



Options Paper

What does it look like for Australia to... Support Youth, Civil Society and Media in the Pacific

SUPPORTED BY



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Executive Summary

Australia is deeply invested in a peaceful, resilient and prosperous Pacific Islands region.

Youth, civil society and media are key interconnected groups that will shape the trajectory of the Pacific region into the future:

- young people are vital to the continuing development of their nations' environments, economies, societies and cultures
- a vibrant civil society makes for more effective and accountable government
- a healthy media plays a crucial role in underpinning democracy, normalising a plurality of views, enabling dialogue and serving the public interest.

Youth, civil society and media should be a key focus for Australia across its Pacific engagement.

YOUTH

Pacific youth have a strong vision for their own future which should be the guiding light for Australia's partnership with the Pacific. But in many Pacific Island communities young people have very limited effective power. Today, many young people are more engaged and informed than ever before and increasingly proactive in tackling the issues faced by their communities. When given the opportunity young people have the capacity to contribute innovative and effective solutions.

Australia has a role in:

- supporting education systems to better suit the educational needs of Pacific populations
- funding entities such as National Youth Councils and youth-focused non-government organisations
- building increased links between young people across the region and with Australian First Nations communities.

CIVIL SOCIETY

Supporting and strengthening civil society enhances effective and accountable governance, builds deeper partnerships and people-to-people linkages, and contributes to stability.

Civil society organisations in the region face numerous challenges including:

- shrinking civil space, with the legitimacy and credibility of civil society being questioned and challenged by governments across the region
- lack of funding, with a critical lack of resources across the board and funding sources that are often unstable and reliant on donor-driven project funding
- difficulties meeting donor requirements in terms of proposal writing, reporting, governance systems and financial and staff procedures.

Australia's International Development Policy includes commitments that will require engagement with Pacific civil society organisations including the design of a new Civil Society Partnerships Fund and creation of country and regional Development Partnership Plans. These provide opportunities to address shrinking civil space and support the strengthening of civil society organisations.

Australia has a role in:

- building the institutional capacity of civil society organisations and providing predictable core funding for organisations that coordinate and engage in public policy and hold leaders accountable
- engaging with Pacific civil society organisations through the design of the Development Partnership Plans and Civil Society Partnerships Fund to demonstrate a long-term investment in civil society.

MEDIA

A well-functioning media ecosystem is an essential pillar of democracy and vital to good governance. Strong, reliable, accurate and transparent media content is vital to create an informed citizenry and promote transparency and accountability within government.

Pacific media, like all media, is facing the challenges of rapid technological change, compounded by minimal government funding and investment, aging infrastructure, small populations and economic stress following the COVID-19 pandemic. Many media businesses in the Pacific are struggling financially.

Australia has a role in:

- ensuring that media organisations in the region are supported to develop business models that promote digital transition and help ensure financial viability, business resilience and improved wages for journalists
- investing in digital media transition including production equipment and ageing infrastructure
- providing media capacity-building programs across the region
- encouraging content sharing to the region and from the region for Australians, creating closer cultural ties and sharing human connection and experiences.

There are opportunities to put this suggested approach into practice in current policymaking.

Development Partnership Plans

- include youth as a cross-cutting issue for development programs in the region
- identify and formalise mechanisms for ongoing engagement with civil society
- proactively seek out ways to ensure media contributions and needs are embedded in development partnership plans.

Civil Society Partnerships Fund

- design the Fund to develop and support initiatives that nurture civil society networks and provide flexible, core, multi-year funding to civil society organisations across the region.

Pacific Regional Accountability Framework

- fund Pacific-led implementation of the Pacific Regional Accountability Framework for civil society organisations and endorse its use as an accountability benchmark.

Knowledge Hub Fund

- establish a Knowledge Hub Fund for advocacy and policy engagement to enable youth, civil society and media to contribute to policymaking
- the Fund could support a regional or country-specific think tank to support public debate.

Media Infrastructure Fund

- establish a Media Infrastructure Fund to enable Pacific media to secure the necessary tools to enable them to operate.

Why it Matters

This paper is the culmination of four months of consultations with experts from the Pacific and Australia. The process commenced with a dialogue event in November 2023 with 48 participants and was informed by small group and individual consultations with a further 45 experts.

As part of the consultations, AP4D convened a focus group discussion with 10 representatives from youth and civil society organisations in Port Moresby. Consultations were also held with seven executives from a range of Pacific media organisations during the Pacific Islands News Association CEO Summit. A further seven senior media representatives from PNG shared their views via a written survey response facilitated by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). Four media specialists from the ABC also provided written responses to consultation questions.

AP4D observed and gathered perspectives from the Pacific Australia Emerging Leaders' Summit 2023, Pacific Islands News Association CEO Summit and consulted with the Australia Asia Pacific Media Initiative.

A full list of individuals and organisations consulted can be found at the end of the paper.

This paper is a synthesis of these contributions

AP4D is grateful to those who have contributed to the development of this paper. Views expressed here cannot be attributed to any individuals or organisations involved in the process.

Australia and the Pacific share a vision for a peaceful, resilient and prosperous region. Securing this future for the Pacific cannot be left to chance, but requires long-term vision, strategy and commitment.¹ There are a range of interconnected factors that will shape the trajectory of the Pacific region going forward.

The media, young people and civil society are prominent in this set of factors, with a strong interconnection. This paper considers them together while acknowledging they are one of many lenses through which to think about Australian engagement in the Pacific.

Youth, civil society and media can be grouped together because they are key influencers on community dialogue, government accountability and the protection and promotion of civic space. Another important point common to all three groups is that they are crucial contributors to socio-economic development that require continued support to be able to operate effectively. Engagement with each group must be embedded at the beginning of policy processes with the unique needs of each considered. Avenues for their genuine participation must be supported and resourced.

While civil society and media are framed as independent functioning entities within this paper, consultees also pointed out that both are strengthened through transparent, nimble, and mutually accountable relationships with society and government. It is often through these relationships that issues of social conflict are debated and ultimately addressed.

Consultations showed that youth, civil society and the media are overwhelmingly viewed as 'very important' to regional peace, prosperity and resilience, with more than 80% of dialogue participants expressing that Australia could do more to support these three groups in the Pacific.

YOUTH

Young people in the Pacific are vital to the continuing development of their nations' environments, economies, society, and cultures.² The next generation of Pacific leaders must be equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to actively lead their communities and countries and perform as effective drivers of social development and economic growth.³ Engaged and positive youth are a powerful barometer of overall community well-being. Conversely, disenfranchised youth risk contributing to instability and unrest.

Across the Pacific, there are considerable differences between groups of young people and the term 'youth' represents an extremely diverse group. While development actors, including governments, often tend to consider 'youth' as a homogeneous group, the reality is that they are highly divergent, and it is impossible to talk about a distinct, undifferentiated category of youth. Class, gender, age, language, culture, educational, economic and national status are all factors that contribute to difference between groups of young people.

Pacific island youth, however this is defined in each society,⁴ are the leaders of tomorrow in government, civil society and business. Providing opportunities for youth to develop individual and collective capacities is fundamental to the future prosperity of their countries and the resilience of

the region.⁵ The region's population is expected to grow dramatically in coming decades with projections suggesting an increase from around 12.3 million people in 2020 to 19.5 million by 2050.⁶ This growth will lead to a surge in the youth population⁷ in a region where the bulk of the populace is already under the age of 35.⁸ Given these demographics, it is crucial that Australia and other partners listen to and build on the strengths of the region's young people.⁹

Some young people have greater social mobility, access to technology, training and networking opportunities than ever before. This enables them to bring new knowledge, skills, experience and insights to leadership roles. However, these opportunities are not always evenly distributed and there is a risk that the same small subset of youth will repeatedly take on leadership roles and opportunities. Strategies to include a broader range of young people and to encourage established youth leaders to make space for newcomers will be important going forward. Any efforts to address the distribution of opportunities for young people will need to cast a wide net and be prepared to cater for different starting levels. For example, it might take more effort to realise and nurture the leadership potential in a young person from a rural village, as opposed to a young person from an urban setting who has had exposure to a different level of education and experience.

In the main, young people in the Pacific want to be active, positive partners contributing to their communities.¹⁰

1 Pacific Island Forum Secretariat, Forum Communiqué, August 2019, <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/50th-Pacific-Islands-Forum-Communique.pdf>

2 Pacific Australian Emerging Leaders Summit 2022, The Pacific We See, 2022, <https://www.micahaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/The-Pacific-We-See-Report.pdf>

3 Catherine Wilson, Demanding the Future: Navigating the Pacific's Youth Bulge, Lowy Institute, July 2022, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/demanding-future-navigating-pacific-s-youth-bulge>

4 There is no uniform definition of youth across the Pacific. See for example, Helen Lee and Aidan Craney, Pacific Youth, Local and Global, ANU, n.d., 1. Pacific Youth, Local and Global (anu.edu.au)

5 Aidan Craney, Youth in Fiji and Solomon Islands: Livelihoods, Leadership and Civic Engagement, ANU Press, 2022, <https://press-files.anu.edu.au/downloads/press/n9934/pdf/book.pdf>

6 The Pacific Community, Pacific Island Populations 2020, The Pacific Community, 2020 https://pacificsecurity.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Pacific_Islands_2020_Populations_poster.pdf

7 Catherine Wilson, Demanding the Future: Navigating the Pacific's Youth Bulge, Lowy Institute, July 2022, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/demanding-future-navigating-pacific-s-youth-bulge>

8 In Fiji more than 60% of the population is under 35; in the Solomon Islands it is almost 75%. See : Pacific Australian Emerging Leaders Summit 2022, The Pacific We See, 2022, <https://www.micahaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/The-Pacific-We-See-Report.pdf>

9 Pacific Australian Emerging Leaders Summit 2022, The Pacific We See, 2022, <https://www.micahaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/The-Pacific-We-See-Report.pdf>

10 Aidan Craney, Youth in Fiji and Solomon Islands: Livelihoods, Leadership and Civic Engagement, ANU Press, 2022, <https://press-files.anu.edu.au/downloads/press/n9934/pdf/book.pdf>

If Australia is genuine about partnering with the region to see a thriving Blue Pacific, the perspectives of young people must be thoroughly understood and considered, and opportunities for youth to contribute to decision-making must be encouraged.¹¹

CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society is essential in creating transformational change and championing rights, inclusion, and development – all centred in local context and communities.¹² This only becomes more important in the face of increasing global challenges.

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have an important role to play in supporting a thriving democracy.¹³ Strong civil society networks provide a mechanism through which citizens express their political, social, and economic concerns and complement other avenues for holding governments accountable to citizens through democratic participation.¹⁴ Vibrant civil society makes for more effective and accountable government.

Free, vibrant and robust civil society networks play a critical role in promoting two-way feedback between citizens and governments, filling gaps in essential services, bringing diverse voices to the table and enabling the inclusion of marginalised and minority groups. Civil society promotes pluralism, strengthens effective and accountable governance, builds deeper partnerships, and contributes to stability across the region.¹⁵

Civil society offers an opportunity to build community around shared values and interests, and in the Pacific plays an increasing role in responding to and speaking about key

issues facing the region. CSOs are also playing an increasing role in partnering and collaborating with the government and non-government sector in responding to disasters. This role will only grow as the impacts of climate change increase.

CSOs, especially churches, play an important complementary (and sometimes substitute) role to governments in assuring service delivery. This is recognised for example in the Australian government's support for church partnerships in several countries.¹⁶ During times of government instability civil society works with all relevant sectors to ensure development partners can still engage with people at the grassroots level.

Civil society also acts as a pathway for communities to engage internationally to gather support on important social, environmental and political issues. For example, in 2023 the CSO Pacific Island Students Fighting Climate Change (PISFCC) successfully campaigned the International Court of Justice to adopt a resolution on countries' legal obligations to combat climate change. This campaign originated in a Vanuatu classroom but was brought to global attention through the work of civil society.¹⁷ This is just one example across the Pacific where climate organisations have played a significant role in shifting the world's understanding of climate issues and the place of the Pacific as a leader on the global stage.

CSOs and the landscapes in which they operate differ both within countries and across the region. Sectors such as the climate movement are strong, can have global impact and present opportunities for cross-regional solidarity. Other civil society groupings are intensely local, community-based organisations created by and for a specific community.

These local, place-based groups are critical for driving local well-being and development.

Civic space is the set of conditions that allow civil society and individuals to organise, participate and communicate freely and without discrimination, and in doing so, influence the political and social structures around them.

At the heart of civic space rights are the rights to freedom of association, freedom of peaceful assembly, freedom of expression, human rights protection and civic engagement in rulemaking.¹⁸

Civic space is shrinking across the globe, including in the Pacific, posing risks to the prosperity and stability of nation states.¹⁹ Against this backdrop, it is crucial to protect and promote an environment in which civil society offer a diversity of views and checks and balances on government actions, providing an important voice on key issues including peacebuilding policy and human rights.

Australia has an important role to play to in supporting robust, vibrant CSOs across the region. Key to this is examining how donor funding is provided with a focus on flexible, multi-year core funding. Development and humanitarian responses are most effective when they are based on genuine, longstanding partnerships, and designed and led by local actors and organisations.²⁰

A stronger focus on civil society will help address rising

poverty and inequality, supporting a resilient region. Building genuine, sustained partnerships with civil society is both good development practice and is in Australia's national interest.²¹

MEDIA

The media plays a crucial role in the Pacific region, contributing to multiple aspects of society, governance and development through activities such as dissemination of information, community engagement and education, communication during times of instability, crises and natural disaster, cultural exchange, political discourse and economic development.

The media also plays a crucial role in promoting democracy, supporting and normalising plurality and diversity of views, enabling public dialogue and serving the public interest.²² Media debate, independent journalism and quality education and entertainment programming are vital to development, democracy and good governance.²³

“Media provides an avenue to galvanise and portray diverse culture, perspective and views in the Pacific, as well shed light on some the challenges confronting the Pacific and the opportunities the Pacific offers.”

From AP4D consultations

11 Pacific Australia Emerging Leaders Summit, The Pacific We See 2023, Nov 2023
12 Australian Council for International Development, Strengthening Civil Society, 2024, <https://acfid.asn.au/our-focus/civil-society/>
13 Parliamentary Joint Committee Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, Supporting democracy in our region, Nov 2023, https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportjnt/RB000041/toc_pdf/Supportingdemocracyinourregion.pdf
14 Australian Council for International Development, Submission on Australia's New International Development Policy 2022, https://acfid.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Submission-to-Australias-International-Development-Policy_2022.pdf
15 Australian Council for International Development, Policy Brief: Civil Society as a Cornerstone of Effective and Inclusive Development, 2022 Election-Policy-Brief-Civil-society_V6.pdf (acfid.asn.au)
16 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Church partnerships in the Pacific, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/pacific/people-connections/church-partnerships-in-the-pacific>
17 Pacific Island Student Fighting Climate Change, To the International Court of Justice, March 2023 ICJAO Campaign — Pacific Islands Students Fighting Climate Change | Seeking an Advisory Opinion from the ICJ (pisfcc.org)

18 WFD, Addressing the global emergency of shrinking civic space and how to reclaim it: A programming guide , 2022, <https://www.wfd.org/what-we-do/resources/addressing-global-emergency-shrinking-civic-space-and-how-reclaim-it>
19 Parliamentary Joint Committee Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, Supporting democracy in our region, Nov 2023, https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportjnt/RB000041/toc_pdf/Supportingdemocracyinourregion.pdf
20 Australian Council for International Development, Walk the Talk on Inclusive Development, Locally Led Development, and Racial Justice, 2024, <https://acfid.asn.au/our-focus/inclusive-and-locally-led-development/>
21 Australian Council for International Development, Policy Brief: Civil Society as a Cornerstone of Effective and Inclusive Development, 2022 Election-Policy-Brief-Civil-society_V6.pdf (acfid.asn.au)
22 Public interest is defined as “The public interest is about what matters to everyone in society. It is about the common good, the general welfare and the security and well-being of everyone in the community we serve.” (Ethical Journalism Network, <https://ethicaljournalism-network.org/the-public-interest/>)
23 Australia Asia Pacific Media Initiative (AAPMI), AAPMI Submission: DFAT New International Development Policy enquiry, Nov 2022, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/new-international-development-policy-submission-australia-asia-pacific-media-initiative.pdf> and Australian Broadcasting Corporation, ABC Submission on Australia's New International Development Policy, Nov 2022, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/new-international-development-policy-submission-abc.pdf>

Youth

Media freedom is an essential pillar of democracy and vital to good governance.²⁴ Societies function most effectively when citizens are well informed, are able to access and share information freely and can debate ideas.²⁵ Strong, independent media is a source of reliable, trusted information and can act as a 'town square' for public debate, a 'watchdog' for government accountability and transparency and a 'bridge' between policy makers and the communities impacted. It is a powerful advocacy tool for civil society groups and in some instances can act as a connector between civil society, young people and power brokers.

A robust, neutral and resilient media sector creates an informed citizenry, offers an antidote to and may counter mis- and disinformation and provides avenues for inclusion and greater political participation. The flip side of this is that media which is not free or independent can influence narratives and impact neutrality of information. Growing grassroots civic journalism²⁶ and social media content can play a significant role in both disinformation as well as information dissemination and public engagement, starting conversations and amplifying minority voices.

Media plays a vital role in creating understanding and emotional connections between cultures and communities and can help inform values including democratic values. It shares traditional storytelling, records history, preserves culture, and fosters unity. In a region with diverse cultures and dispersed populations, the media can help connect communities and keep them informed about local, regional and global events. A free and independent media promotes the exchange of views which can reduce tension and prevent conflict within and between countries. And yet swathes of Pacific populations do not have access to media.

In a region prone to natural disasters, the media plays a critical role in disseminating early warnings and providing lifesaving information in times of disaster, allowing families to contact each other and providing updates during and after emergencies. In these instances, timely and accurate reporting can save lives and help communities prepare for and respond to disasters. Additionally, when one country is affected by disaster, other media from within the region can offer support such as surge capacity, technical expertise to get back on air and the ability to reach citizens from other countries. Pacific media should be supported to play this role.

Pacific youth have a strong vision for their own future which should be the guiding light for Australia's partnership with the Pacific.²⁷ In the Pacific Youth Development Framework 2014–2023, young people describe the Pacific they would like to see as 'A sustainable Pacific where all young people are safe, respected, empowered and resilient'.²⁸

Youth concerns are often treated as stand-alone issues, unconnected to other issues, and often without addressing root causes. As both a cross-cutting and a multi-sectoral issue, coordination is essential to ensure that all aspects of youth development are addressed and monitored across sectors and to bring a focus on youth and youth engagement to new sectors. National youth policies need to be implemented across a range of ministries and need high-level commitment from core ministries.²⁹

Increased use of mobile phones and improved access to the internet and social media provide some additional avenues for young people, particularly those in urban contexts, to engage outside their immediate communities. This is especially true in Melanesia where social media is empowering citizens to voice their opinion and engage with government in more interactive ways.³¹ Despite this, young people in the Pacific still do not have sufficient access to the networks and forums to engage in dialogue with policy makers, nor do those in power adequately consider youth issues when developing policies and program.

While exact estimates vary, high unemployment is one of the biggest challenges for young people in the Pacific. Even those who are educated are at a high risk of joblessness, with most Pacific Island economies not creating enough jobs to keep pace with population growth.³²

Education structures across the Pacific are currently not well suited to Pacific education needs.³³ Throughout the Pacific, education systems are predominantly based on colonial or missionary models of education. Such systems do not encourage critical thinking and focus on academic achievement aimed at service-based employment. This is despite most Pacific Island countries not having service-based economies.

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

In many Pacific Island communities young people have very limited effective power. Strict social hierarchy within families and communities dictate that Pacific youth should listen to and obey their elders. Because of this young people's participation in public life and politics remains constrained with few avenues for young Pacific islanders to voice their views on political issues. This is particularly the case for young Pacific women.³⁰

24 Blake Johnson and Lucy Albiston, Pacific media needs more support to protect the truth, ASPI Strategist, May 2023, Pacific media needs more support to protect the truth | The Strategist (aspistrategist.org.au)

25 Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Fact Sheet, Why Free Media Matters, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/8/e/31230.pdf>

26 Civic journalism is journalism that is conducted by people who are not professional journalists but who disseminate information using web sites, blogs and social media platforms.

27 Pacific Australia Emerging Leaders Summit, The Pacific We See 2023, Nov 2023

28 The Pacific Community, The Pacific Youth Development Framework 2014–2023, 2015, [Pacific Youth Development Framework.pdf \(spc.int\)](#)

29 The Pacific Community, The Pacific Youth Development Framework 2014–2023, 2015, [Pacific Youth Development Framework.pdf \(spc.int\)](#)

30 Catherine Wilson, Demanding the Future: Navigating the Pacific's Youth Bulge, Lowy Institute, July 2022, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/demanding-future-navigating-pacific-s-youth-bulge>

31 Glen Finau, Acklesh Prasad, Romitesh Kant, Jope Tarai, Sarah Logan, John Cox, Social Media and e-Democracy in Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, ANU, 2014, https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/75381/2/01_Finau_Social_Media_and_e-Democracy_2014.pdf

32 Catherine Wilson, Demanding the Future: Navigating the Pacific's Youth Bulge, Lowy Institute, July 2022, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/demanding-future-navigating-pacific-s-youth-bulge>

33 Aidan Craney, Youth in Fiji and Solomon Islands: Livelihoods, Leadership and Civic Engagement, ANU Press, 2022, <https://press-files.anu.edu.au/downloads/press/n9934/pdf/book.pdf>

THE PACIFIC WE SEE, PACIFIC AUSTRALIA EMERGING LEADERS SUMMIT 2023

“Our vision as a delegation is to see healthy environments, empowered young people and flourishing communities across the Pacific region. This is a vision that will only be realised in full when communities enjoy self-determination, when no one is left behind and when we engage in genuine partnerships across our Blue Pacific.”

Key priorities for the young people of the Pacific include climate change and disasters, youth empowerment and health.

Summit delegates highlighted how young people within Pacific communities are leading the world in environmental stewardship and innovative solutions to combat the impacts of a warming climate. Australia can support these efforts by aligning domestic climate policies with Australia’s commitments under the Paris Agreement to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees, as well as providing adequate and accessible climate financing to the region. Operationalising and appropriately financing a Loss and Damage Fund would compensate vulnerable nations in the Pacific who are least responsible for creating the climate crisis. The ancient wisdom and knowledge of Australia’s First Nations People should be valued and drawn upon in responding to environmental challenges.³⁴

The Pacific Emerging Leaders Summit expressed the view that education systems throughout the Pacific need to better reflect Pacific culture and history and be appropriate for the types of employment opportunities available to young people in the Pacific. There is a need to move away from colonial models of education and centre curriculums around indigenous perspectives, cultures and histories. Existing perceptions of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) need to be challenged and skills-based training seen as a viable alternative to academic, exam focussed learning. High levels of unemployment across the Pacific lead to feelings of disempowerment and disconnection amongst youth populations. Ensuring education systems are equipping young people with the skills they need to find employment is key to empowering young people and creating just, equal and sustainable societies.³⁵

Summit participants also identified a lack of access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) as a core barrier to flourishing communities, highlighting that the Pacific region faces some of the lowest WASH coverage rates in the world. Across the Pacific, water and sanitation-related diseases remain of the leading causes of death for children under five.³⁶

Delegates recognised long held connections between Australia’s First Nations communities and Pacific communities and highlighted how shared colonial histories and cultural connectedness resonates deeply. Delegates suggested that if Australia wishes to engage in true partnership with the Pacific, it needs to first engage in truth telling and genuine partnership with First Nations communities, ensuring policies are informed by indigenous knowledge and wisdom.

Delegates recognised that Australia has shown willingness to create good partnerships to support the Pacific region and emphasised that Australia’s engagement with the region should be built on the foundations of strong relationships and truth telling, guided by self-determination and local leadership, drawing on the wisdom of Indigenous peoples and building on the strengths of the region. Delegates expressed the view that the principles of self-determination, inclusion and a whole of life approach³⁷ must inform everything Australia does in the Pacific.

34 Pacific Australia Emerging Leaders Summit, The Pacific We See 2023, Nov 2023

35 Pacific Australia Emerging Leaders Summit, The Pacific We See 2023, Nov 2023

36 UNICEF, Water, sanitation and hygiene, <https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/what-we-do/water-sanitation-hygiene>

37 A whole-of-life approach is one that recognizes the interconnected nature of life and sees economic, cultural, social, spiritual and ecological wellbeing as interrelated.

Consultees expressed the view that education should reflect and create local ways of being and knowing, and help young people take advantage of realistic livelihood opportunities – balancing skilled trades, subsistence livelihoods and professional services. Some consultees considered that to achieve this, entire education systems need to be completely overhauled and revolutionised.³⁸ The Institute of Education at University of the South Pacific has been working on how to make Pacific education systems better fit Pacific education needs for more than two decades and there are opportunities to build on and support this work.

Consultees expressed their view that Australia’s International Development Policy has a minimal focus on children and young people. While the policy references some of the challenges facing the region’s youth, there are no specific commitments to support their rights and wellbeing.³⁹

OPPORTUNITIES

Many young people in the region are more engaged and informed than ever before and increasingly proactive in tackling the issues faced by their communities. Young people are leaders in peace and security, inclusion, self-determination and responding to the climate crisis. When given the opportunity young people have the capacity to contribute innovative and effective solutions to global problems.

There are opportunities to link young people across the region. Consultees suggested that links between Pacific youth and First Nations communities within Australia are particularly important and provide significant opportunities for non-Indigenous Australia to learn how to engage cross-culturally with respect, care for their communities and the environment and how to build strong relational bonds.

National Youth Councils provide opportunities for young people to take on leadership roles, be involved in public debate as well as contribute to their communities through volunteer

work. Previously these councils were coordinated across the region through the Pacific Youth Council housed within the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC). Funding for this coordinating role was provided under the Pacific Leadership Program however when the program finished SPC was unable to maintain this role. There are opportunities to reinvestigate the Pacific Youth Council to work with National Youth Councils to strengthen their capacity and functionality.

Support for entities such as National Youth Councils and youth-focused non-government organisations could create sustainable partnerships which would lay a foundation for long-term social development in areas such as leadership, education and politics. Similarly, more targeted funding could be provided to youth-led organisations which promote democracy in the region.

Other potential opportunities arising from consultations include supporting the work of the Institute for Education at the University of the South Pacific to revamp Pacific education systems to better suit the educational needs of Pacific populations, and funding more young Pacific researchers to undertake qualitative research on the challenges faced by young people in different parts of the Pacific. Many of those consulted saw place-based research as critical to understanding the issues young people are facing.

38 Aidan Crane, Youth in Fiji and Solomon Islands: Livelihoods, Leadership and Civic Engagement, ANU Press, 2022, <https://press-files.anu.edu.au/downloads/press/n9934/pdf/book.pdf>

39 Australian Council for International Development, New International Development Policy Analysis, Aug 2023 [New Development Policy ANALYSIS \(acfid.asn.au\)](https://www.acfid.asn.au)

PNG CONSULTATIONS

A small focus group discussion was held to gather views on the role of youth, civil society and media in the region with representatives of ten key population groups of young people (men who have sex with men, transgender men and women, people living with HIV, female sex workers, high risk men and women).

Consultees saw a strong role for the media in educating and informing the community to bring about shifts in attitudes and behavioural changes especially as it relates to issues such as HIV/AIDs, transgender and queer rights. The media was seen as a way to combat stigma and amplify the voices of vulnerable groups. The converse of this was also recognised with misinformation about HIV/AIDs, sex workers and transgender people contributing to increased stigma and higher levels of discrimination. Providing accurate and up to date information around HIV treatment and other essential services was also seen as a role for local media.

An independent media was seen as important to counteract the rising influence of social media, although social media was also identified as a platform to advocate for vulnerable population groups.

Focus group consultees identified a role for Australia in supporting civil society to build capacity, understanding and knowledge needed to advocate and support key population groups. The role civil society can play in reaching areas that the government does not was also highlighted.

The need for drop-in centres and accommodation for at risk groups such as sex workers was raised as an area for further support.

Job creation initiatives were seen as an important part of supporting young people in Port Moresby, particularly young people from marginalised groups. Alongside of this, opportunities for scholarships, education and training particularly targeted to members of key population groups was suggested as a way of empowering young people and reducing stigmatisation and discrimination.

Legalising sex work and enforcing legislation around treatment of people with HIV was seen as a critical step in advocating for the rights of key population groups, and consultees felt there was a role for both the media and civil society in promoting this.

Case Studies

PACIFIC AUSTRALIA EMERGING LEADERS NETWORK⁴⁰

Emerging leaders from Pacific Island nations, First Nations Australians, members of diaspora communities and other Australians, have formed a network based on the belief that the stories, the creativity and the civic participation of young people in the Pacific region will be crucial in helping to build a safer, and more just and sustainable future for our shared Blue Pacific.

The network exists to foster relationships between emerging leaders across Australia and the Pacific, and to build partnerships of mutual respect and trust between those leaders and key decision-makers in Australia and the region.

The network connects regularly throughout the year, engaging in knowledge sharing, leadership development and relationship building. This culminates in a yearly summit in which delegates are equipped to meet with key Australian decision makers; sharing with them their vision for the region, their lived experiences of these critical development areas and engaging in dialogue on how genuine partnerships can be formed to see the region flourish.

Alongside this political engagement, the summit provides the opportunity for deep connection, cultural learning, capacity building, song, dance, laughter and more.

This initiative is coordinated by Micah Australia and the Pacific Conference of Churches and supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade under the Pacific Church Partnership Program.

THE YOUNG PACIFIC CHANGE MAKERS PROJECT⁴¹

The Young Pacific Change Makers project celebrates and supports Pacific Islanders aged 18–30 who are making a difference in their communities, helping to amplify their voices through media and develop their skills as leaders.

The Young Pacific Change Makers project shines the light on young people in Fiji, Solomon Islands and Tonga and the work they're doing to strengthen their

communities. The project highlights inspirational stories of dedication, ingenuity and resilience and gives young leaders a platform to help raise awareness of their work and achieve greater impact through storytelling.

Selected Young Pacific Change Makers are provided media, mentoring and networking opportunities to help develop their leadership capabilities and encourage them to be at the centre of conversations in their community.

GIRLS ONLINE (GO!)⁴²

The GO! Project supports Australia's objectives to promote and protect human rights online and gender equality in cyberspace. The project is supported by a grant from Australia's Cyber and Critical Tech Cooperation Program.

This project is a continuation of the 2019 PACMAS Tonga Cyber Safety Project. The Cyber Safety Project involved a codesign workshop with 15 young women in Tonga to explore their experiences and behaviours online and isolate issues that affect them. The young women also designed their own solutions to the problems they shared and contributed to a final prototype solution in the form of YouTube videos with information and reassurance embedded in popular content.

ABC International Development (ABCID) is working with in-country partners, Talitha Project (Tonga) and CARE (Vanuatu), to amplify the voice of young women and build their online resilience and capacity in a contextualised, needs-based, and relevant way.

Design partner, Portable, is working with GO! to design and deliver human-centred co-design activities that help make cyberspace a safe and enabling environment for women and girls.

In keeping with ABCID's 'nothing about us without us' approach, GO! activities have young women at the core.

The guiding principle of the project is recognising young women as experts of their own experience, so they lead the identification and exploration of cyber safety rights, experiences and issues. Young women will also drive contextually relevant and practical solutions for their online safety.

⁴⁰ Micah Australia, Pacific Australia Emerging Leaders Network, <https://www.micahaustralia.org/take-action/apac-young-leaders/>

⁴¹ <https://www.abc.net.au/abc-international-development/projects/young-pacific-change-makers>

⁴² <https://www.abc.net.au/abc-international-development/projects/go-cyber>

Civil Society

The interests and perspectives of civil society organisations (CSOs) across the region are diverse. However, consultees agreed that open and transparent mechanisms for structured consultation between governments and civil society need to be embedded in partnership agreements with donor countries.

If Australia and other partners are serious about engaging with civil society in the Pacific and investing in strong, accountable organisations they must recognise that such investment needs to go beyond thematic issues. It is critical that Australia invest in building the institutional capacity of CSOs and provide predictable core funding to CSOs that play a coordinating role, engage in public policy and hold leaders accountable.

The 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent has provided valuable opportunities for civil society to engage with governments in a coordinated and consistent way. This has been a very positive experience and has provided civil society with a window of opportunity to engage.

As geopolitical competition continues to play out in the Pacific, there is a real need for civil society to build solidarity and trust across the region. Consultees reported that many communities feel they have been left uninformed when it comes to geopolitical concerns and are starting to lose trust in their leaders. Consultations identified a view that civil society has a role in understanding high-level political issues and articulating this to the public, but support is needed to enable this outcome.

Investing in well-informed CSOs who have the capacity to understand and articulate complex issues means that not only can civil society share information with communities, but it also positions civil society to engage effectively in public policy debate and hold governments accountable. Formalising mechanisms for consultation and engagement provides civil society with a legitimate avenue to raise difficult issues such as West Papua, self-determination and the legacy of nuclear testing in the Pacific.

Civil society groups in the Pacific do not have opportunities to contribute to policy debate through budget submissions and parliamentary inquiries in the way that Australian organisations do. Currently Fiji is the only country in the region to accept budget submissions from CSOs. Dialogue and advocacy efforts would be assisted by supporting CSOs to understand the entry points to engage with governments and formalising mechanisms to achieve this.

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

CSOs in the region face numerous challenges. While these challenges vary between organisations and are different in each country, some common challenges include:

- 1. Shrinking civil space.** The legitimacy and credibility of civil society continues to be questioned and challenged by governments across the region. Despite the importance of an open civil society and civic space for development, governments across the Pacific are undertaking actions that are closing safe civic space.⁴³ At a local level, smaller CSOs feel like they are being crowded out by larger more established and often international organisations. This is compounded by unequal partnerships that do not foster local systems. Dialogue between civil society and governments are often ad-hoc and unsupported by institutional frameworks. Within the context of heavily contested political spaces, many local organisations feel they have very little leverage to engage with policy makers and power brokers.⁴⁴ It can be challenging for civil society actors to play a dual role as both advocates and implementers of programs. Both are critical functions that need to be adequately resourced. Civil society advocates hold governments to account and promote transparent, strong and responsive states. It is difficult for those implementing programs to carry out this role if they fear vital funding will be withdrawn as retaliation for speaking up to the government.

- 2. Lack of resources and funding.** Many CSOs face a critical lack of resources and funding across the board. Funding sources are often unstable and reliant on donor driven project funding. This lack of ongoing, reliable funding exacerbates human resource constraints with many organisations facing difficulties in recruiting and retaining high quality staff.⁴⁵ There is a high demand for capable and qualified staff in the civil society sector. International NGOs tend to pay higher salaries and have more attractive conditions meaning they are more likely to have trained and qualified staff. Smaller, local organisations cannot compete with the pay and conditions offered by larger entities. The ability for CSOs to obtain and maintain suitable infrastructure, equipment and other resources including information technology capacity is also hindered by a lack of funding. Further, the scarcity of donor funds available for ‘core’ or non-project related salary funding puts pressure on CSOs to tailor their activities to suit donor preferences operating on a project-to-project basis rather than working towards an overall strategy.⁴⁶
- 3. Difficulties meeting donor requirements.** Smaller CSOs, particularly local organisations, can find donor requirements onerous in terms of proposal writing, reporting, governance systems and financial and staff procedures. Because of the overwhelming reliance on donor funding, organisations are required to invest large amounts of time and energy in grant and proposal writing. The requirements to produce comprehensive documents in English is simply not feasible for some local organisations. Additional requirements such as online applications in environments where electricity and internet connectivity may be unreliable, audited financial statements and sophisticated governance structures are all difficult hurdles for smaller local organisations to overcome.⁴⁷

OPPORTUNITIES

Australia’s International Development Policy includes commitments that will require engagement with Pacific CSOs:

- commitment to supporting locally-led development
- design of a new Civil Society Partnerships Fund that will sit alongside the Australian NGO Cooperation Program and provide support to local civil society organisations
- creation of individual and regional Development Partnership Plans.

These provide opportunities to address shrinking civil space and support the strengthening of civil society organisations.

The Australian Government should engage with Australian and Pacific civil society organisations through the design of the Development Partnership Plans and Civil Society Partnerships Fund to demonstrate a long-term investment in civil society, and understand priorities, including on using funding mechanisms to build the sustainability and resilience of organisations.

43 Pacific Island Association of Non—Governmental Organisations, International Development Policy Submission, PIANGO, [Pacific Island Association of Non-Governmental Organisations \(PIANGO\) - International Development Policy submission \(dfat.gov.au\)](http://www.piangoo.org/)

44 Pacific Island Association of Non—Governmental Organisations, Strategic Plan 2020-2030, <http://www.piangoo.org/home/about-us/strategic-plan/> and Development Asia, Participation Tools for the Pacific - Part 1: Engaging Pacific Civil Society Organizations, Asian Development Bank, 2019, <https://development.asia/explainer/participation-tools-pacific-part-1-engaging-pacific-civil-society-organizations>

45 United Nations Development Program, A Capacity Assessment of CSOs in the Pacific: Six Country Profiles, UNDP Fiji, https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/asia_pacific_rbap/UNDP_PC_DG_A_Capacity_Assessment_of_CSOs_in_the_Pacific_Six_Country_Profiles.pdf

46 Development Asia, Participation Tools for the Pacific - Part 1: Engaging Pacific Civil Society Organizations, Asian Development Bank, 2019, <https://development.asia/explainer/participation-tools-pacific-part-1-engaging-pacific-civil-society-organizations>

47 Development Asia, Participation Tools for the Pacific - Part 1: Engaging Pacific Civil Society Organizations, Asian Development Bank, 2019, <https://development.asia/explainer/participation-tools-pacific-part-1-engaging-pacific-civil-society-organizations>

Case Studies

PACIFIC ISLAND ASSOCIATION OF NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS (PIANGO)

PIANGO is the regional coordinating body for civil society networks in the Pacific. As an established and influential civil society actor, PIANGO connects and represents civil society bodies across 24 Pacific Island countries and territories, which collectively reach over 1,200 local civil society organisations.⁴⁸ PIANGO's primary role is to be a catalyst for collective action, to facilitate and support coalitions and alliances on issues of common concern, and to strengthen the influence and impact of NGO efforts in the region.⁴⁹

As part of its submission to the Australian Government's new international development policy, PIANGO called for Australia to include civil society organisations in decision making processes and the development of national and regional policies, strategies and implementation, emphasising that this must include local civil society organisations and networks, as well as Australian international development non-government organisations.

Critically, PIANGO requested that the Australian Government support and resource mechanisms that strengthen civil society and civic space at national and regional levels; and support civil society voices by providing core funding for civil society organisations to strengthen their role as actors in their own right, not just as delivery partners.

AUSTRALIAN NGO COOPERATION PROGRAM⁵⁰

Non-government organisations (NGOs) and civil society have been working in partnership with the Australian Government, particularly through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP), for over 40 years to deliver development outcomes. DFAT's own evaluation of the ANCP corroborates the effectiveness of the program's approach. The 2015 review described the ANCP as "one of the best performing programs" delivering 18.2 percent of DFAT's aggregate development results for only 2.7 percent of the overall development program spend.

Beyond the ANCP, in 2020, 61 Australian NGOs expended \$157 million across 529 projects in a dozen Pacific countries. While 50% of funding comes from DFAT, another 11% is corporate support with the remainder from the public, which is significant as an aggregate across the region.

The advantage of Australian community NGOs is their longstanding and close relationships with Pacific churches and community organisations, which means ready-made partnerships and community level knowledge and response.

The program fosters unparalleled people-to-people linkages, supporting Australia's development program's engagement with marginalisation and exclusion that would likely otherwise remain unreachable.

PACIFIC CHURCH PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAM

The Pacific Church Partnerships Program (PCPP) is a model for how the Australian Government can create opportunities for connection with non-government faith-based institutions from across Australia and the Pacific.⁵¹

Churches have traditionally played an important role as drivers of civic values. By focusing on building relationships, the PCPP has successfully created a platform for faith-based organisations to share knowledge, develop relationships and strengthen partnerships. PCPP activities include assistance to Pacific churches to manage the ongoing impacts of COVID-19, and support for learning and cooperation between young and senior church leaders, including through the Pacific Church Partnership Advisory Network (PCPAN) and the Pacific Australian Emerging Leaders' Summit (PAELS).

With strong indigenous participation, the PCPAN and PAELS also builds on the longstanding cultural and spiritual links between Australian First Nations and Pacific peoples. The program is an example of where the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has provided the mechanisms to encourage non-government actors to participate in Australia's engagement overseas.

48 Pacific Island Association of Non—Governmental Organisations, International Development Policy Submission, PIANGO, [Pacific Island Association of Non-Governmental Organisations \(PIANGO\) - International Development Policy submission \(dfat.gov.au\)](#)

49 Pacific Island Association of Non—Governmental Organisations, [About PIANGO – PIANGO](#)

50 Australian Council for International Development, Submission to JSCFADT, Strengthening Australia's Relationships with Countries in the Pacific Region, June 2020, p.10:

51 [Church partnerships in the Pacific | Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade \(dfat.gov.au\)](#)

Media

Consultations with media executives and senior journalists both within Australia and across the Pacific highlighted the important role of the media in creating an informed citizenry and promoting transparency and accountability within government.

The need for strong, reliable, accurate and transparent media content across the region was emphasised, along with the responsibility of the media to disseminate information about the region itself as well as about global issues which impact the region.

The media was seen as both a vital information source and an advocacy tool. For example, as significant financial commitments are made at the global level to combat the climate crisis in the Pacific, the media has a responsibility to keep the public informed about how groups can access support or funding to address climate issues in their communities as well as a responsibility to report how this money is used by government in efforts to promote transparency and accountability.

Media also plays a key role in public service across the region, particularly in times of natural disasters and political instability. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic regional media outlets such as the ABC through ABC Radio Australia were able to share success stories from Fiji's vaccination campaign with other Pacific Island countries as a way of encouraging vaccine uptake.

Sharing stories across the region contributes to Pacific regionalism – not to promote a homogenous Pacific identity but to increase understanding between countries, allowing people to see parallels and connections with their own communities.

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

Pacific media, like all media, is facing the challenges of rapid technological change and shifts in audience tastes, compounded by minimal government funding and investment, ageing infrastructure, small populations and economic stress post the COVID-19 pandemic. Digital uptake is significant, but traditional media platforms still have high reach and value. Competition for shrinking advertising dollars between traditional and digital platforms is fierce. Digital advertising

revenues are lower than for traditional media; this means that transitioning to digital, while keeping pace with changing audience behaviours, does not deliver the same revenue base with which to run newsrooms and content teams.

“Ongoing barriers in the media sector have included limited infrastructure, connectivity and limited access of audiences out in the most remote parts of Pacific. And with language and diverse culture, content production can be a challenge. For PNG specifically, the rapid digital transition does not equal our resource availability, skills and knowledge.”

From AP4D consultations

Many media businesses in the Pacific are struggling financially. Media in the Pacific has always been fragile. Existing issues of underfunding, lack of resources and low pay for journalists have been further exacerbated by the economic downturn caused by COVID-19. This financial fragility threatens media freedoms and could compromise the independence of the media if it becomes more susceptible to outside influence.

Media across the globe, not just in the Pacific, faces increasing threats to neutrality and independence. Media houses must carefully manage the balance between revenue streams and undue influence from funders. This highlights the importance of supporting media to have systems and policies in place to help safeguard media integrity, independence and the ability to negotiate with advertisers and funders. For example, the Chinese government provides funding to local media operators on a mission-by-mission basis. This has led some to hold concerns that China may apply pressure to publish Chinese narratives.

A counter perspective to this is that Pacific media organisations can manage donor funding without being compromised, with measures in place to manage and resist both domestic and international influences. Some consultees raised the perceived double standard that Australia is concerned about Pacific media being compromised by Chinese funding but far less troubled by the ability of the Pacific to resist Australia's influence in the region.

Digital transformation also poses challenges from a transmission infrastructure point of view. Much of the infrastructure in the Pacific is ageing, with reliability issues or out of date, threatening information access. Funding and expertise to maintain, repair and upgrade infrastructure is scarce. It often requires significant investment.

Legislation varies widely from country to country with frameworks covering basics such as media standards and freedom of information largely missing. Regulatory regimes with the capacity to hold media houses to account for quality, impartiality and accuracy need to be established as a critical step in ensuring trust in the media. However, regulation must be balanced in such a way that it cannot be used by governments as a mechanism for control or to stymie media outlets for unfavourable coverage.

Where media houses rely heavily on revenue from government advertisements, or in small markets where family and kinship connections are widespread, it can be difficult for local journalists to break local stories, for example, reporting on government corruption or fraudulent activity. Where this is the case, it is vital to have a healthy regional media ecosystem. Stories that are important for the region but cannot be told by local journalists can be picked up by regional media outlets such as the ABC and news can be broken, giving local media the license to follow up and report.

There is a lack of experienced, trained journalists in the region. For example, it is estimated that there are only 16 full time journalists in the Solomon Islands which is one of the biggest countries in the region.⁵² Media wages are extremely low leading many to reluctantly leave the industry to take higher paying jobs, for example in aid-funded or government communication roles. For those

who do stay in the sector, tough media restrictions, small markets, journalism education challenges and poor pay and conditions can lead to burn out and fatigue.

Consultees shared their frustrations that international non-government organisations and donors, including Australia, 'steal' many high-quality media professionals by offering highly paid roles that local media houses are unable to compete with. For example, one consultee shared how a driver at the Australian High Commission in Vanuatu earns more than double what an experienced journalist can expect to be paid by a local media organisation. This frustration is felt particularly acutely when Pacific media organisations invest in the training and up-skilling of workers only for them to leave to join donor-funded projects.

“Barriers faced are appropriate training and upskilling of staff and a high turn-over rate in the industry due to various reasons. Top among them is proper remuneration and welfare of staff. Security and insurance issues to cover staff on their day-to-day work and proper funding by organisations to focus on investigative reporting are some of the hindrances.”

From AP4D consultations

In light of this, donor countries and international NGOs operating in the Pacific need to think more strategically about how they interact with trained media staff in the Pacific. For example, many trained journalists in the Pacific can earn much higher wages working as communication staff on donor programs. A good question to ask is what use is another Communications Officer if there is no media for them to talk to? More creative approaches are needed, and consultees expressed a desire to see donors pay closer attention to how their programming impacts the sector.

In the past, journalism has been seen as a desirable career path alongside nursing and teaching. However, this is no longer the case in the Pacific with fewer high-school graduates choosing to pursue careers in the media sector. Some consultees suggested that the quality of students choosing to study journalism is often poor with students lacking the basic writing and analysis skills required to succeed. Gaps in education mean that young journalists are often ineffective at reporting on matters of substance. For example, if a journalist does not have at least a basic understanding of accounting principles, they are not able to report effectively on the national budget.

Some consultees shared how it was difficult for journalists to undertake in-depth investigative reporting and analysis on complex issues where they did not have subject matter expertise. Defence, security and geopolitics were identified as examples where the media has a role in both asking difficult questions of government and informing the public, but also areas where many journalists felt under-qualified to report on.

“I love reporting on sport because I know the rules and the culture of the game. I know the teams and the language used to talk about sport. This is not the case when it comes to reporting on geopolitics.”

From AP4D consultations

It was suggested that for Pacific media to service their own communities, it is essential to provide training through education and capacity-building in all aspects of media and communication for existing and potential practitioners. However, this training needs to be consistent and ongoing rather than one-off workshops. It was noted that all the training in the world won't help if staff continue to leave the Pacific media sector in search of greener pastures.

In addition to journalism education, there is a need to improve the general public's media and digital literacy, such as understanding algorithms, recognition of scams and protection of personal information. Understanding how to fact-check information, the importance of seeking information from multiple sources and not believing everything that appears

on social media are all skills that need to be incorporated into education curriculums and other training opportunities.

Accessing donor funding to support media activities is difficult, especially for relatively small-scale expenses such as printing and recording equipment. Where funding opportunities do exist, donors such as Australia, New Zealand and the United Nations have lengthy and often complex process that are difficult to navigate especially for organisations that are already under resourced. Some consultees contrasted this with China, which offers funding on a mission-by-mission basis that avoids red-tape and provides an easy, quick solution for local media organisations.

Consultees also raised the difficulties the Pacific has in engaging with the social media giants. The big social media platforms do not have offices in the Pacific, and those that have offices in Australia tend not to engage or respond on Pacific issues. For example, there have been instances of broadcasting corporations in the region having their Facebook pages taken down with no avenue to contact Facebook outside of those available to individuals.

“The role of the media, now more than ever, remains an important one, not only in providing properly vetted information and news, but also to present information in a formally processed manner, to counter misinformation and disinformation in the public sphere. While our regional populations have embraced new media technologies to express themselves, there remains the clear and present danger of citizens in the region not properly verifying information before onforwarding it to others. The media also continues to play a role in preserving our traditional cultures and traditions. Much of which is being lost.”

From AP4D consultations

52 Sue Ahearn, How China is Winning the Information War in the Pacific, ASPI Strategist, Mar 2022 <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/how-china-is-winning-the-information-war-in-the-pacific/>

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN SHAPING THE FUTURE OF THE PACIFIC REGION

“The role of media in shaping the future of the Pacific region is multifaceted and influential. Social media use has increased dramatically with slow digital transition of traditional media. In the Pacific, media is focused on information dissemination – providing essential information about regional events, policies, and developments. Accurate reporting informs citizens, policymakers, and businesses as well as raises awareness about critical issues such as climate change, health crises, and social justice. It mobilizes public opinion and encourages action. On advocacy and accountability, media plays a vital role in advocating for human rights, environmental protection, and social justice. Investigative journalism holds institutions accountable... On economic development, media promotes economic growth by disseminating information about investment opportunities and trade agreements. On education and church work – learning through media has been a long practice in the Pacific with educational programmes and sharing and preaching of the church.”

“The role of the media is important in ensuring a future that is sustainable, peaceful and that there is a progressive Pacific: a region that is free of corruption and overharvesting of its natural resources, with appropriate laws and security to protect its citizens from global security threats and ensuring a knowledgeable population that knows its place in the global environment. It has the role of holding leaders accountable for their actions... Pacific nations and people deserve a voice in this age where global issues like destruction of the environment, war, geopolitical and health issues will affect the way the Pacific region and countries thrive or fall going into the future. The media must promote issues affecting lives of people in the global arena especially on trending issues relating to global security and environment. But in order for the media to thrive it has to be progressive and have a well-trained, competent human resource and have proper resources at its disposal.”

From AP4D consultations

PAPUA NEW GUINEA MEDIA CONSULTATIONS

As part of consultations, six senior media executives from PNG were asked what it would look like for Australia to support the media sector in shaping a peaceful, prosperous, and resilient Pacific region. Their answers are synthesised below:

- Australia’s support should focus on fostering collaboration, capacity-building, and sustainable practices to ensure a resilient and informed Pacific region. There is a role for Australia to facilitate and promote the ideals of a vibrant, Pacific media sector
- Australia can establish exchange programs for journalists, editors, and media managers between Australian and Pacific media organisations to promote cultural exchange, knowledge sharing, skills transfer and people-to-people links
- Training workshops on digital skills, investigative journalism, emergency broadcasting and ethical reporting are all areas of need, as is strengthening media infrastructure across the region
- Australia can facilitate partnerships and collaborations between media agencies, government and other relevant bodies to identify specific challenges within the industry, address regional issues and promote ways of making money through online content
- Specifically in PNG, support could be given to the annual review of the media sector through an annual Media Symposium. Such a symposium would provide a platform for the media sector to review its performance, speak on innovation and curriculum in the media learning space, and give its members an opportunity to showcase their work in industry. This would also include a discussion forum on media business management and the media economy. This annual media event would also review standards and training.

OPPORTUNITIES

Digital technologies such as mobile journalism kits enable media houses to slim down the resources required to do video storytelling and open opportunities for positive storytelling about culture and change makers as well as education and entertainment content that goes beyond news broadcasting.

Content that would have traditionally required at a minimum a camera person, sound person and journalist to create can now be collected using a mobile phone. This means that more stories can be told from a wider range of places (urban, regional and remote) at a much lower cost and at times more safely.

“Collectively, there are opportunities to take through uniform trainings like mobile journalism, collaboration and partnerships with other Pacific media organisations and civil society which includes the government and participation of audiences like youth, people with disabilities and women.”

From AP4D Consultations

Quality, independent media has an important role to play as an antidote to misinformation. Fact checking news investigations, public awareness campaigns and media and social literacy initiatives are key roles of the media, as is debunking misinformation and pre-bunking before the misinformation takes hold, which is highly effective. This is core business for professional journalists, but they need to have sufficient financial resources to do this.

Media capacity building programs in the region must be expanded with multiple pathways for journalist training provided. This includes University of South Pacific, national universities, technical and vocational education and training programs and cadet type apprenticeships.

“The opportunities provided both in country and outside is available however organisations have to allow their employees to tap into this to upskill themselves. Proper collaboration to work with NGOs and foreign partners to support journalists and media workers in PNG is vital to ensure progress in the region.”

From AP4D Consultations

Consultees also saw opportunities for Australia to support media in the Pacific by running workshops or roundtable discussions that aim to inform Pacific journalists about topical issues such as geo-strategic competition, defence, security and climate science. This was seen as a relatively low-cost way of boosting capacity in the region and enhancing journalistic capability to report on complex and often nuanced topics.

The media is a powerful medium for sharing human connection and experiences, and there is a role for Australia media to improve Australians’ understanding of the Pacific. Currently, most stories on the Pacific region focus on geopolitics with other stories about the Pacific few and far between. Australia is home to significant Pacific diaspora audiences with a thirst for human interest stories from the Pacific and there are opportunities to platform voices directly from the Pacific. More Pacific stories reaching Australian audiences would contribute to improving Australia’s literacy of Pacific peoples and cultures and the issues faced in the region, particularly in relation to climate change. In doing this, Australian’s engagement in the Pacific region, and support for Australian Government policy and programs which favour engagement with the Pacific may be enhanced.

“In terms of opportunities the Pacific provides unique and diverse perspectives and stories to tell the world.”

From AP4D Consultations

Case Studies

AUSTRALIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION INTERNATIONAL SERVICES

The ABC is the largest multiplatform public interest media organisation in the region and works with the Pacific to promote healthy media ecosystems and meet citizens' information and storytelling needs. In its regional media output, through ABC Radio Australia, ABC Australia (TV) and through its digital and social media distribution activities it does not seek to undermine local media or dominate the market, but rather to enhance media diversity and a range of voices and to present pan Pacific perspectives on a broad range of issues to local, regional and global audiences. The ABC can also act as a catalyst at times to break news and stories that local media may be hindered from doing because of political, social and/or cultural pressures or impediments.

In the media development space the ABC supports media organisations and practitioners across the Indo-Pacific region to build media access and skills, address industry issues including media policies and laws, improve business resilience and transition to digital ways of working. Training and support are driven by partners' needs. Pacific media operators can access ABC's institutional expertise, engage in shared learning and information on emerging topics such as artificial intelligence, archives preservation and mobile journalism and enduring topics such as broadcast transmission, emergency broadcasting, craft skills development and meeting audience needs in new ways and local languages like podcasts, sports commentary or digital storytelling. ABC acts as a hub for partners to foster cooperation and relationship.

INDO-PACIFIC BROADCASTING STRATEGY

The Australian Government's support for the Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy is an opportunity to strengthen Australia's media engagement internationally.⁵³ In addition to a commitment of \$32 million over four years to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) to expand regional media connections, content production and media capacity training in the October 2022 budget strategy, the 2023- 24 Federal Budget committed a further \$8.5 million over four years to the ABC to expand transmission infrastructure in the Pacific.

The ABC's dual international media and domestic media distribution role will enable stories to not only be shared with Pacific neighbours, but also provide access to content from the region for Australians. This will enable the ABC to deliver content and services that inform, entertain and educate Australians, including youth, regional audiences and multicultural communities, increasing Australian literacy in the region's cultures, politics and priorities. Boosting media connections enables more Pacific Islands Forum citizens to access to Australian content, creating closer cultural ties to our neighbours.

ABC PACIFIC – CONNECTING AUSTRALIA WITH THE REGION⁵⁴

ABC Pacific is a digital platform launched by the ABC to cater to the growing digital audiences across the Pacific region. It serves as a home for relevant digital content tailored for Pacific audiences and is accessible to both Australian and international viewers.

The site features content from across the suite of ABC Radio Australia and ABC Australia programs including Pacific Beat, Sistas Let's Talk, That Pacific Sports Show, and the World, The Pacific news and current affairs TV program and so on. ABC Pacific encourages conversations and the exchange of ideas between Australians and the diverse people and cultures of the Pacific. ABC Pacific Facebook and Instagram also take a wide range of ABC content to Pacific audiences who are engaged on these social platforms. The digital and social teams are resourced to create bespoke and tailored content suited to the platform in question. It is designed and created in response to the way audiences engage on that specific platform.

PACIFICAUS TV – FREE TV INITIATIVE⁵⁵

PacificAus TV is an Australian Government initiative that aims to enhance Australia's engagement in the Pacific by offering the broadcast rights to a wide variety of Australian commercial television content available to broadcast partners in Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Samoa, Kiribati, Tuvalu, and Nauru.

This includes making rights available to at least 2,000 hours per year of premium Australian commercial television programs including lifestyle programs, news, current affairs, children's programs, drama, reality TV and sport.

The objective of the program is to project an accurate image of modern Australia through increased access to high quality, trusted and credible content, contributing to a diversity of media in the Pacific. It also benefits Pacific broadcasters who may not have the financial capacity to create sufficient quality content to meet demand.

This enables broadcast partners to make independent decisions on the programming of the content provided, ensuring the content broadcast meets audience and broadcasting needs and complies with all relevant requirements within each jurisdiction.

Providing news and information content strengthens Australia's contribution to discussion on issues of regional importance, whilst entertainment content showcases Australia's lifestyle and culture.

PACIFIC MEDIA ASSISTANCE SCHEME (PACMAS)⁵⁶

The Pacific Media Assistance Scheme (PACMAS) is a long-term media development program (2008-2026) that works to support Pacific media's role to hold space for locally-led civic discussion and debate. The goal of PACMAS Phase 4 (2023-2026) is that Pacific people value their media as the source of Pacific news, conversations, culture and stories in the public interest.

PACMAS Phase 4 will work towards this goal through the program objective of enabling a more professional, resilient, and diverse Pacific media sector.

The initiative is an Australian development assistance project, funded by Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and managed by ABC International Development. PACMAS delivers capacity building activities that support credible news journalism, digital transformation, quality content production and media association strengthening.

To deliver PACMAS, ABC International Development works in partnership with the Pacific Islands News Association, national media associations and Pacific media businesses. Its work engages with the development programs of key regional bodies, other DFAT-funded programs and local civil society groups.

MEDIA DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE⁵⁷

The Media Development Initiative (MDI) is a long-term development program funded by Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade that works to support the role of media in Papua New Guinea (PNG) to build community engagement on issues of public interest. The goal of the current phase is that a more professional and diverse PNG media serves the public interest and supports democratic processes.

This goal is pursued through engagement with PNG organisations such as the Media Council, all PNG media organisations including the National Broadcasting Corporation of PNG (NBC) and Church radio stations that inform communities. MDI makes an important contribution to PNG's public and private media through media sector leadership, capacity and skills, media content generated through co-productions, and partnerships with church radio stations and civil society.

53 Penny Wonyg, Richard Marles, Mark Dreyfus and Pat Controy, Joint Media Release, Delivering for a peaceful, prosperous and resilient Pacific, May 2023, <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/penny-wong/media-release/delivering-peaceful-prosperous-and-resilient-pacific>

54 <https://www.abc.net.au/pacific>

55 <https://www.freetv.com.au/what-we-do/pacificaus-tv/>

56 <https://www.abc.net.au/abc-international-development/projects/the-pacific-media-assistance-scheme>

57 <https://www.abc.net.au/abc-international-development/projects/papua-new-guinea-media-for-development-initiative>

The Vision

What does it look like for Australia to support youth, civil society and media in the Pacific?

“Just as the Pacific see the ocean as water that connects rather than divides, so too does Australia need to look at the strengths of the Pacific, rather than simply the deficits”

*The Pacific We See, Pacific Australia
Emerging Leaders Summit 2023*

Australia engages in genuine partnerships that support youth, civil society and the media in the Pacific. Work in the Pacific is underpinned by key principles of self-determination, inclusion and a whole-of-life approach.⁵⁸ Australia continues to elevate First Nations perspectives in its foreign policy.

Youth is considered a cross-cutting issue for all development programs in the region with formalised structures in place to ensure consideration is given to how activities impact on youth.

Pacific education systems are updated to meet Pacific education needs. Pacific culture and history are embedded in curriculums with a move away from colonial systems. The valuable work of the Institute of Education at the University of the South Pacific is supported and built upon.

Technical and vocational education and training is promoted as a legitimate educational pathway for young people throughout the Pacific with links made between this training and future employment opportunities.

Young Pacific researchers have access to adequate funding opportunities to undertake qualitative research on the diverse challenges faced by young people in different parts of the Pacific. Place-based research is better-resourced and valued, especially in countries outside Fiji and Solomon Islands.

Australia recognises and values Pacific **civil society organisations** as important development actors and partners. Civil society has a formal part in policy-making processes, with the Australian Government actively seeking the involvement of civil society actors in its engagement with the region. Mechanisms for consultation and engagement with civil society are formalised in agreements, programming and policy documents.

Free, vibrant and robust civic space is protected and promoted as a vital part of a stable and democratic region. Civil society is empowered to offer a diversity of views, to provide checks and balances on government actions – including in accountability and transparency on public spending – and to act as an important voice on key issues including peacebuilding and human rights.

Civic space is protected with adequate, dedicated, reliable funding provided to build institutional capacity of civil society organisations by covering non-program core funding needs.

Media is valued as an essential pillar of democracy and seen as vital to good governance. The region enjoys a well-functioning media ecosystem.

Media organisations in the region are supported to develop business models that promote digital transition and help ensure financial viability, business resilience and improved wages for journalists. Investment in digital media transition includes upgrading of production equipment and aging infrastructure.

Journalism is seen as a valued and important career choice among school leavers who have already developed literacy and numeracy skills through their education, as well as by mid-career journalists so they stay in the sector. There is adequate investment in media education and journalism training – at the University of the South Pacific, country-specific universities, vocational education journalism courses and cadet-style apprenticeships – allowing media a variety of employment pools from which to draw and keep talent. Media content quality is improved through increased skills and training.

The industry and policy environment around media laws and practices is resourced and supported to encourage media freedom but also to protect information integrity including digital and cyber security.

The ABC’s legislated role in engaging in media across the region is fully recognised and embraced, with continuity of funding for its international activities and increased funding directed towards supporting media resilience and skills development across the region.

Australia advocates regionally for the role of public interest media and why citizens should demand and support it. Australia utilises its international media outreach and institutional relationships to champion the role of independent public interest media and best practice objective journalism underpins well-functioning societies, democracy and its processes.

Pacific citizens value and understand how free media protects their interests and how it is under threat. Grassroots civic journalism and social media platforms are utilised in ways that contribute to information dissemination and public engagement, starting conversations and amplifying minority voices.

58 The Pacific Australian Emerging Leaders Summit 2023 described a whole of life approach as a worldview which recognizes the interconnected nature of life and does not try to separate economic, cultural, social, spiritual and ecological wellbeing.

Putting it in Practice

There are a number of current opportunities where Australian policymakers can put the suggested approach into practice.

Recognising the important contributions that young people, civil society and the media can make to the future of the Pacific region, Australian policy should engage with and support these vital sectors.

DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP PLANS

In the International Development Policy released in August 2023, the Australian Government committed to developing new whole-of-government country and regional Development Partnership Plans.

Consultees saw this as an opportunity to include youth as a cross-cutting issue for all development programs in the region with formalised structures in place to ensure consideration is given to how activities impact on youth. Likewise, mechanisms for ongoing engagement with civil society should be identified and formalised.

Media is also a cross-cutting issue that can impact or influence a range of key areas of development. For example, media fits into security (cyber, disinformation, digital literacy, geopolitics), economic development (transparency, accountability, governance, infrastructure) and social development (health, education, culture, cohesion, inclusion, gender equality). Recognising that not all partner governments will prioritise a robust, independent media sector, Australia should proactively seek out ways to ensure media contributions and needs are embedded in development partnership plans. As with youth and civil society, media needs a seat at the table and to be valued and recognised.

CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERSHIPS FUND

The new International Development Policy also announced the creation of a new Civil Society Partnerships Fund to support local civil society organisations and local leadership. This is currently being designed.

Consultees saw this as an opportunity to develop and fund initiatives that nurture civil society networks or civic space ‘ecosystems’, and to provide flexible, core, multi-year funding to civil society organisations across the region.

The fund should be designed to be accessible to community organisations and groups operating in the public interest, such as non-government organisations, civil society organisations, media and faith-based organisations. Historically media organisations have only been able to access these types of funds if they partner with a civil society organisation that leads and controls the initiative. This type of arrangement sets up a power dynamic in which the civil society organisation sees the media as a platform and messenger only rather than as a full contributor with capacity to report independently, foster public discussion, debate, share information and empower citizen voice.

PACIFIC REGIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK

Alongside or as part of the Civil Society Partnership Fund, consideration should be given to funding the Pacific-led implementation of the Pacific Regional Accountability Framework for civil society organisations and endorsing its use as a benchmark for non-government organisation accountability in support of the realisation of locally led development and humanitarian responses across the Pacific.⁵⁹

KNOWLEDGE HUB FUND

Consideration should also be given to funding policy advocacy and policy engagement.

Youth, civil society and the media all have a critical role to play in influencing the communities in which they live and operate. Establishing a Knowledge Hub Fund to promote opportunities and capacity for advocacy and policy engagement would enable youth, civil society and media to better contribute to decision-making nationally, regionally and internationally. The Fund could support a regional or country-specific think tank to support public debate. This would increase the diversity of and elevate the voices of Pacific thinkers on Pacific and Australian policy in a two-way exchange.

MEDIA INFRASTRUCTURE FUND

Another suggestion for practical support is the establishment of a Media Infrastructure Fund. Such a fund could look at supporting major digital transformation costs in terms of equipment and infrastructure, such as transmission, media buildings and equipment. Many of these costs are beyond the reach of Pacific media houses and Pacific governments due to scale. Investing in this way would allow for Pacific media to secure the necessary tools to enable them to operate with greater business resilience. This in turn would contribute to better wages, increased investment in investigative journalism and improved content quality share with region and Australia.

Alongside of investment in media infrastructure, Australia can provide technical advice that ensures compatibility of technology regionally. Some other donors are only paying for equipment that is compatible with their country but no other systems, hampering access across the region.

Traditionally Australia has not provided this kind of assistance, but as an infrastructure partner, consideration should be given to investing in media infrastructure as it would be a transformative game changer with broader knock-on development and geopolitical benefits.

59 ACFID, Civil Society as a Cornerstone of Effective and Inclusive Development, <https://acfid.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Election-Policy-Brief-Civil-society.pdf>

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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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Eleven representatives of Papua New Guinea media and Pacific media were also consulted in the development of this paper, providing written responses to consultation questions.

AP4D gathered perspectives from the Pacific Australia Emerging Leaders' Summit 2023.

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