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An investigation into the availability and quality of advisory services for agribusinesses in Fiji

Market Development Facility, September 2024

Introduction

MDF has worked closely with agribusinesses in Fiji since its inception in 2013, and has observed that they often struggle with the lack of available advisory services to support them to identify export markets, meet their stringent requirements and export their products. However, this evidence was largely anecdotal.

Accordingly, MDF undertook a more empirical study into the availability and quality of advisory services for agribusinesses in Fiji.

Methodology

We designed an online survey comprising qualitative and quantitative questions to gather data about Fiji-based agriculture businesses who may have used technical advisory services. These questions aimed to assess the supply and demand of these services, and their experiences in using them.

The survey was undertaken online through MS Forms and was sent to 78 agribusinesses who were either known to MDF or/and on the list of Investment Fiji's agriculture exporters. We received 17 responses, of which 16 were valid and analysed.



Results



Of the sixteen agribusiness respondents, only seven had used any kind of advisory services in the last five years. The most common services used were to support product development, market access requirements, value chain analysis and organic certification. The quality of these services was assessed as “ok” on average, but advice on market access requirements was “bad”, and organic certification and facility design and layout was “good” (Table 1).



The majority of respondents were either considering (5) or maybe considering (10) using advisory services in the next year. The main services sought were for product marketing, and product development and manufacturing. Respondents considered a range of factors when sourcing advisory services; chief among them were expertise and experience (especially in Fiji), turnaround time, certification and ratings.



The majority of respondents felt that access to, and quality of, advisory services was a constraint to various aspects of their business to some extent; especially to their exports and access to markets. Respondents also mentioned that the high cost, and low quality of advisory services are also key constraints.

3.1. Current use of consultants and advisory services

Seven respondents used at least one service over the last five years. Product development, market access, local context analysis and organic certification were the main services used. Only one respondent received funding (from MDF). Few gave reasons for not using consultants; free advice being available, unavailability of suitable consultants, and lack of awareness of such services, were the reasons given.

Table 1: Experience with Consultants for advisory services in the past 5 years

Consultancy job & number of responses	Average Rating	Comments
Product development (4)	Ok	Good understanding of processes but no solution provided
Market access requirements (3)	Bad	No results from the consultant
Local context e.g., value chain analysis, community engagement (3)	Ok	
Organic certification (3)	Good	
Facility design and layout (2)	Good	
Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) certification (1)	Ok	
Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification (1)	Very Bad	Too expensive
Other (1)	Very Good	Overseas company used for packaging information
Overall rating	Ok	

3.2. Intentions to use consultants in the future

The majority of respondents were intending to use consultants, or maybe intending to use them in the near future: only one said they were not. The majority were seeking advice on marketing or product development and manufacture, with others seeking food technology and certification.

Respondents took a range of factors into account when considering sources of consultants; the main ones being expertise and experience, turnaround time, accreditation, recommendations and cost (Table 2).

Overall, most respondents agreed that access to, and the quality of consulting and advisory services constrained their business in a range of ways. The main ones relate to exports and market access, but others include management and human resources, certification/accreditation, and strategy (Table 3).

Table 2: Factors considered when choosing sources of advisory services

Factors & number of responses	Average Rating	Comment
Expertise (14)	Strongly Agree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultants need to give results and follow up • Consultants need experience in countries like Fiji
Turnaround Time (14)	Agree	
Experience (13)	Strongly Agree	
Certification/accreditation (13)	Agree	
Ratings (13)	Agree	
Personal recommendations (12)	Agree	
Cost (12)	Agree	
Location (11)	Agree	
Support or subsidy is available (11)	Agree	

Table 3: How access to, and quality of advisory services constrains your business

Business function & number of responses	Average Rating	Comments
Exports (15)	To some extent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advice is too costly • Advice is of low quality • Unaware of such advisory services
Access to markets (13)	To some extent	
Management (12)	To some extent	
Manufacturing (12)	To some extent	
Certification/accreditation (12)	To some extent	
Human Resources (12)	To some extent	
Strategy (12)	To some extent	



Appendix

4.1. Survey Questions

1. In the past 5 years have you used a consultant to deliver advice in the following areas? If so, what was your experience using them?
 - Facility design and layout
 - Product development
 - Market access requirements
 - Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) certification
 - Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification
 - Organic certification
 - Local context e.g., value chain analysis, community engagement
 - Other
 - Please explain your rating of your experience of the consultant/s
2. Did you receive any kind of financial support to engage the consultant?
 - If yes, please explain the source of funds or/and support used to pay for advisory services.
 - If you have not used a consultant in the last 5 years - why not?
3. To what extent do you feel that access to or quality of advisory services constrains the following aspects of your business?
 - Exports
 - Management
 - Manufacturing
 - Access to markets

- Certification/accreditation
- Human Resources
- Strategy
- Other
- Please add more information about the above if you would like to clarify

4. Are you considering using advisory services in the near future (one year)?
 - If yes, what type of advisory services do you currently need?
 - If no, why not?

5. What factors do you consider when choosing sources of advisory services? "
 - Cost
 - Expertise
 - Turnaround Time
 - Location
 - Experience
 - Certification/accreditation²
 - Ratings
 - Personal recommendations
 - Support or subsidy is available
 - Other (specify below)
 - If other, please specify

6. Is there anything else you wish to share about advisory services?

4.2. Participants

- Fresh produce sellers and exporters
- Kava exporters
- Coconut oil producer
- Ginger/turmeric powder producer
- Noni juice producer
- Preserved vegetables producer
- Chocolate maker
- Value-added juices and puree exporter