

Discussion document: Role of Secretariat, members and focal points

Background.

In the initial development of the POETCom membership structures it was decided to include Focal Points at national level to facilitate coordination and information sharing at national level. A primary practical reason was to make it simpler when working out who to invite to funded meetings such as the General Assembly. It was decided not to formalise how the Focal Points were selected in each country acknowledging that every country was different and on the assumption that countries could facilitate their own national coordination in a transparent, fair and inclusive way.

With the exception of the establishment of Focal Points we have essentially adopted IFOAMs membership structure and categories. Most of this system has worked, membership has grown, we have been able manage some membership applications that were considered not meeting requirements based on policy rather than discretion, and membership is broad based and inclusive – a variety of stakeholders have been able to find their place within the structure.

In the 4 years since this was established there has been much learning and the current system of Focal Points is not working as had been hoped. Few of the Focal Points are fulfilling the duties they have to report on national activities and to build a national network.

There has also been much discussion about where the centre of gravity is and some feel that it is too heavily focused in the Secretariat.

Focal Point Report Card

Based on the basic expectations of Focal Point engagement the table below indicates engagement by country.

Focal Point	National Annual reporting	Contributes to newsletters/annual report/list serve	Contribution to growth and coordination of movement nationally
Titikaveka Growers Association (Cooks)	no	no	No expansion, no links with other initiatives, no national network, now changing due to project intervention but TGA are unlikely to fulfil other requirements and Focal Point may change
NIOFA (Niue)	yes	no	Organic stakeholder expanding – project assisted.
TNYC (Tonga)	no	no	Organic stakeholders expanding external to/independent of Focal Point, no known links to other initiatives or national network
FOA (Fiji)	no	no	Organic stakeholders growing external to/ independent of Focal Point, new entrants becoming POETCom members
KGA (Solomons)	yes	no	Organic stakeholders expanding, organised national network and new stakeholders becoming POETCom members
FSA (Vanuatu)	yes	no	Organic stakeholders expanding, organised national network, some stakeholders outside of network but become direct POETCom members,
WIBDI (Samoa)	only on own activities not	no	Organic stakeholders are expanding external to/independent of Focal

	other organic activities		Point, new entrants not becoming POETCom members, no national network
POGA (Palau)	yes	yes	Organic stakeholders expanding
K-Organic Producers (Kiribati)	only on own activities, not other organic activities	no	No
NARI (PNG)	no	no	Organic stakeholders growing, no connection to POETcom or Focal Point
French Polynesia	only on own activities, not other organic activities	no	Organic stakeholders are multiplying external to/independent of Focal point, new entrants not becoming POETCom members
New Caledonia	only on own activities, not other organic activities	yes	Organic stakeholders expanding with Focal Point and independent of/external to Focal Point, new entrants becoming POETCom members
MIOFA (Marshal Islands)	New member		
Wallis & Futuna	Yes (via New Caledonia Chamber of Ag)	no	unknown

NB. "organic stakeholders expanding" refers to new organisations/businesses/farmer groups etc NOT increased numbers in existing Focal Points programme

Generally speaking Focal Points are not fulfilling basic requirements for engagement as per the membership policy and basic expectations.

While lack of resources and capacity has been identified as an issue in Focal Points 'playing their part' it is also clear that the role of the Focal points is not well articulated to all - some Focal Points are not clear they are meant to provide data on the whole country, others think all organic activities in the country must 'go through' them. In some cases local issues and the priorities or perceived business prerogatives of the Focal Point inhibits them from playing the role effectively, particularly with regard to supporting growth of the movement and new entrants into organics outside of their own programme. In some cases where Focal Points are the 'funnel' for information to members it is unclear how much information gets through.

In some cases even those Focal Points that are well resourced are unable for a variety of reasons to establish relationships with other organic stakeholders and so do not fulfil these requirements – and in some cases block POETCom support to other organic stakeholders. In some cases organic stakeholders are reluctant to apply for membership as they feel that POETCom in their countries is 'controlled' by the Focal Point and so there is no point in joining

IFOAM model

IFOAM does not have a Focal Point system. Membership is direct in different categories, affiliates all have the opportunity to feed into policy and decision making. Membership surveys are also undertaken regularly.

For information gathering and data IFOAM contact individuals or organisations that assist them but it is not an expectation or role of membership.

As with most umbrella organisations expectations of direct engagement are moderate and there is always an aim to improve member engagement.

IFOAM does not aim to build capacity of its members other than by provision of advocacy materials and ways to engage in campaigns and through training materials on organic production and certification – it does not engage in organisational capacity building activities.

SUNGO/PIPSO model

Organisations at national level join/form a formalised membership based *umbrella body* that serves as ‘focal point’ for the regional body. This requires a national governance structure, which implies more resources. It must be open and inclusive and could not be an existing single entity such as an NGO, it must genuinely represent all its members in a country and other organisations must be able to join it without having to integrate their own programmes with the umbrella body or give up their own organic programmes and activities.

With this model the struggle continues at National level for engagement, always it is the secretariat that drives the organisation as members are focused on their own particular mandate and contribute to development through that.

Neither SUNGO nor PIPSO have made the same level of requests for reporting and participation

PIFON

PIFON has a direct membership model, but it is selective with prospective members having to be invited by an existing member and then given provisional membership for 12 months before being allowed membership (if approved). It does not have focal points. It currently has one project where some of its members (who happen to be the original members) in the project countries are given a grant to implement their own programmes, similar to how POETCom has found grants to support activities in some countries.

Recommendation from the Secretariat

The Secretariat believes that a structure with Focal Points is not the most effective way to achieve the vision and mission of POETCom. In some cases they can even be detrimental and could lead to a fracturing of the movement.

5 responsibilities were identified from Board contributions (Bob and Francois) as to the role of Focal Points, all of these however could be carried out by any member

Suggested Focal Point role	Secretariat Comment
Representing interest of the organic community in their country, including advocacy, awareness, ...	All members can do this in their own sphere
Providing information as required by POET Com Secretariat	All members through Annual survey or specific requests by secretariat
Disseminating POET Com information to country' members	Direct through current channels; list serve; newsletters etc. This ensures the information is getting through to all members with no bottle necks
Contributing financially to POET Com Secretariat	Membership fee structure, all members contribute
Being designated by all members of their country	Current experience shows there are issues in countries where there are issues/conflict between organic stakeholders and/or stakeholders feel excluded.

Aiming to build the capacity of focal points (capacity to do what? And for whom?) will not address some of the fundamental issues that currently exist in the system.

There may in some cases be a clear role for a National Organic Association – such as hosting a national certification scheme or PGS, but this would not necessitate that they are a POETCom Focal point. It would necessitate that their systems meet requirements and they are licensed to use the Organic Pasifika Mark.

Realistically the most effective participation from members is through them successfully implementing their own work programmes to promote organics. From the various discussions there has been no clear indication or suggestion of what Focal Points (or members) would need to do to shift the ‘centre of gravity’ away from the Secretariat. Experience shows that the reality of umbrella organisations is that the secretariat will be the driver and the work to improve engagement of members is ongoing and challenging and best done through constantly improving communication and creating opportunities for engagement.

It is worth noting that in none of our vision, mission or strategy documents are Focal Points articulated– it is about organic stakeholders and growing the movement for the Pacific and global good. It is only in the log frame for the strategic plan where Focal Points are mentioned and in all cases the actions they are to contribute towards could be done by all members.

The Secretariat recommends that we take to the General Assembly a motion to change the structure to direct membership and direct election of Board members from and by the membership. Also to consider a slight enlargement of the Board to 7 to ensure a wider representation of membership. A membership fee structure should be introduced.

The Secretariat believes this would engender more direct involvement of members and allow POETCom to be more inclusive and reach a broader base.

Role of the Secretariat

In light of this the role of the secretariat remains mostly unchanged as follows:

Develop and implement programmes to assist in the achievement of POETCom's vision and mission.

Our vision is that:

"Pacific Organics & Ethical Trade – the key contributor to sustaining our cultures and communities, improving farmer livelihoods, people's health and the environment in the Pacific".

Our mission is:

"Through coordination, information sharing, networking, capacity building and establishing a regional certification scheme; grow the organic and ethical trade movement and contribute to a productive, resilient, sustainable and healthy Pacific Island region."

In order to do this the Secretariat will:

- Nurture Pacific organic principles and aims of Pacific organic agriculture as outlined in POS.
- Work toward POETCom's objective to serve its affiliates to the greatest extent possible, making effective use of the resources available [in a non-discriminatory manner]. That is to serve all eligible and requesting help.
- Contribute to development and implementation of POETCom's plans e.g.
- Development and strategies e.g. communications.

- Build advocacy capacity of POETCom, the board and members and undertake advocacy and awareness raising during major regional forums.
- Strengthen and expand membership base.
- Source resources plus mobilize resources to publish, communicate and represent the organic community at strategic international meetings and with key influencers and international policy decision-makers.
- Source resources for approved activities.
- Where possible utilize skills and human resources within the POETCom network for capacity building and training programmes.
- Manage the Pacific Organic Guarantee System including facilitate organic certification programs and organic inspector training program.
- Guide the development, establishment and training of Participatory Guarantee Schemes.
- Advance POETCom's website and social media sites and platforms.
- Develop, publish and disseminate collateral and other materials in support of POETCom, its board and its members.
- Encourage policy dialogue at national, regional and international level.
- Facilitate value web(chain) development including organic tourism/hospitality.
- Ensure effective implementation and reporting of donor funded projects.
- Help members identify and seize funding and capacity building opportunities.
- Promote organic production and consumption on both political and technical levels.
- Support the development of policies facilitating organic agriculture.