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# Coconut Risk Management and Mitigation Manual for the Pacific Region

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Compiled by R. Bourdeix, J. M. Sourisseau and J. Lin

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Compiled by R. Bourdeix <sup>(1, 2)</sup>, J. M. Sourisseau <sup>(3, 4)</sup>, and J. Lin <sup>(5)</sup>

(1) CIRAD<sup>1</sup>, UMR AGAP<sup>2</sup>, F-34398 Montpellier, France.

(2) AGAP, Univ Montpellier, CIRAD, INRA<sup>3</sup>, Montpellier SupAgro, Montpellier, France.

(3) CIRAD, UMR ART-DEV, F-34398 Montpellier, France.

(4) ART-DEV<sup>4</sup>, CIRAD, Univ Montpellier, CNRS<sup>5</sup>, Université de Perpignan via Domitia.

(5) Doctoral Researcher in Research Training Group 1666 ‘Global Food: Transformation of Global Agri-Food Systems’ University of Göttingen, Göttingen, Germany.

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<sup>1</sup> The French Agricultural Centre for Research and International Cooperation.

<sup>2</sup> Joint Research Unit on Genetic Improvement and Adaptation of Tropical and Mediterranean Plants.

<sup>3</sup> The French National Research Institute for Agriculture, Food and the Environment.

<sup>4</sup> Joint Research Unit on Actors, Resources and Territories in Development

<sup>5</sup> The French National Research Institute for Scientific Research.

## 34. TRADING ACCESSIBILITY IN REMOTE FARMS OR ISLANDS

*By R. Bourdeix and I. Bororua*

### Description

This risk is linked to geographical isolation and lack of efficient infrastructures for transportation of agricultural products. It may greatly reduce the profitability of exporting agricultural commodities.

### Occurrence and severity

In 2003, the ADB initiated Alternative Livelihood Project recognised that the growth on Vanua Levu (Fiji) could not be sustained because all products must be transhipped to Suva before they could be re-loaded on container ships for overseas markets. The cost of transhipment within Fiji, from Vanua Levu to Suva, is almost equivalent to the cost of freight to New Zealand or Australia from Suva.

Copra trade is often the main economic reason for ships to travel to remote islands. If the copra deal stops, the island is dead by isolation – if no other ships come people may be forced to leave the island.

Copra transportation in boats needs special care. Closely associated with the process of deterioration and directly due to the presence of moisture in the copra is the phenomenon of self-heating. It is known that temperatures high enough to cause spontaneous ignition may be generated. Though under-dried copra is regarded as somewhat dangerous cargo (Class 3 in the Suez Canal schedule of dangerous materials) conflicting views have been expressed regarding the real possibility of high enough temperatures being generated to cause spontaneous combustion. Literature records show that the highest temperature recorded in the hold of a ship is only 67°C.

### Mitigation and adaptation

Rather than exporting basic agricultural products, there is an interest in transforming these products locally to increase their values and reduce the volume and cost of transport. There are many traditional recipes made from coconut, such as confectionery or canned food, which could be prepared locally. Many traditional cosmetic preparations, including the famous 'Monoï', deserve to be better valued and marketed.

The name of the isolated island must be used as a trademark, or in a controlled appellation of origin, which will give strong added value to the products, within the framework of a protected niche market.

Copra can be locally transformed into oil, some of which can be used as fuel for the operation of vehicles and electro-generators. This has the advantage of reducing the energy bill on isolated production sites. However, care must be taken that the trade with the outside does not stop and that, in the case of isolated islands, boats continue to come regularly to these islands to collect products, bring fuel, medicines and other indispensable products. Also, by-products of such biofuel generation can be toxic and must also be well managed.

## **Actions to undertake**

Governments are always interested in keeping isolated and remote islands populated and that not all citizens crowd into often overpopulated capitals. They often initiate practical measures to support these policies. One of these measures is to subsidize the transport of agricultural and artisanal production from these isolated islands.

Such a subsidy system already exists in French Polynesia. Copra cultivation is a core activity in remote archipelagos, including Tuamotu Gambier. It provides livelihoods to isolated, low-income populations in the absence of 'minimum income' type of social assistance or unemployment benefits. For many families, copra is the only cash income. The copra produced in French Polynesia is purchased in its entirety by SA Huilerie de Tahiti, regardless of the quantity and quality, in accordance with the terms of an agreement that binds it to the country. For promoting the economic and social development of islands other than Tahiti, the country is responsible for inter-island sea freight for certain goods. Initially limited to copra, staple foods and bottled water, freight now includes building materials, agricultural products, handicrafts, and some processed agricultural products.

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