

OFFICIAL FEEDBACK FORM

DIALOGUE DATE	Wednesday, 25 August 2021 09:00 GMT +12:00
DIALOGUE TITLE	RMI National Nutrition, Health and Food Safety Dialogue
CONVENED BY	Secretary Iva Reimers-Roberto, Ministry of Natural Resources and Commerce
DIALOGUE EVENT PAGE	https://summitdialogues.org/dialogue/43470/
DIALOGUE TYPE	Member State
GEOGRAPHICAL FOCUS	Marshall Islands

The outcomes from a Food Systems Summit Dialogue will be of use in developing the pathway to sustainable food systems within the locality in which they take place. They will be a valuable contribution to the national pathways and also of interest to the different workstreams preparing for the Summit: the Action Tracks, Scientific Groups and Champions as well as for other Dialogues.

1. PARTICIPATION

TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

34

PARTICIPATION BY AGE RANGE

0-18

13

19-30

17

31-50

3

51-65

1

66-80

80+

PARTICIPATION BY GENDER

19 Male

15 Female

Prefer not to say or Other

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS IN EACH SECTOR

3 Agriculture/crops

2 Fish and aquaculture

Livestock

1 Agro-forestry

3 Environment and ecology

Trade and commerce

5 Education

Communication

4 Food processing

5 Food retail, markets

1 Food industry

Financial Services

1 Health care

4 Nutrition

3 National or local government

Utilities

Industrial

2 Other

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS FROM EACH STAKEHOLDER GROUP

8 Small/medium enterprise/artisan

Large national business

Multi-national corporation

1 Small-scale farmer

Medium-scale farmer

Large-scale farmer

3 Local Non-Governmental Organization

3 International Non-Governmental Organization

Indigenous People

3 Science and academia

Workers and trade union

Member of Parliament

Local authority

14 Government and national institution

Regional economic community

4 United Nations

International financial institution

Private Foundation / Partnership / Alliance

Consumer group

Other

2. PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

HOW DID YOU ORGANIZE THE DIALOGUE SO THAT THE PRINCIPLES WERE INCORPORATED, REINFORCED AND ENHANCED?

Organization of each RMI National Dialogue incorporated and reinforced the Summit Principles in a number of ways. All organizing team members were made aware of the Principles through the sharing of relevant materials, and these were borne in mind throughout the organization and execution of the Dialogues. Specifically, the RMI is a country on the front lines of climate change like few others, and one that very clearly recognizes the need to act swiftly with regards to sustainable development. This awareness of the need for action in specific relation to the nation's food systems was integral to the organization of the National Food Systems Dialogues. The Dialogues were planned with an array of local stakeholders, ensuring that local culture and context was at the core of their planning, design and execution. The range of invitees reflects the recognized complexity of food systems in the RMI. Dialogue invitees were drawn from a cross-section of RMI society, including not only government officials from relevant agencies, but local farmers and fisherfolk, those involved in the buying and selling of foods for commercial and other purposes (e.g., institutional caterers), health professionals and NPO/NGO personnel. All dialogues were conducted in the context of current policies and legislation, and of previous and current relevant projects and initiatives. This was ensured through the delivery of relevant presentations preceding discussions at each Dialogue. Transparency has been central to the organization of the Dialogues, with the intent of the Dialogues and outputs from them clearly communicated to all invitees and attendees. Dialogue discussions were structured in such a way as to provide all attendees with a safe space to share their knowledge, perspectives and ideas.

HOW DID YOUR DIALOGUE REFLECT SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE PRINCIPLES?

Execution of the RMI National Nutrition, Health and Food Safety Dialogue reflects the Principles in various specific ways. Commitment to the Summit was evident in the number of attendees and their engagement in the discussions being held; a wide range of perspectives were shared, and all were recorded. All discussions were held respectfully, with individuals given the space and time to share their points of view; this was the case in the smaller discussion groups and in the plenary group. In terms of the recognition of the complexity of food systems and how these relate to the issues of human health, nutrition and food safety, this was communicated via a detailed opening presentation, and was reflected in the diversity of attendees, which also reflects that the Dialogue embraced multi-stakeholder inclusivity. In terms of complementing the work of others, the Dialogue allowed varied stakeholders to share their activities with a wide audience, with the potential to increase awareness of these and open doors for new collaborations. Finally, the outputs of the Dialogue are those of the group as a whole, with no attribution to any given individual, reinforcing the Principle of building trust.

DO YOU HAVE ADVICE FOR OTHER DIALOGUE CONVENORS ABOUT APPRECIATING THE PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT?

The planning and organization of the Dialogues, both in terms of their content and execution, were conducted with an understanding and appreciation of the Summit Principles. Planning the Dialogues centered around the specific needs of the RMI with topics and meeting styles initially developed to be locally relevant and appropriate. Dialogue plans were subsequently cross-checked with the Summit Principles to ensure their incorporation. In this way, national priorities were placed at the center of Dialogue planning to ensure they were meaningful and valuable, while the Summit Principles provided an underlying guide to support the development of Dialogues that responded to them.

3. METHOD

The outcomes of a Dialogue are influenced by the method that is used.

DID YOU USE THE SAME METHOD AS RECOMMENDED BY THE CONVENORS REFERENCE MANUAL?

☐ Yes

☒ No

The organizing team developed three 3-hour RMI National Food System Dialogues. These focussed on a) Green Food Systems, b) Nutrition, Health and Food Safety and c) Blue Food Systems. All three Dialogues were conducted in the week of 23rd August 2021. The decision to conduct the Dialogues in this way was based upon an in-depth understanding of the current national food systems and their associated priorities, as well as the capacity of individuals to attend the Dialogues. The Dialogues were organized by the RMI national-level convener at the Ministry of Natural Resources and Commerce, supported by a team of consultants, relevant stakeholders from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Commerce, the Ministry of Health and Human Services and the Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority to guide the individual Dialogues, and personnel from the Resident Coordinator Office in the Pacific. The development process involved in-depth collaborations and discussions between all team members to ensure all aspects of the Dialogues, from discussion content to logistical aspects, were comprehensively planned and efficiently executed. Three invitee lists were developed to reflect the content of the individual Dialogues. Invitees ranged from national-level government personnel to members of civil society engaged in different aspects of the food systems of the RMI. This enabled discussions to engage a range of people from those responsible for guiding national policy to those impacted by such policies. Prior to the Dialogues, invitees received an official invitation, a copy of the Dialogue agenda, relevant materials and a link to an electronic attendance form. Printed attendance forms were also provided at the Dialogues to ensure full completion and submission by all participants. Each dialogue presented the relevant national context in terms of the current status of food systems and the impacts of these in terms of economy, environment and social and human health, policies and legislation in place that relate to these systems and impacts, and examples of past or current innovations of relevance, including government-led, NGO-led, and individual-led initiatives. Discussions in each Dialogue were focussed around five key topics (specific to each Dialogue), with discussions under each topic guided by a number of key questions. These topics and questions were drafted by members of the organizing team and validated by the wider team, with particular input from national experts and relevant ministerial personnel. All topics were cross-checked against the Summit Action Tracks to ensure all Action Tracks were sufficiently incorporated into each Dialogue. The five discussion topics that formed the Nutrition, Health and Food Safety Dialogue comprised 1) The food we produce, 2) The food we eat, 3) Education/awareness, 4) Resilience and vulnerability, and 5) The impact(s) of COVID-19. Dialogue discussions were structured in a way to ensure all stakeholders had the opportunity to have their voices heard. Discussions were held in small 'breakout' groups, helping to prevent individuals from dominating the discussion. Feedback was then delivered by each group in the plenary setting, allowing for the sharing of all ideas and perspectives and affording the opportunity for additional comments and discussion as a single group. The Dialogues were structured to allow both in-room participation and online participation. This enabled the Dialogues to be accessible to as broad a group of stakeholders as possible, providing access both to stakeholders across the country (the RMI being an archipelagic nation including some 24 inhabited atolls) and to those for whom online access may not be possible.

4. DIALOGUE FOCUS & OUTCOMES

MAJOR FOCUS

A 2018 Hybrid Survey examining non-communicable diseases identified that only 6.5% of adults in RMI eat a diet consisting only or mainly of local foods, with 37.4% eating mainly imported foods and 37.4% eating a balance of imported and local foods. Almost all adults eat less than the recommended five servings of fruit and vegetables per day. This report also identified that 27% of adults have diabetes, with a further 21% having pre-diabetes, and over 70% of adults are overweight or obese. A rapid scan of the RMI agriculture/nutrition nexus conducted in 2018 indicated that at least 90% of the RMI food supply chain is made up of imported goods. This document reports that numerous diet-related health issues have become prevalent in the RMI, including 35% of children between 48 and 59 months of age having stunted growth. The RMI Food Security Policy 2013 has as its goal "To ensure access to nutritious, quality, safe and affordable food for all Marshallese people at all times." Five strategic action areas support this goal and broadly include stimulating sustainable local food production, strengthening access to nutritious food, education, facilitating efficient food distribution and building safety, quality and resilience food supply and production. In terms of food safety, an FAO Technical Cooperation Programme Strengthened Food Control in the Republic of the Marshall Islands was established in 2014. A 2017 mission under this program identified that, at that time, limited capacity and coordination between relevant agencies meant that the 2010 Food Act was not being effectively implemented. There were no food inspectors, and a responsibilities were being shared across agencies.

Within this context, the National Nutrition, Health and Food Safety Dialogue explored the following five key topics:

1) The food we produce

Questions to guide this discussion focussed on the contribution of locally produced foods to nutrition security and the factors limiting local food productions and manufacture.

2) The food we eat

Questions to guide this discussion focussed on whether commonly eaten foods contribute to a nutritious diet, food preferences, and the issues related to local food production and accessibility of local foods.

3) Education/awareness

Questions to guide this discussion focussed on activities to support production of local, healthy foods, the contributing factors to diet-related health problems and food safety systems and policies.

4) Resilience and vulnerability

Questions to guide this discussion focussed on social inclusion in a nutritious food system, economic support for healthy, nutritious food production and sale, and policies and strategies to address inequity related to the accessibility of nutritious foods.

5) The impact(s) of COVID-19

Questions to guide this discussion focussed on the impact of COVID-19 on the food system and how such impacts can be addressed.

ACTION TRACKS

✓	Action Track 1: Ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all
✓	Action Track 2: Shift to sustainable consumption patterns
✓	Action Track 3: Boost nature-positive production
✓	Action Track 4: Advance equitable livelihoods
✓	Action Track 5: Build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress

KEYWORDS

	Finance	✓	Policy
✓	Innovation		Data & Evidence
✓	Human rights		Governance
✓	Women & Youth Empowerment		Trade-offs
		✓	Environment and Climate

MAIN FINDINGS

The main findings from the RMI Nutrition, Health and Food Safety Dialogue are presented under the five topic areas.

1) The food we produce

There are few farmers in the RMI, and the soil is too poor for extensive agriculture. There are some home gardens, but local food production is not contributing enough to nutrition security. The Canvasback Wellness Center is introducing box farming to rural and urban communities. Efforts are made to transport locally grown foods from the outer atolls to Majuro, but foods are limited to coconut, breadfruit and pandanus, local varieties of which are seasonal. The issue is one of scale; it is possible for individuals to be self-sufficient, but not enough is grown for consistent supply to markets and there is a reliance on imported foods. It is recognized, however, that increasing local food production will help deal with food-safety issues specific to transportation. Fish is abundant, however, it is often eaten alongside more convenient imported foods, rather than local produce. Ciguatera is a food-safety issue related to fish, particularly those caught near urban areas where development has led to toxic algal blooms.

2) The food we eat

Rice and canned goods are the most commonly eaten foods in urban and rural communities (where it might be expected that local foods would predominate). Local foods are seen as a luxury. Childhood stunting is more prevalent in rural communities, and there are limits to the coverage of vitamin A and folic acid supplement delivery in these communities. This may be the result of a lack of information about nutrition, limited knowledge on cooking non-seasonal foods, and convenience; cooking local foods is time consuming. More people are eating vegetables, but importing produce is costly and lengthy, with associated food-safety issues. The Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority buys fish from rural fisherfolk to sell in urban areas, and can ensure safety in ways that local transport routes cannot. These fish are often bought up by local restaurants, rather than individuals. There is also a need to consider food safety around school meals, with vendors often producing these in un-monitored domestic environments. Various policies regarding unhealthy foods, agriculture and food safety have been drafted and await endorsement and implementation.

3) Education/awareness

There is limited general knowledge about healthy diets and growing and cooking healthy foods. It is recognized that healthy habits start with children, and the youth are one group identified as being potential change makers in terms of diets and nutrition. School gardens are being grown, with some already productive enough for children to take excess produce home. There were plans to build a garden in an outer atoll community to provide food for the local boarding school and the College of the Marshall Islands. The Ridge-to-Reef project has been encouraging the planting of non-seasonal breadfruit, to support year-round supply of traditional, nutritious food. One community-driven awareness activity is a Facebook group for home gardeners in Majuro to share knowledge. Training and resources are provided to support the development of these gardens. Food security is part of the University of the South Pacific Graduate Diploma on Climate Change, and graduate scholarships in Global Environmental Studies at Sophia University, Japan are open to RMI applicants.

4) Resilience and vulnerability

It is recognized that farmers may grow enough food to support themselves and sell to neighbors, but production is too small-scale to support national food security. Plans are in place to increase food production on outer islands and increase the self-sufficiency of rural communities, and work is ongoing in relation to the cultivation of drought and salt tolerant. A UN IOM project to build resilience in outer atoll communities includes home gardening, the intent being to ensure access to sustainable local food supplies. A project to draw up standards for the Public School System agriculture curriculum was started to support food security. Standards focused on reducing poverty and the right to grow and access healthy foods were co-created by a group inclusive of women, youth, elders, and the disabled community. Further funding is needed to complete this work. There has been no assessment of the impact of existing and prior activities to support food security to date.

5) The impact(s) of COVID-19

One major impact of COVID-19 on RMI's food systems is the lengthening of quarantine for imported foods. While it usually takes around 21 days for importation of goods, this has lengthened to around 30 days for US imports. This has not only had an impact on the flow of goods to market, but also on food safety as food is remaining in transit for longer. Furthermore, the cost of importing foods has risen owing to impacts on global transportation and the reductions in food-related workforces at point-of-origin. As a result, air shipments of goods to supplement the food supply have been commissioned, which are themselves costly. Health and nutrition experts and practitioners are usually international personnel, and so the inability to travel to RMI has negatively impacted this sector.

ACTION TRACKS

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KEYWORDS

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 1/5

The RMI National Nutrition, Health and Food Safety Dialogue delivered outcomes in terms of specific ideas and innovations to be implemented to drive change within the RMI food system and also in terms of the recognition of specific needs and challenges that may not have been previously identified. These provide new avenues for consideration and future action. The identified Action Tracks and keywords represent the outcomes as a whole, rather than individual outcomes.

1) The food we produce

Increasing and innovating in food production and supporting food safety

The timely harvesting and processing of traditional foods, such as breadfruit and pandanus, was considered, with recognition that farmers may have neither the capacity nor equipment to process these foods for sale. This can result in a proportion of harvests going to waste. During the Dialogue a cooperative approach was discussed; one that has been shown to be successful in expanding the market for breadfruit in Hawaii and that may be viable in the RMI. In this system, farmers joining the cooperative are guaranteed a fair price for their crop, with any processing and marketing of goods handled by the cooperative, thus encourage the growth of such crops, reducing crop wastage and providing an opportunity for the development of value-added products.

The Dialogue also identified that consumption of sea vegetables, e.g. seaweed, is very uncommon in the RMI. It was also recognized, however, that they present a nutritious and sustainable food source. Exploring sea vegetables as a viable food product was considered worthwhile, recognizing that influencing food preferences can be a long process. Also, the role of school gardens to increase children's interest in growing and valuing healthy and locally grown foods was raised. The Canvasback Wellness Center, in partnership with the government and local stakeholders such as farmers cooperatives, is moving forward with different programs at the school and family level to implement house/school gardens and healthier diets, including supporting relevant legislation.

Identified challenges

Specific challenges that were identified as needing addressing included:

- The lack of a certified laboratory in the RMI for the testing and labelling of foods for export and domestic consumption
- Though growing root crops is recommended, it is not easy owing to soil conditions and high temperatures. There is therefore a need to support farmers with organized education, technology, tools and markets as a route to boosting production
- Lack of land, water scarcity and soil conditions are the major identified challenges to growing and accessing fresh foods in the RMI

ACTION TRACKS

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KEYWORDS

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		✓	Environment and Climate

OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 2/5

2) The food we eat

Transforming palettes

"Transforming palettes" across society, i.e. assimilating novel or less commonly eaten foods into the diet, is necessary, as many people will not have tasted (or know how to prepare) many vegetables. In order to better integrate healthy local foods into people's diets there is a need to become familiar with their flavors and how to cook them. It is essential that addressing this includes children, as they can be change makers, both influencing their families but also altering societal behaviors as they grow up. Initiatives to introduce vegetables into school meals have shown that children will often push the foods that they are not used to the sides of their plate. Therefore, coming up with recipes that incorporate vegetables in a way that they can't be separated is necessary.

Using the whole plant

Developing campaigns to demonstrate how plant leaves can be incorporated into meals is a way to help reduce food waste and incorporate the nutritious and edible parts of plants that may otherwise be ignored into people's diets.

Innovative production

Some hydroponics projects have been initiated, with one system intending to grow enough for the local store to incorporate this produce into their takeaway dishes. This type of project shows promise for replication in other localities.

Identified challenges

Specific challenges that were identified as needing addressing included:

- There is a need for focus on programs for schools and young people as many children attending school are not sufficiently fed, and lunch programs currently do not provide adequate nutrition
- School meal vendors are often families working in unregulated domestic kitchens, presenting a potential food safety issue that requires addressing
- Ciguatera can be a problem. Ongoing, regular monitoring of fish is not currently in places, and this is needed to deal with this issue
- Local and healthy foods are usually the more expensive, with many people unable to afford them
- Know-how around food preparation and cooking is an issue raised by the participants that limits local food production and the inclusion of healthy foods in everyday diets.

ACTION TRACKS

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 3/5

3) Education/awareness

Promoting farming as a career

Young people do not see agriculture as a viable future career option. There is a need to change this mindset by including agricultural science into the education system. It is recognized that to deliver sufficient agricultural education to a high enough level that will benefit the country as a whole, the offering of specific scholarships will be needed to attract students into the field.

Awareness raising opportunities

Churches host regular group activities and events where food is provided. Encouraging churches to incorporate healthy local foods into these gives the opportunity not only to provide a healthy meal to people but also to raise awareness about the importance of healthy, nutritious diets.

The Summer Youth Convention held annually on Majuro was identified as an opportunity to reach RMI's youth with educational messages around nutrition and food safety, as well as providing an opportunity to collaborate directly with church and your groups.

There is a need to improve awareness of the importance of including healthy foods in everyday meals. The development of a food pyramid in Marshallese to be distributed to households was identified as a way of better communicating balanced, nutritious diets. Furthermore, a program of house-to-house visits would enable direct communication with new mothers with regard to infant nutrition.

It was also identified that local governments and the private sector should be encouraged to play a larger role in raising awareness around nutrition and food safety amongst their communities.

There are some programs carried out by the Canvasback Wellness Center, in collaboration with the Public School System, to deliver conferences and educational activities (such as cooking demonstrations that include healthy foods) that teachers and families are encouraged to participate in.

Funding awareness interventions

Resources to support awareness-raising interventions are limited. Discussions during the Dialogue suggested that a portion of funds received via taxation on tobacco could be directed to the Ministry of Health and Human Services to support new and ongoing interventions. Discussion also raised the fact that various pieces of legislation are being considered in relation to unhealthy foods such as high-sugar beverages.

Identified challenges

Specific challenges that were identified as needing addressing included:

- Maintaining interest and awareness around activities driven by government ministries is an ongoing challenge. Programs and interventions require regular revitalization and improved communications
- There is a need for greater nutrition expertise to be involved in the initiatives that are carried out by government and the Canvasback Wellness Center.

ACTION TRACKS

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 4/5

4) Resilience and vulnerability
It is considered that there is a need for government-driven activities, programs and awareness raising to establish an inclusive, healthy food system in the RMI that integrates local foods into markets.

Gathering data
The recognized lack of data regarding the impact of initiatives run by organizations such as the Taiwan Technical Mission Farm and the Canvasback Wellness Center on the health, nutrition and household welfare needs to be addressed. This requires addressing, and this data gathering should ensure a particular focus on women's perspectives, being pivotal to family food choices and infant nutrition. Even though RMI have a Quarantine office, government officers need to be better equipped to conduct food safety checks.

Identified challenges
Specific challenges that were identified as needing addressing included:
• The seeds used by initiatives such as the Taiwan Technical Mission Farm are commercialized hybrids that need to be repurchased every year. This general lack of available seeds needs to be addressed, as does the lack of composting, which is vital for improving and fertilizing soils
• There is a recognized disparity between the goals and targets in relevant government policies and the on-the-ground activities to achieve those goals. There is, therefore, a need to address the challenge of limited policy implementation.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 5/5

5) The impact(s) of COVID-19
The food safety concerns that have arisen with the increased transportation times that the COVID-19 pandemic have resulted in has led to the need for requests for quarantine protocols to be re-assessed. The impacts on food supply have also led to the recognition that more needs to be done to commercialize locally produced foods and food products.

ACTION TRACKS

- ✓ Action Track 1: Ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all
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KEYWORDS

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| ✓ Finance | ✓ Policy |
| ✓ Innovation | ✓ Data & Evidence |
| Human rights | Governance |
| ✓ Women & Youth Empowerment | Trade-offs |
| | ✓ Environment and Climate |

AREAS OF DIVERGENCE

No specific areas of divergence came to the fore during the Dialogue. The unique geography and environment of the RMI, and the limitations and opportunities that this presents, are well understood by all participants. There were no suggested activities or initiatives that led to a divergence of opinion and participants were cohesive in their views of the priorities related to health, nutrition and food safety in the RMI.

ACTION TRACKS

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KEYWORDS

- Finance
- Innovation
- Human rights
- Women & Youth Empowerment
- Policy
- Data & Evidence
- Governance
- Trade-offs
- Environment and Climate

ATTACHMENTS AND RELEVANT LINKS

ATTACHMENTS

- **Nutrition, Health and Food Safety Dialogue Agenda**
<https://summitdialogues.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Nutrition-Health-and-Food-Safety-Dialogue-Agenda-30august2021.docx>
- **RMI Food System Dialogues guiding questions**
<https://summitdialogues.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/RMI-FSSD-dialogue-questions-prepared-by-ISU-final-version-20august2021.docx>
- **Hybrid Survey Final Report 2017**
<https://summitdialogues.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Hybrid-Survey-Final-Report-2017.pdf>
- **Integrated Child Health Survey 2017**
https://summitdialogues.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/RMI-ICHNS-2017-Final-Report_11_06_2017_CLEAN.pdf
- **RMI Food Safety Control System**
<https://summitdialogues.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/RMI-FOOD-SAFETY-CONTROL-SYSTEM-DRAFT-PRESENTATION.pdf>