particularly those linked to the tourism industry and trade, including the creative industries and agriculture are experiencing many challenges to sustain their enterprises, not only as a result of the global pandemic but also recent and on-going regional/national disasters. For those in the **creative sector**, effects have been widespread as a direct result of a highly impacted tourism sector, not likely to resume to its 2019 levels prior to 2022, in the most optimistic scenario. Meanwhile, the same SEIA has indicated the return of urban dwellers to rural areas. This trend has resulted in the increase of **agricultural activities**, which has in turn contributed to increased resilience of vulnerable populations during the pandemic, offering a diversified livelihood strategy and meaningful coping strategy, as well as the region's gradual reduction in dependency on imported products. However, this newly created part of the informal sector, has reportedly faced difficulty in selling their produce, likely reflecting skills-gap, as well as a change in market structure, in addition to a possible reduction in overall demand for fresh produce.

2. UN Joint Project

The UN Secretary General's Multi Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) for COVID-19 recovery has approved a joint project entitled "***Inclusive Economic Recovery through Sustainable Enterprises in the Informal Economies of Fiji, Palau, Tonga and Vanuatu***". The project has a 13 months' implementation duration, started in October 2020 and implemented jointly by the International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

^[1] <https://www.pacific.undp.org/content/pacific/en/home/library/socio-economic-impact-assessment-of-covid-19-in-fiji.html>

In summary, the project will intervene in the sub-sectors of the informal economy, with a focus on sustaining enterprises in the cultural and creative industries and agriculture sector. The project aims to mobilize stakeholders in the labour market, increase capacities to sustain enterprises and decent work and improve access to markets as a way to address unemployment, underemployment and business deficits. The overall objective is to improve resilience and employment, production and income recovery from the impacts of COVID-19.

The project objectives are as follows:

Objective 1: Improve the institutional capacities of national service providers to deliver innovative and sustainable and COVID-19 safe business development services (BDS) and social security/pension options to vulnerable groups to support recovery and income generation.

Objective 2: Improve productivity and spur innovation in the creative and agricultural sectors.

Objective 3: Monitor, document and evaluate progress, share lessons learned and contribute to recovery policy development and review.

3. Past experience with BDS

The ILO has had a long-term partnership on delivery of Start & Improve Your Business (SIYB) with the Ministry of Commerce, Tourism, Trade and Transport (MCTTT). The SIYB has been delivered face-to-face by its Corporative and Integrated Human Resource Development Programme (IHRDP) units, currently under the newly established MSME Fiji. The delivery of SIYB by MCTTT has had challenges, particularly with the mobility of certified SIY trainers. The Fiji Enterprise Engine (FEE) under the Fiji Commerce & Employers Federation (FCEF) is supported by the Market Development Facility (MDF), ILO and when it was launched in 2019, by the MCTTT. As the Pacific's first private sector led business accelerator programme, the FEE programme has received favourable review. In 2020, due to COVID-19 some of the FEE services were delivered virtually. The Fiji Trades Union Congress (FTUC) and FCEF implemented the Transition to Business (T2B) initiative that provides business training, business mentoring and business advisory services to redundant formal sector workers who have started micro business in the informal sector.

4. Developing the concept

Based on the project inception meeting in December 2020 and follow-up consultations with relevant BDS partners, there is an expectation for a mixture of virtual and face-to-face delivery modality of BDS. BDS includes business training, business advisory services and business mentoring.

Therefore, the project will firstly explore the creation of a **virtual platform/incubator** and accelerator that target groups could access and BDS can

be delivered. These include target groups from any project or pacific country. The platform can host recorded sessions or live sessions.

For the live sessions, creative groups and farmers will be targeted in the first round. It is envisaged that agreements will be signed with hotels that source creative services from nearby villages, to provide **satellite training venues** for the duration of the project and beyond. Trainers, advisors and mentors will use the virtual platform to engage with the target groups.

Where there is no connectivity, **face-to-face training** will be conducted by MSM Fiji, in communities.

5. Participants

The participants will include :

- (a) Ministry of Commerce, Tourism, Trade and Transport
 - MSME Fiji : Corporative, IHRDP, NDP
- (b) Fiji Commerce & Employers Federation (FCEF)
 - Fiji Enterprise Engine, Business Link Pacific, Business Continuity Planning, WEBC, YEC
- (c) Market Development Facility (MDF)
- (d) Innovation Hub (USP/UNDP)
- (e) South Pacific Tourism Organization (SPTO)
- (f) Fiji Hotels & Tourism Association (FHTA)
- (g) Fiji Arts Council
- (h) PIFON
- (i) UNDP
- (j) UNESCO
- (k) IFAD
- (l) ILO

6. Meeting objectives

Therefore, this technical meeting will explore the potential for:

- (a) the creation of a virtual incubator and accelerator platform for those with good internet connectivity;
- (b) delivery of face-to-face BDS where there is low or no internet connectivity.

7. Programme

Day 1: Tuesday 23rd February 2021		
Time	Activity	Notes
8:00am – 8:30am	Registration	
8:30am – 9:00am	Official opening, introductions and workshop objectives - Opening speech by ILO Director - Objectives by Edward Bernard (ILO)	
9:00am – 10:45am	Lessons from the past: - UNDP/USP, MDF, MCTTT, FCEF, SPTO	Presentations & Q&A
10:45am – 11:00am	<i>Morning tea</i>	
11:00am – 12:30pm	Identifying the BDS needs: - PIFON, Fiji Arts Council, UNESCO, IFAD	Presentations and focus group meeting
12:30pm – 1:30pm	<i>Lunch</i>	
1:30pm – 3:00pm	Addressing those BDS Needs: (a) Group 1 – virtual (b) Group 2 Face-to-Face	Group work
3:00pm – 3:45pm	Group Presentations	Presentations & Q&A
3:45pm – 4:00pm	Wrap up	
Day 2: Wednesday 24 February 2021		
Time	Activity	Notes
9:00am – 9:15am	Review of Day 1	

9:15am – 10:00am	Global best practices pre and during COVID-19 - Kinan Albahnasi (ILO)	Presentations & Q&A
10:00am – 11:30am	Developing the BDS delivery: (a) Group 1 – virtual (b) Group 2 Face-to-Face	Group work
11:30am – 12:30am	Group Presentation	Presentations & Q&A
12:30pm – 1:00pm	Next steps	Presentations & Q&A
1:00pm – 1:15pm	Official closing ILO, FCEF, MSME Fiji	
1:15pm – 2:15pm	Lunch	