



Options Paper

What does it look like for Australia to be a... Partner on Digital Resilience and Transformation in the Pacific

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You can cite this paper as: Asia-Pacific Development, Diplomacy & Defence Dialogue, What does it look like for Australia to be a partner on digital resilience and transformation in the Pacific (Canberra 2022): www.asiapacific4d.com

First published June 2022

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Why it matters

Technological change is one of the **most critical issues** facing the Pacific. Digital technology is a stand-alone issue, but also cuts across all sectors of society and government and is vital for how Pacific island countries function now and into the future. It is not a niche concern.

Digital technology provides an **immense opportunity** for the Pacific, a region that is still struggling with global connectivity.¹ The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of digital connectivity, providing economic opportunities for the Pacific to promote business and continue to connect with global customers while borders were closed and tourism shut down.

Digital technology enables Pacific nations to maintain notions of statehood, **providing opportunities to capture and preserve identity, traditional knowledge, way of life and culture**. This is increasingly important as climate change is forcing the relocation of whole communities. The nation of Tuvalu, severely impacted by climate change, is rapidly adopting digital tools and platforms to build a digital nation.

At the same time, digital technology poses a **major risk to state sovereignty**. Cyber-attacks can bring down parts of the bureaucracy.² With so many critical functions of governments and societies dependent on technology, identifying and protecting critical assets is a core security issue – and one on which governments, civil society and industry need to work together.³

Further, new technology in the digital space challenges the nature, viability and legitimacy of Pacific island countries as functioning states. New technology is **undermining the already unstable nature of statehood** and presenting threats to states already struggling with inclusive, transparent and accountable governance.⁴

Technology has the potential to **undermine democracy** and poses increasing risks to freedom of expression as governments may seek to exert control over digital media.⁵

From Australia's perspective, physical and digital linkages across the Pacific directly **impact Australia's national security**, highlighting the intersection of defence, diplomacy and development cooperation with the region. Insecurity in the Pacific affects Australia as insufficiently protected vectors could provide avenues for hostile actors to gain access to Australia's critical infrastructure.

A digitally connected Pacific will pay **diplomatic dividends for Australia**. The importance of digital connectivity goes beyond defence and security and is about building relationships. Incorporating digital technology into the way Australia engages with the Pacific is vital to help people connect, to enable Australia to pursue its advocacy and to engage in dialogue.

Australia needs to partner with the Pacific both on **digital resilience** – the ability to withstand incidents and criminal and malicious attacks and still continue to operate – and on **digital transformation** – the ability to reap the benefits of technological change. Digital technology is a complex multidimensional problem that requires a holistic and tailored approach to help countries understand where they stand now and identify their own priorities for next steps. To achieve digital resilience, longer-term development support will be required.

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- 1 Australian Strategic Policy Institute, *ICT For Development in the Pacific Islands*, February 2020: <https://www.aspi.org.au/report/ict-development-pacific-islands>
 - 2 Radio New Zealand, *PNG government system hit by ransomware attack*, October 2021, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/454467/png-government-system-hit-by-ransomware-attack>
 - 3 Global Forum on Cyber Expertise, *Towards Identifying Critical Infrastructures in the National Cybersecurity Strategy Process*, 2021: <https://cybilportal.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/White-Paper-Towards-Identifying-CNI-in-the-NCS-Process.pdf>
 - 4 Danielle Cave and Jake Wallis, *Why the Indo-Pacific needs its own hybrid threats centre*, The Strategist, December 2021: <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/why-the-indo-pacific-needs-its-own-hybrid-threats-centre/>
 - 5 Global Partners Digital, *Human Rights in the Digital Age: State of Play across Commonwealth Pacific Countries*, March 2021: https://www.gp-digital.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/PACIFIC-REPORT_GPDfinal.pdf

Aligning views

PACIFIC VIEWS

The speed of digital technology advancement has created a critical time frame for Pacific countries to become digitally equipped and to protect their sovereign interests. This has led to a heavy reliance in the short- to medium-term on international partners. Governments with a lack of capacity to pursue opportunities and address threats have struggled to coordinate and connect with appropriate support.

It is in Australia's interest to **reinforce norms and democratic values in the digital space**. Increasing access to these technologies, both by governments and Pacific people, requires attention to how technologies are used and how some governments might be tempted to seek to use them. Digital tools and resources alongside cyber security considerations should be part of Australia's development program.

The recent Tonga volcanic eruption which severed Tonga's undersea cable and thus its **connection to the outside world** demonstrated how vulnerable Pacific island countries are in terms of connectivity. With people living so much of their lives online, they are severely impacted if this is cut.

Other actors in the region are providing the infrastructure, skills and knowledge to support Pacific ambitions on digital connectivity. Australia must ensure **it does not leave a vacuum** in the digital space in the Pacific.

There is a deep desire for communities and governments across the **Pacific to be better globally connected**, bringing significant change for a region where logistics and connectivity has always been an issue. Digital technology and communications in the Pacific are a shared commodity, with phones often becoming community assets. However isolated communities are not integrated into the new technology landscape and many people still only have 2G access. There is interest in the potential for technology such as Starlink, operated by SpaceX, to bring game-changing connectivity to the region, as well as Telstra's acquisition of Digicel to expand affordable access.⁶

Training, education and skills development are important for Pacific island communities to fully participate in new technology. Digital literacy is a priority, particularly for those receiving remittances. Technical training is required that is tailored to opportunities in the Pacific.

Disruptive technology platforms have changed the way people communicate and consume information, disrupting traditional communication practices. Discussions within and between communities are now taking place online, challenging social structures and traditional communication channels. Social issues such as domestic violence, community disagreements and bullying can be carried across onto online social media platforms. Misinformation can have real-world effects – for example in violence between villages or in health outcomes due to vaccine misinformation.

There is a need for education to support people going online to recognise both bad and good behaviour as well as education to improve **media literacy to recognise misinformation**. It is critical for governments and social media companies to work together to balance staying safe with having a positive experience online. Technology companies are sometimes perceived as not spending resources to understand and respond to the context of the places they work in.

From a Pacific perspective, success is economic and digital transformation through **building a digital economy and creating a safe space for communities**.

6 AP4D Pacific Voices Roundtable Consultations, 21 and 26 April 2022

AUSTRALIAN VIEWS

There is greater consideration of the communal use and benefits of digital technology and how it might affect future generations, which differs from a western society view focused on the immediate individual benefits.⁷

Pacific Governments can utilise digital technology to communicate **information for good or bad citizenship**. Using radio to educate and inform communities in isolated areas, such as in the Papua New Guinea highlands about upcoming elections, demonstrates the benefits of digital technology when used appropriately.

Some Pacific Governments have **demonstrated interest in digital finance**. Tonga and Vanuatu have investigated introducing cryptocurrency as part of its national currency, with geothermal energy powering bitcoin mining. This is an emerging issue for the region and the Australian Government. Australia must engage and address the impact digital finance has on stability and financial security by encouraging dialogue on the risks and threats associated with blockchain technology.

There is a strong perception within the Pacific that digital technology is an **area of geopolitical competition**. Pacific island countries are prepared to accept assistance and partnerships with countries other than Australia. Australia must also be aware of and manage perceptions in the region that strengthened engagement in the digital space is not purely for its domestic political purposes, but a genuine attempt to build stronger relations and a safer and more secure Pacific. Australia should reset its expectations that Pacific island countries will only engage with Australia and use the opportunity to recognise the gaps in its defence, development and diplomatic relationships.

Australia's perception that its **security interests** are implicated is evident in its strategic investments in the Coral Sea cable network linking Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea to Australia, and the Australian Government's underwriting of Telstra's acquisition of Pacific telecommunications provider Digicel. The recently signed memorandum of understanding between Papua New Guinea and Australia on cyber security cooperation demonstrates the priority being given to this area.

Cyber security and digital infrastructure is perceived as a **domain of geopolitical competition**. Malicious state or state sponsored actors are active in cyberspace against countries around the world, and the Pacific is not immune. Raising the capabilities and defences directly benefits Australia as well as Pacific island countries.

Australia has a **role in coordinating cyber defence** for the region. Given that establishing cyber security frameworks is expensive and requires niche capabilities, Australia should offer to lead to support Pacific island countries' needs. Partnership in this area comes with having a shared understanding of what the Pacific can realistically contribute. There must be recognition that countries across the region are on a broad spectrum of technological development and have diverse needs. Australia's approach must not be one size fits all.

There is a **spectrum of views** on the threat, opportunity and risk associated with digital technology across government, private sector and civil society. There is also a range of views on cyber security and what cyber is. Agreeing on scope is important.

The development community is not perceived as having been an early adopter of digital technology, despite its huge potential to positively impact and support **development outcomes** across all sectors of Australia's development cooperation, including education, health, climate and economic development. Some NGOs are embracing the opportunities technology provides and

⁷ Australian Strategic Policy Institute, *The Sydney Dialogue - Indigenous Technologies: Innovations Powering the Continuation of our Oldest Civilisations*, February 2022, <https://tsd.aspi.org.au/session/indigenous-technologies-innovations-powering-the-continuation-of-our-oldest-civilisations>

partnering with technology companies to use social media platforms for development programs, including to educate people on online safety, or using digital tools to assist with humanitarian relief, such as using blockchain technology to get funds to affected areas.

The Australian government must be aware of how quickly the digital environment in the Pacific is evolving or **risk being left behind**. Multi-national tech companies including Twitter, Facebook (Meta), and TikTok are more agile than governments and build their own relationships directly with governments, commercial partners and community groups. A recent example is Elon Musk restoring Tonga's internet access by deploying Starlink low-orbit satellites after a volcanic eruption damaged its undersea cable.⁸

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALIGNMENT

Australia and the Pacific have a shared interest in preventing and responding to cyber security challenges. Governments can form a strong partnership to build a regional **cyber security shield**.

Emerging digital technology has created **capacity issues across the board for governments** around the world, including Australia and the Pacific. There is an opportunity for Australia, if it is solving problems domestically, to then make this region-wide as a matter of common security.

There is an opportunity for the benefits of an Australian government **partnership with the private sector**, established to utilise the specialised skills and resources to upgrade cyber security and coordinate implementation domestically, to then be extended out into the region to address similar cyber security issues faced by Pacific island countries.

There is a shared interest in **combating the spread of disinformation** that can cause significant harm and poses significant risk to communities.⁹ All countries share concerns about foreign influence through the spread of disinformation online and the impact that may have on democracy and governance. Currently no country is successfully responding to this issue.

Australia and the Pacific have a shared interest in ensuring citizens stay safe and have a positive experience online, and governments must **find a balance** between protecting and constricting the digital media space. There is a shared interest in protecting good governance.

⁸ ABC News, *Elon Musk's SpaceX helps to restore Tongan internet, as Pacific nation battles growing COVID-19 outbreak*, February 2022, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-02-10/musk-helps-restore-tongan-internet-amidst-covid-outbreak/10081911>

⁹ The Asia Foundation, *The Pacific COVID-19 Pandemic Infodemic: Challenges and opportunities in the Pacific's response to an online information crises*, 2020: https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/The-Pacific-COVID-19-Infodemic_Nov17.pdf

CASE STUDY:

SAVE THE CHILDREN 'I AM DIGITAL' CAMPAIGN

An example of the development community partnering with technology companies is the Save the Children 'I Am Digital' campaign.

Save the Children has partnered with Meta (Facebook) to deliver a digital literacy and safety initiative in the Pacific, the 'I am Digital' campaign. The campaign has developed learning materials to help Pacific people stay safe on the internet. The tip sheets, jingles and videos are shared online, in person and via the radio. They help empower children and their parents to have safer, more positive experiences online and safeguard themselves against abuse, bullying and exploitation.

The campaign was first launched in February 2021, and has been implemented in Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu, and featured educational materials in English, Bislama, Fijian iTaukei, Fiji Hindi, French, Kiribati, Samoan, Solomon Islands Pijin, Tok Pisin and Tongan.

This is an example of what can be built on in other areas.

CASE STUDY:

WITH YOU WITH ME (WYWM)

The Australian based media company With You With Me (WYWM) is an organisation that provides training for veterans to start a digital career.

WYWM builds talent where there are skills shortages in the technology sector through established training, education and recruiting systems. The program assists veterans to discover their civilian skills and the right digital career pathway, and provides training as well as continuous learning through establishing a career plan for each candidate.

The program is currently operating in Australia, Papua New Guinea and Fiji and is an example that could be built on in other countries to support more digitally skilled Pacific workers.





“Australia’s vision of an open, free and secure cyberspace and our ambitions across the broad spectrum of cyber affairs are impossible to achieve alone. All of our efforts, both globally and regionally, will be delivered in partnership... Harnessing the opportunities of the digital age and mitigating risks is a shared challenge and a shared responsibility.”

Ambassador for Cyber Affairs Dr Tobias Feakin

Barriers

There is a **capability gap** across the Pacific, not only of digitally-equipped people, but of government capability and capacity to deal with digital technology. This includes the ability to coordinate and pursue opportunities, address threats and respond to how technology is shaping governance and policy. Local agency exists, however it is difficult to reach and connect to government policy and development cooperation.

Technology is emerging too fast for governments to regulate or understand how to effectively integrate into its diplomacy, development and defence toolkit. This requires connecting and partnering government decision-makers with the private sector expertise that is required.

New technology exacerbates government vulnerabilities.

A lack of capacity and capability creates a dependence on outside assistance, opening up the possibility of outside actors taking advantage of governments. Pacific governments have already begun ceding important tasks such as disseminating information to private corporations. Australia is also challenged by this issue, with varying levels of success.

Limited donor coordination coupled with a dependency on international aid has led to the introduction of different types of digital technologies, platforms and applications. Multiple donors with overlapping programs increase the burden on Pacific island countries with limited capacity to engage, coordinate and manage programs. A cultural challenge in saying no to resources has also led to duplication of programs and reduced aid effectiveness.

Incompatible cyber and tech capability between countries hampers communication and cooperation on regional security efforts. For example, incompatible technology has caused significant issues in defence cooperation activities working to combat Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing.

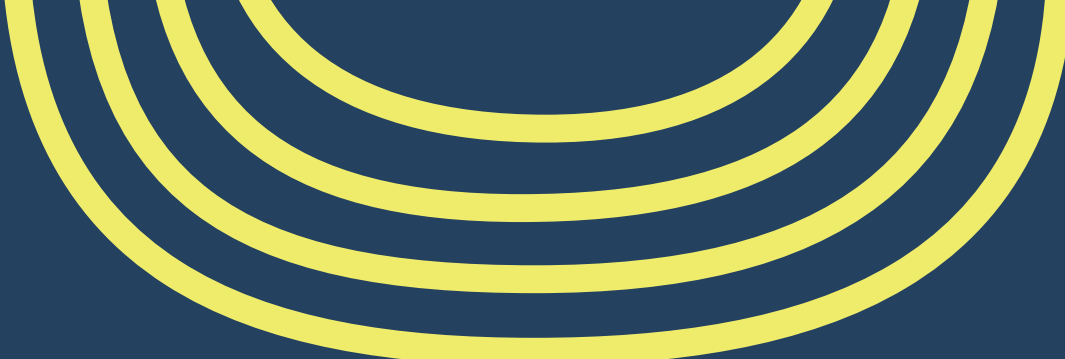
There are **differences within and between Pacific island countries** around societal structures, decision-making processes and levels of development and technological development. Engaging with this complex environment requires better coordination between defence,

development and diplomacy to ensure engagement is culturally-appropriate and context-specific.

Perceptions of sovereignty are sensitive when cooperating on cyber security programs. There is a risk cyber security can intrude in direct ways on a country's sovereignty and interfere with culture, communities and society. The solution lies in Australia supporting Pacific-led policies and programs, such as the implementation of Papua New Guinea's National Cyber Security Policy.

Judging **what constitutes misinformation** is inherently political, challenging the balance between governments' role in protecting citizens and protecting democratic norms and values. The recent example of the Solomons Islands Government national ban on Meta (Facebook) demonstrates the potential for the perception of misinformation to be used to prevent the sharing of information and opposing political views.

The cost of technology is a significant barrier for the Pacific and it goes well beyond initial investment and includes maintenance costs and the need for skilled people to utilise the technology. There are many examples of programs funding high-tech digital equipment, such as cameras or computers, requiring high levels of maintenance which means they are unusable when there is no additional or local support available, so the utility of the intervention is lost. **Ongoing costs** must be built in from the beginning of development cooperation programs. Small Pacific markets are a barrier for industry in terms of profitability.



**“I hope we can get past politics
and Australia can be genuinely
interested in the Pacific.”**

Michael Kabuni, Papua New Guinea, AP4D Pacific Voices Consultation,
April 2022

“It’s more than about cyber security.”

Joep Tarai, Fiji, AP4D Pacific Voices Consultation, April 2022

**“Australia is one of the leading
countries in the world in the cultural
and creative industries but there is no
partnership in the Pacific in that space,
or it’s very, very limited.”**

Letila Mitchell, Fiji, AP4D Pacific Voices Consultation, April 2022



The vision in practice

The Pacific region will be **digitally connected in a secure and safe way** that provides protection for governance, societies and communities and allows access to global cultural conversations, global markets and global information flows. A safe and prosperous digital environment will allow for flourishing and safe economies.

Pacific island countries will have agency to make their own decisions and choices. Pacific stakeholders will **participate in joint efforts** through conversations, dialogue and connections rather than being on the sidelines. Pacific communities will be empowered to deal with their own priorities through sustainable support.

The Australian government will support a **regional cyber security shield**, based on mutual need for a stable and secure region, meeting the national security interest of all. The Australian Government's support for regional cyber security will be through a process of closer consultation and engagement with Pacific neighbours. Australia will align with the Pacific Island Forum's Boe Declaration on Regional Security to support broader regional cyber security efforts.¹⁰

The Australian Government will **actively engage with regional forums** to build on cooperation already taking place.

The Australian Government will seek opportunities to **closely collaborate with other actors** with shared interests including the United States, Japan, New Zealand and France. When engaging with partners, Australia will focus on its strengths and use its knowledge, close diplomatic and development cooperation to identify areas of investment for digital technology transformation.

Australia assists in increasing **digital capacity and digitally-equipped people** in the region. Australia supports sustainable digital and technology solutions that are managed, resourced and deployed locally. Programs will be designed and implemented to embed sustainable capability into the future, made possible by long-term investment with development cooperation partners.

The Australian Government will partner with the private sector to use digital technology platforms to **support the ability to respond quickly to natural disasters** in the region. There will be interoperability of platforms to enable coherent disaster response.

Australia has **strong partnerships** with Pacific island countries through co-developing long-term programs that seek to address the priority needs they have identified. Emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic, which closed borders and moved interaction online, Australia will work to build robust and positive relationships by taking opportunities to be present and on the ground to maximise people-to-people engagement.

10 Pacific Islands Forum, *Boe Declaration on Regional Security*, September 2018, <https://www.forumsec.org/2018/09/05/boe-declaration-on-regional-security/>

Pathways

CYBER SECURITY

Australia will enhance cooperation with regional networks to strengthen regional responses to cyber incidents. Australia, as a member of the Pacific Cyber Security Operational Network (PaCSON), can work to encourage Pacific island countries which are not yet members but are looking to build a national response capability to join and expand the network across the Pacific.¹¹ Additional support to build capacity could come from encouraging and supporting government, private sector and civil society stakeholders to engage in the global Forum of Incident Response and Security Teams (FIRST).¹²

The Australian Government should further its partnership with the Pacific Islands Law Officers Network (PILON) to strengthen regional responses to cybercrime, including the implementation of best practice legislation in line with the Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime (the Budapest Convention).¹³ The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Attorney-General's Department should ensure PILON has the resources and capabilities it needs to strengthen regional efforts.

Australia and the Pacific should promote mutual learning by encouraging knowledge exchange. There are opportunities for a comparative analysis in digital technology issues between small island developing states. Australia can look to the role of the Organisation of American States (OAS) in developing regional cyber security capability and capacity in the Caribbean.

SUSTAINABLE INFRASTRUCTURE

The Australian Government should have a clear role in financing the physical infrastructure required to build Pacific connectivity. The Coral Sea cable network is a good example of Australia connecting Pacific island countries such as the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea to global information flows. Australia is working collaboratively with other actors in this area. Through the Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific (AIFFP), Australia is partnering with Japan and the United States on financing an undersea cable to the Republic of Palau,¹⁴ and is partnering with New Zealand, Japan and the United States on a Papua New Guinea Electrification Partnership.¹⁵ Australia also has a trilateral partnership with the US and Japan for infrastructure investment in the Indo-Pacific.¹⁶ However there are still opportunities for Australia to connect further, such as in USAID's Digital Connectivity and Cyber Security Partnership (DCCP) activity in the Pacific.¹⁷

Australian development cooperation should support infrastructure that addresses the different levels of development across the region. For example, Fiji aspires to become a cyber hub, while Papua New Guinea is focused on providing its population's basic electricity needs. The provision of digital connectivity goes beyond just providing technology, requires affordability of access. Australia can provide practical assistance at the local level, for example simple solar technology to enable charging of phones.

11 <https://pacson.org>

12 <https://www.first.org>

13 <https://pilonsec.org>

14 <https://www.aiffp.gov.au/news/australia-partnering-japan-and-united-states-finance-palau-undersea-cable>

15 <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/papua-new-guinea/stepping-up-in-papua-new-guinea>

16 <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/joint-statement-governments-australia-japan-and-united-states>

17 <https://www.usaid.gov/digital-development/digital-connectivity-cybersecurity-partnership>

CASE STUDY:

THE CYBER SAFETY PASIFIKA PROGRAM

Led by Australian Federal Police, Cyber Safety Pasifika is an example of a program already in place working to improve cyber safety in the Pacific.

Cyber Safety Pasifika is aimed at increasing cyber safety awareness and education of vulnerable communities. The program is managed through the Pacific Police Development Program – Regional (PPDP-R). The program delivers activities in three key areas: cyber safety awareness and education; development of cybercrime legislation and policy; and upskilling of Pacific police in cybercrime investigations.

Cyber Safety Pasifika has been delivered in 18 Pacific island countries through local Pacific police officers, and is an important part of regional efforts to counter cybercrime and to help keep communities safe.

CASE STUDY:

CERT VU RADIO SONG VANUATU

In support of the Vanuatu National Cyber Security Strategy 2030, the Computer Emergency Response Team Vanuatu (CERT VU) is encouraging cyber security awareness through music. Lyrics written in the national language of Vanuatu, Bislama, are promoting critical cyber security messages to Vanuatu's citizens, businesses and everyday internet users. The songs have been composed to help keep citizens safe online and have each been performed by well-renowned Vanuatu musicians.

The program is part of the regional Pacific Get Safe Online initiative, which has developed bi-lingual online resources and supported local train-the-trainer approaches to embed skills and ensure awareness activities are sustainable.¹⁸

This is an example of a fun and innovative cyber security program from the Pacific that could be successful in Australia.

ONLINE SAFETY AND DIGITAL AND MEDIA LITERACY

Australia's eSafety Commissioner should work collaboratively with Pacific governments to reduce online harm and protect the safety of citizens across the Pacific. Education for digital and media literacy needs to be part of governments' response to online safety concerns. As more people go online and the opportunity for misinformation to spread grows, governments need to partner together to support each other in countering this serious issue for the region. Australia can support Pacific countries to establish their own eSafety commissioner roles to support a regional approach to cyber safety for citizens.

Australia can work with Pacific governments to strengthen their own capabilities and capacity to manage misinformation through understanding and mapping the threat landscape and supporting government agencies to design contextualised approaches to monitoring and responding to these threats. Part of this effort could be to support National Cyber Security Strategy development and revision, ensuring countries have strategies that reflect the current risk environment and national priorities.

DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT

Australia can explore opportunities provided by digital technology and integrate them into development programs in education, health, climate and economic development. In the education sector where there is significant scope to expand and improve online learning and teaching. Australia could partner with the University of the South Pacific on ongoing information and communication technology (ICT) investment in campuses, extending this across the region. Investing in the younger generation can build trust and respect between Australia and the Pacific.¹⁹

GOVERNANCE AND REGULATION

Australia should take an active role in regional forums and seek platforms for Pacific island countries in global and regional forums including the Asia Pacific Telecommunity (APT), Global Forum on Cyber Expertise (GFCE) and the United Nations Internet Governance Forum (IGF).

Australia can strengthen engagement with regional forums, including the Pacific Islands Forum, the Pacific Community and the Pacific Fusion Centre, to encourage Pacific-led dialogue on governance and the use of technologies in public policy. Australia can leverage existing partnerships to promote discussion on regional governance as a policy priority for the region, connecting it to economic development, regional integration and geopolitical challenges.

Working through established regional organisations will lessen the burden faced by Pacific islands countries with limited human resources to contribute to multiple different consultation processes. Australia should look to encourage meetings in the margins of other major meetings, rather than separate events, to make it easier for the Pacific to engage.

Australia should ensure human rights discussions are part of engaging with Pacific counterparts on cyber and digital policy and legislative development. Working to support freedom of expression and other key democratic principles only promotes Australian values, but also protect the rights of Pacific people.

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DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

The Australian Government should partner with platforms that support cultural and economic connectivity for communities to increase their reach. The Australian Government has a role in bringing these programs onto the national and regional agenda for Pacific countries, for example, working with chambers of commerce to adopt digital marketplace platforms.

Australia could contribute through funding research on markets for digital content and digital products, for example how to monetise digital media with a focus on the diaspora communities who are better placed financially.²⁰ There could be greater support for Pacific-focused content on Australian media platforms streaming into the Pacific.

The Australian Government should support fast-tracking more digitally skilled Pacific people to support a safe and secure digital transformation. Australia can implement a dual approach that addresses the short-term tactical workforce development needs for technical cyber skills with programs such as cyber career conversion, targeted talent campaigns, training of trainers and sharing course materials, along with the development of longer-term workforce development pathways. Australia could undertake a regional cyber security training needs analysis to understand which skill sets are required to build a strong cyber security workforce, as was recently done in the Caribbean.²¹

Australian development cooperation should focus on strengthening skills and knowledge within the region, and support Pacific countries and governments to retain professionals by providing long-term commitments to mentoring, training and upskilling to keep pace with the rapidly evolving digital technology.

STRENGTHENED COORDINATION

The Australian Government should invest resources in coordination of cyber security activities to maximise the benefits for all. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade should be significantly better resourced to coordinate a whole-of-government effort in the Pacific. Through a greater investment in DFAT, Australia can provide the resources to support coordination not only between key development partners, but assist countries within the region with their own coordination efforts.

Australia should also be open to learning and collaborating with key partners such as New Zealand. Australia could provide support to the Pacific Data Hub (PDH), a platform led by the Pacific Community and supported by the New Zealand Government, that serves as a gateway to a comprehensive collection of data and information about the Pacific across key areas.²²

The Australian Government should take the lead and proactively bring together different actors to encourage collaboration in the digital space. DFAT should play a convening role for government, academics and tech companies – including Meta (Facebook), TikTok and Google – to work creatively to find ways to partner together. With Telstra's acquisition of Digicel, there is an opportunity to do more to connect and encourage dialogue between government and industry to find ways to work together and harness the most technology has to offer.

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21 Government of Jamaica, Office of the National Security Advisor, *Caribbean Regional Cyber security Training Needs Analysis*, 2022, <https://caribbeanmilitaryacademy.edu.jm/newcic1.php>

22 <https://pacificdata.org/about-us>

CASE STUDY:

AUSTRALIA AND FIJI ESAFETY COMMISSIONER PARTNERSHIP

In February 2021, Australia's eSafety Commissioner formed a new online safety partnership with Fiji Online Safety Commission to work together to tackle online harms. The partnership is a world-first online safety regulator partnership.

Supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade through its Cyber Cooperation Program, the project utilises best practice to deliver resources and tools to build online safety capabilities. Their collective work involves fostering more positive online experiences, focusing on supporting diverse and remote communities and reaching the most at-risk people.

This partnership is an example of what can be achieved when Australia and Pacific Governments are focused on regulating for a range of online harms and take care to preserve an open and free digital environment. The partnership shows online harms are not bound by national borders and these issues require governments and industry to work together towards a shared vision.

CASE STUDY:

CATALPA: PACIFIC ELEARNING PROGRAM

Development organisation Catalpa is using technology to deliver Pacific e-learning programs to improve science learning outcomes for students and professional development opportunities for teachers.

The program uses engaging science content relevant to the Pacific context and delivers interactive online teacher professional development. The program also enables flexible offline learning. The co-designed learning content is delivered via a custom e-learning platform and is designed for scaling across the region.

The program is currently being implemented in the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Samoa and Cook Islands and is an example of the opportunities digital technology provides in improving the delivery, reach and effectiveness of education programs in the Pacific.

CASE STUDY:

KNOW YOUR CUSTOMER PROGRAM

The South Pacific Central Banks, including the Reserve Bank of Australia, are working together to collectively bring down the cost of remittances through the regional 'Know Your Customer' (KYC) facility.

The program aims to improve customer due diligence processes and compliance with anti-money laundering and countering financing of terrorism compliance, lower legal compliance risks and support the provision of banking services to the region. The program aims to reduce the cost of remittances by reducing the regulation and complexities of sending money digitally from Australia and New Zealand to the Pacific. This is significant for the Pacific given that remittances are a key source of income and have a significant impact on individuals and communities across the region.

This is an example of Australia working with regional forums to strengthen efforts on digital technology issues to help drive financial inclusion in the region.

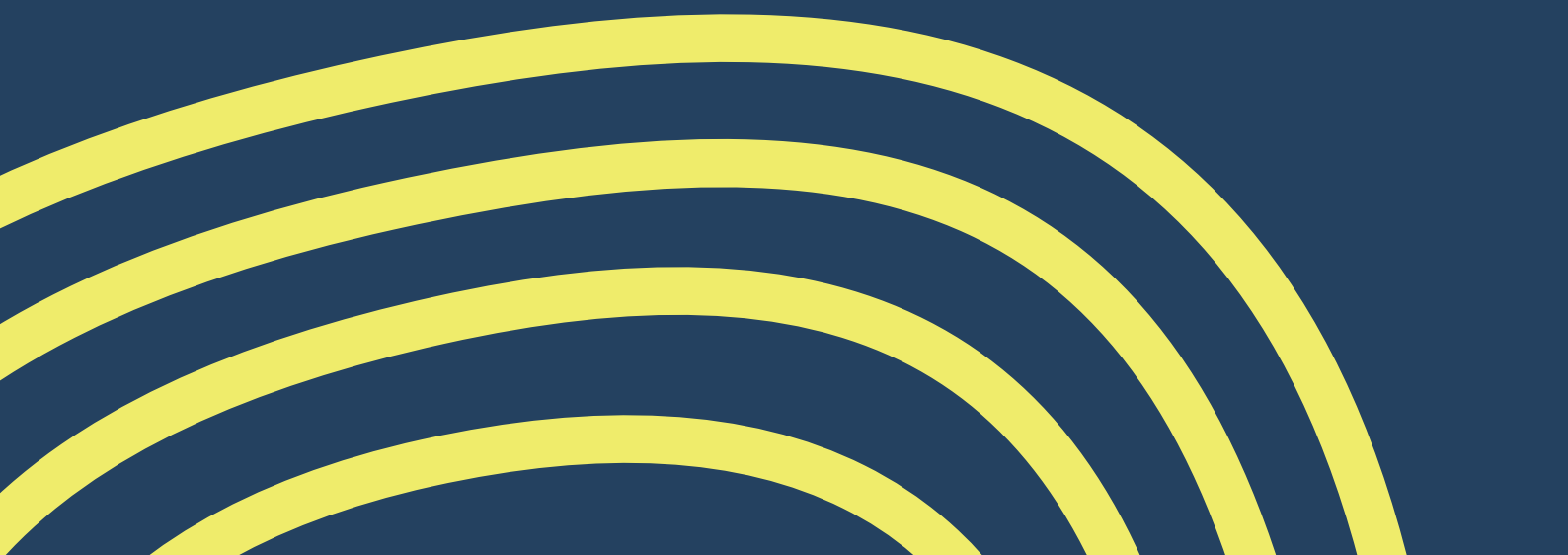
CASE STUDY:


SOLOMON ISLANDS INFLUEN-SHELL SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN

'Influen-shell' is a social media campaign promoting local businesses developed in partnership between Meta (Facebook) and the Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The campaign ran for five weeks in 2021 and aimed to promote local businesses in the Solomon Islands through sharing of stories of growth, resilience and connectedness, particularly with their use of digital technology. It celebrated Solomon Islands local enterprises and their employees, and showcased their diversity, adaptability and innovation, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is an example of the potential social and economic benefit from access to social media services.





“Globalisation is wonderful in the way in which it has cross-pollinated human development. Of course, the Pacific can and should benefit from this as well.”

Then Deputy Leader of the Opposition the Hon Richard Marles MP, “Pacific in peril: Why our region needs us to step up and lead”, Sydney Morning Herald, August 2021

“...human security, environmental/resource security, traditional security (transnational crime, cyber security, and border protection). The complex interplay between these security challenges and limited resources raises the need for regional and national cooperation to build resilience.”

Meg Keen, Security through a Pacific lens, ANU Press, February 2021

“I think the time is right that we take on a more concerted effort, as a region, to define ourselves on our own terms. After all, this global community of ours is continuing to shrink rapidly, thanks to the marching advancement of internet technology and the uptake of mobile devices, which can basically run and organise a business or organisation — on the run!”

Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Forum Henry Puna, University of the South Pacific, October 2012



Contributions

Thank you to those who have contributed their thoughts during the development of this paper. Views expressed cannot be attributed to any individuals or organisations involved in the process.

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