



Australian Council for International Development (ACFID)

10 March 2005

ACFID Pacific Working Group Comments on working draft of “The Pacific Plan for Strengthening Regional Cooperation and Integration”

I. Introduction

Australian NGOs who currently work on development cooperation activities with local Pacific island country partners, welcome the opportunity to provide input (through consultation with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretary-General) to the draft “*Pacific Plan for Strengthening Regional Cooperation and Integration*”.

57 Australian NGOs, including faith-based organisations and volunteer sending agencies, that make up the ACFID Pacific Working Groupⁱ, have received a copy of the working draft of The Pacific Plan. ACFID also contacted the Pacific Regional NGOsⁱⁱ and the Solomon Islands umbrella NGO informally seeking their views. We thank especially the Pacific Islands Association of NGOs (PIANGO) and the Solomon Islands Development Services Exchange (DSE) for their informal comments. Some ACFID member agencies have provided informal views, other gave specific written input. All views received, both formal and informal have been incorporated into this ACFID paper.

Specific written input was received from:

- ♣ Anglican Board of Mission (ABM);
- ♣ Christian World Service (CWS)/ National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA);
- ♣ Friends of the Earth (FOE);
- ♣ Oxfam Community Aid Abroad (OCAA);
- ♣ World Vision Australia (WVA);
- ♣ World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF); and
- ♣ Nic Maclellan (Pacific commentator and adviser to the Working Group).

Australian NGOs are cognizant of the importance of working with Pacific island partners to achieve the Pacific Vision as outlined by Pacific Leaders in 2004:

“Leaders believe the Pacific region can, should and will be a region of peace, harmony, security and economic prosperity, so that all of its people can lead free and worthwhile lives. We treasure the diversity of the Pacific and seek a future in which its cultures, traditions and religious beliefs are valued, honoured and developed. We seek a Pacific region that is respected for the quality of its governance, the sustainable management of its resources, the full observance of democratic values, and for its defence and promotion of human rights. We seek partnerships with our neighbours and beyond to develop our knowledge, to improve our communications and to ensure a sustainable economic existence for all.”

We also adhere strongly to the view as expressed in the draft Plan that it should give precedence to national Pacific island ownership and commitment. Whilst recognising that neighbouring countries (Australia and New Zealand) form part of the Pacific Region, we believe that the Plan itself should embrace first and foremost the views and values of Pacific islanders and be *unequivocally for the benefit of Pacific island countries and territories*.

II. Guiding Principles and Prioritisation Criteria

We note the four key principles of the strategic framework endorsed by Pacific Leaders and provides comments below. We would also commend to the consideration of the Forum that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) provide an internationally agreed framework for addressing basic needs. This would provide a strong basis for ensuring that the economic growth and improved governance systems serve the ends of development and poverty reduction.

Guiding principles

- (a) Increasing the levels of sustainable returns to the Pacific from broader and deeper regional cooperative mechanisms, including those that are already well established.

Australian NGOs recognise the importance of broadening and deepening regional cooperative mechanisms both at the government and non government level. We recognise the valuable role of Pacific regional intergovernmental organisations (the agencies that make up the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific – CROP).

We believe an important Guiding Principle should be **“greater recognition of the role and benefits of civil society”** and associated mechanisms. We support the efforts of our Regional NGO colleagues (mostly Suva-based) and work closely with them. As well there are innovative mechanisms at the Pacific island national level which could have regional applicability. One example is the mechanism being utilised by AusAID in Papua New Guinea, linking PNG churches and Australian faith-based NGOs through the PNG Church Partnerships Program (CPP) to enhance the capacity of PNG churches to contribute to PNG development and social stability.

We welcome the NGO/CSO Parallel Forum as an important opportunity for civil society voices to be heard. Further we encourage the Pacific Islands Forum and other CROP agencies to investigate additional opportunities for greater dialogue with Pacific NGO representatives, e.g. providing the opportunity to speak at regional meetings (rather than attending with observer status only). We also call for those Forum member countries who are also donors (Australia and New Zealand) to be aware of the importance of adequate financial assistance for our Pacific island *regional* NGO colleagues, noting the high costs associated with regional coordination and networking (e.g. costs associated with regional communication and travel). Australian NGOs recognise that the Australian and New Zealand Governments provide substantial donor assistance to the governments of the region. We believe that financial assistance is also vital for Pacific regional and Pacific national NGOs.

Addressing and improving demand-led governance will also provide a strong foundation for ensuring the success and sustainability of the Pacific Plan's governance objectives.

We understand from our Pacific Regional NGO colleagues that they have been involved in consultations with the Forum Secretariat on the Pacific Plan. We are aware of discussions relating to the appointment of a civil society (NSA) focal person for 6 months during the process of developing the Pacific Plan. We believe that such appointment would be a valuable step in providing civil society views.

(b) Ensuring the successful implementation of regional cooperation at the national level to take advantage of economies of scale and harnessing limited resources.

Our Pacific regional colleagues in the non government sector have a strong mandate to support national initiatives. For example, the Pacific Islands Association of Non Government Organisations (PIANGO) is tasked with national NGO capacity building. We agree that there are economies of scale and scope for effective utilisation of limited resources that can be obtained through regional cooperative mechanisms, e.g. identification by regional NGOs of training opportunities for national Non Government representatives. Similarly, the Pacific Concerns Resource Centre (PCRC), the Regional Rights Resource Team (RRRT), the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC), the Ecumenical Centre for Research and Education (ECREA), Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific International (FSPI), Disabled Peoples' International Oceania Sub Region, Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women, Pacific Islands Broadcasting Association (PIBA), Pacific Network Against Globalisation (PANG), Pacific Foundation for the Advancement of Women (PACFAW) and the regional AIDS organisation provide important economies of scale and national outreach ensuring that civil society perspectives from all Pacific island countries and territories are heard.

(c) Meeting common responsibilities and providing services cost-effectively, such as common regional approaches including where appropriate: reporting on international obligations; regional representation at international level; and agreed regional policy frameworks to harmonise

national legislation, policies and strategies with international commitments.

Australian NGOs are aware of the existing mechanisms through the regional non government and inter governmental organisations. Especially important is the role played by the CROP agencies through regional representation at international meetings, through agreed regional policy frameworks and through their efforts to provide guidance with harmonising national legislation. An important example of harmonisation of national legislation, policies and strategies exists in the natural resource protection area (especially the marine environment) where strategies have been negotiated and developed at the regional level with direct impact at the national level. We believe that these work most effectively where there is cooperation between the regional intergovernmental organisations (as has been the case with the Global Environment Facility (GEF)-funded International Waters Programmeⁱⁱⁱ) as well as close engagement with civil society. Other important regional initiatives relate to the joint regional approaches taken to international fora such as the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) and the United Nations Convention on Climate Change (UNCCC) – involving both government and non government personnel.

We would like to see a strengthening of these mechanisms through greater involvement of Non Government Organisations.

- (d) Developing processes and mechanisms for partnerships with neighbours and beyond including through more effective engagement with traditional partners and South and East-Asia; Multilateral Agencies; Non-State Actors; and regional organisations; and the use of the Pacific Plan to facilitate harmonisation of donor and international efforts with the region's priorities.

The ACFID Pacific Working Group increasingly has close engagement with the Pacific regional Non Government Organisations. Such engagement is valuable in providing a Pacific civil society perspective to development cooperation activities undertaken within the region by Australian NGOs. There is also close collaboration between Australian and New Zealand NGOs in support of activities to assist our Pacific island partners. An excellent example is the current initiative by AusAID relating to Australia's response to HIV/AIDS in Papua New Guinea where Australian and New Zealand Non Government Organisations are being encouraged to link foremost with their PNG partners but also with a wide range of regional/international expertise (from both government and non government sources) to ensure the best possible advice and expertise is available to deal with this crisis.

Criteria for prioritisation

Likely impact

We agree that programs and projects under the Pacific Plan should be prioritised in terms of outcomes produced in at least one of the four goals (economic growth, sustainable development, governance and security),

particularly as they relate to achieving the MDGs. Further, we agree with prioritisation based on the number of countries or people benefiting.

Potential for successful implementation

We agree with each of the criteria. However, in the case of (a) “level of commitment by Member states” we suggest that this criterion be enhanced as follows: (a) “level of commitment by Member states, **including through observable community acceptance and support**”. In the case of some of the more fragile states, government commitment to a program or project might not necessarily result in success unless there is also strong community support. For example, government commitment to natural resource development such as forestry in some Pacific island countries has in the past run counter to community views and traditional land tenure issues.

III. Regional Cooperation Priorities

Australian NGOs, noting the early-practical, medium-term and longer-term benefits of the four priority goals, comment as follows:

Economic growth

Boosting of trade facilitation through improvements in customs and quarantine services and the development of trade standards and conformance.

Comment:

We agree with the value of this and note that the Australian Government is already supporting capacity building in customs and quarantine areas in some Pacific island countries.

Integration of trade in services, including free labour movement, into the Pacific Island Countries Trade Agreement (PICTA) and negotiations with the European Union on the Economic Partnerships Agreement (EPA).

Comment:

With regards to free labour movement, we agree that Australian labour markets should be made more accessible to Pacific island nationals (as noted in the *Report of the Senate Inquiry into Australia's Relations with Papua New Guinea and the island states of the south-west Pacific*, August 2003). However, we believe that free labour movement should not be restricted to seasonal work (as was recommended in the Senate Report), due to the potential for this to create ‘guest workers’ with insecure working arrangements and poor benefits. Whilst being aware of the danger of ‘brain-drain’ from Pacific island countries, it is nevertheless important to recognise that there are an increasing number of highly trained and skilled Pacific islanders to whom freer labour movement (not only seasonal unskilled work) should apply.

We believe that studies should be undertaken of remittance patterns and also studies of the potential for re-employment of Pacific islanders in their home countries on return from work in Australia.

EPA in general:

There have been a number of significant lessons learnt from the EPA negotiations between the EU and African ACP countries. As a result we would suggest the following with regard to the Pacific EPA negotiations:

- The principle of reciprocity should be treated with caution; the unfettered opening of Pacific markets to European goods could mean extinction for many local producers.
- Commitments under the EPA should be determined by the Pacific's development, financial and trade needs, and not by arbitrary timeframes.
- The three 'Singapore Issues', investment, competition policy, and government procurement should not be included in any EPA negotiation despite pressure from the EU to do so.

In general there should be full public debate and parliamentary scrutiny of all trade agreements, including the EPA, before they are signed, and a more democratic and accountable system of international trade negotiations.

Trade in services:

The inclusion of the liberalization of trade in services into the EPA negotiations has potential dangers for Pacific Island countries.

International companies in the services industries are particularly interested in acquiring existing public utilities, rather than creating new productive assets through "greenfields investment". This is particularly relevant as Pacific governments move to privatise public services in energy, telecommunications, water and transport.

Many aid donors argue that the private sector can manage these services more cheaply and efficiently than government-run utilities. But there is evidence to suggest that private corporations do not always work in the best interests of consumers or employees:

- Companies can increase rates once they have monopoly control of public assets, and call on governments for subsidies if they do not obtain the expected revenues.
- Private water companies have shown a tendency to "skim the cream", concentrating on supplying consumers who can pay market prices while doing little for poorer neighbourhoods, peri-urban settlements or rural farmers, who have to rely on self-help or support from NGO and aid projects. Will private companies for example provide adequate supplies to the 80% of Port Moresby's population that live in squatter areas with little access to water and little ability to pay?
- A "user-pays" policy can impose high rates with little concern over people's ability to pay. These rates are then enforced by water cut-offs despite serious dangers to public health.
- The cost of water can push the poor away from the piped water system leaving them to depend on alternative water sources, which may be polluted.
- Some corporations have failed to meet their commitments and abandoned a water or power supply project when they are not making enough profit.

- Handing over water management to private sector operators can erode local skills, which can undermine the government's capacity to manage the service at the end of the contract or if the private corporation pulls out.

Rather than privatisation, or joint venture "private-public" projects, we believe that Pacific island governments should investigate "public-public" finance models.

Strengthening of vocational training

Comment:

We welcome the strengthening of vocational training and believe that innovative approaches should be investigated especially given the high youth unemployment figures in some countries.

Establishment of Regional Business School and Specific Vocational and training programs e.g. nursing and tourism (medium-term benefits)

Comment:

As stated above, vocational training is important and should extend beyond the conventional training of nursing, tourism and maritime services. Innovative approaches should be investigated for example, in the Solomon Islands through programs associated with the Rural Training Centres.

Implementation of the principles on Regional Transport Services (alongside Pacific Aviation Safety Office and the Pacific Islands Air Services Agreement).

Comment:

Important initiatives which will no doubt be difficult due to sovereignty issues associated with national airlines.

Development and implementation of a Regional Tourism Marketing Plan.

Comment:

There is considerable scope for a community consultation process associated with a Regional Tourism Marketing Plan, especially with regard to niche markets such as nature and village-based tourism. Involvement of Pacific civil society, identified through regional NGO networks, would be valuable for such a consultation process.

Regional bulk purchasing and storage of key import commodities

Comment:

Important initiative.

Improvements in information and communication technology (ICT)

Comment:

We believe it is very important to improve information and community technology and through a regional approach to make ICT more widely available and affordable. This we hope would provide ICT services to a wider cross section of the community. We note that alongside improvements in ICT will need to be improvement to electrical power systems in some countries as well as increased emphasis on ICT training.

Implementation of the Digital Strategy resulting in a region-wide cost-effective and reliable ICT system (to promote easier communications, economic growth and better resource management, including of risks from natural disasters, communicable diseases and other bio-security threats). (Medium-term benefit).

Comment:

As above.

Participation of non-sovereign Pacific territories in trade agreements and discussions with Australia and New Zealand on integration of services in trade and other regional agreements. (Medium-term benefit).

Comment:

We welcome greater engagement with non-sovereign Pacific territories.

We also note that the aim of the Economic Growth priority goal should be to provide broad-based pro-poor growth that addresses the critical issues of participation and youth unemployment.

Sustainable development

Provision of common services for effective resource management based on better country-specific and regional information/statistics bases.

Comment:

We welcome this approach and assume that collection of environmental statistics will become an integral part of training through the SPC statistics program. National Non Government Organisations could play an important role in data collection at the community level.

As well, we assume that information will be collected on traditional natural resource management practices and that these will be protected through intellectual property rights legislation (to be developed in those countries where it is currently non-existent).

Immediate implementation of regional policies and plans for: Natural disasters; Waste management; Biodiversity and conservation; Climate change and variability; Water resource management; and Fisheries and ocean resources.

Comment:

Important to immediately implement these regional policies and plans which we assume will be undertaken through CROP agencies. It is essential that this work is undertaken in collaboration with the national Non Government Organisations of Pacific island countries and territories for community outreach and to ensure the appropriateness of delivery.

In particular ACFID recommends that any policies or plans in response to climate change should have a dual focus on mitigation of and adaptation to climate change. It is now internationally recognised through the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change as the peak science body and the Climate Action Network as the international Non Government Organisation Umbrella, that some degree of climate change is inevitable and that the small island states of the Pacific are amongst the most vulnerable countries to climate change. Given the severity of potential climate change impacts and the recent statements by Pacific Island leaders such as Bikenibeu Paeniu, the Tuvaluan Minister for Finance and Planning, ACFID would strongly support the prioritisation of climate change as a regional issue through the Pacific Plan.

There is an urgent need for regional support to improve capacity in developing national plans. NGOs are able to help with expertise but there is a serious capacity problem within governments.

We also note that the MDGs provide another important international commitment to which Pacific island countries are party.

A more Pacific-led harmonized approach to health, especially in implementing the HIV/AIDS and STI Strategy and making anti-retroviral drugs more accessible.

Comment:

The importance of a more Pacific-led harmonized approach to health is well recognised and we assume that this would closely involve the SPC Health Section. We welcome the current AusAID initiative especially with regard to a HIV/AIDS and STI response in PNG and its efforts for close engagement of PNG NGOs assisted by Australian and New Zealand NGO (and specialist HIV/AIDS and STI) Organisations.

Better surveillance and early warning of epidemics.

Comment:

An important initiative. We believe there is scope for investigating involvement of Pacific national NGOs and civil society organisations.

Creating a stronger developmental role for sports through regional sporting networks and physical education at schools.

Comment:

As above, we consider this to be an important initiative. We believe there is scope for investigating involvement of Pacific national NGOs and civil society organisations in organising sporting activities. We refer to the work already undertaken by Pacific NGOs in the area of sporting activities for disabled people.

Application of information systems in managing resources and essential services such as health and education. (Medium-term benefit).

Comment:

Important.

Improved links between national and regional education and training programs (regional accreditation systems and standard qualifications) (Medium-term benefit).

Comment:

Important.

Specialist support to implement international gender commitments, coordinate youth programs, develop regional sports studies and maintain and strengthen Pacific cultural identity (Medium-term benefits).

Comment:

National Non Government Organisations and civil society organisations would obviously have an important role to play.

Good governance

Strengthening justice systems at the national level, through assisting establishment of human rights mechanisms and regional judicial training and education.

Comment:

Strongly agree with the importance of efforts to strengthen human rights mechanisms. We believe there is scope for involvement of the Regional Rights Resource Team (RRRT).

Strengthening key national integrity institutions or initiatives (Audit, Ombudsman, Leadership Codes, anti-corruption institutions and Attorneys General).

Comment:

Strongly agree with the importance of strengthening key national integrity institutions and initiatives. In each of these initiatives, the involvement of civil society will be important given the potential for the community to call for accountability on the part of government. NGOs and civil society organisations should be encouraged to be involved.

We urge the Forum to add: **"Natural Resource Governance"** to its list of good governance concerns. A particular example is forestry governance issues (illegal and corrupt practices) in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Greenpeace and the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) are cooperating to address this problem, but it is an issue that needs urgent national and regional attention.

We believe it is important to complement institutional strengthening with appropriate emphasis on the creation of demand-led governance to create sustained institutional culture.

Full adherence to the "Forum's Eight Principles of Accountability".

Comment:

Strongly agree with adherence to these principles not only at the government but also at non government level.

Establishment of a regional register of judges and public prosecutors serving in different countries and regional conflict resolution strategies (Medium-term benefits).

Comment:

Important initiative. We assume that due attention will be given to identification of effective traditional conflict resolution strategies.

Common standards of accountability and transparency for national integrity institutions (Medium-term benefits).

Comment:

Common national standards should strengthen the overall accountability and transparency of the region.

Integration of Forum Economic Ministers Meeting (FEMM) decisions into national planning and budgeting processes (including alignment of financial regulations and prudential capacities) (Medium-term benefits).

Comment:

An obvious and important linkage. We also consider that there is scope for greater information sharing of these decisions with the wider community in each country given the important role that civil society can play in keeping their decision makers accountable.

Development of models for land ownership, tenure and associated legislative frameworks (Medium-term benefit).

Comment:

A very important initiative and sensitive issue. ACFID members recognise that the Forum would automatically be proactive in ensuring that development of such models draws on regional experience and takes into account the importance to Pacific islanders of land tenure and collective ownership. It should also draw on more general international experience and lessons in developing land registration systems so as to avoid previous mistakes. These include land reform that has further disadvantaged displaced populations, or has negatively impacted on women's status, particularly where matrilineal land ownership has not been recognised.

Regional security

Implementation of the Forum Secretariat's Pacific Islands Regional Security Technical Cooperation Strategy (PIRSTCS) (especially supporting national implementation of Biketawa, Nasonini and Honiara declarations) For example:

♣ Supporting economic recovery in Solomon Islands under RAMSI.

Comment:

Whilst recognising some success with RAMSI (local reports that indicate 95% of the people agree with the importance of RAMSI) and recognising that RAMSI officials in Solomon Islands meet regularly with Honiara-based Non Government Organisations, we believe that mechanisms could be strengthened to enhance consultation with wider civil society. For instance, we understand that the RAMSI team meets with provinces and villages but this appears to be on an *ad hoc* basis rather than as ongoing dialogue. We consider it important to ensure that such meetings are part of a 'true coming together of minds' rather than as public relations exercises.

ACFID and its members welcome opportunities to provide briefings at pre-deployment meetings with the Australian Federal Police.

We believe that there is considerable scope for greater on-the-ground integration between RAMSI and the Solomon Islands constabulary.

We would encourage the Forum to be more proactive in initiatives such as RAMSI to return a 'Pacific regional' face to the intervention. We regarded the *Social Impact Assessment of Peace Restoration Initiatives in the Solomon Islands* commissioned by the Forum in 2003 to be a positive undertaking and would like to see regular, truly independent assessment to be ongoing. We would also encourage the Forum to take a proactive role in ensuring Solomon Islands participation in RAMSI decision making and sharing of its successes.

We encourage the Forum to bring Pacific experience to economic recovery in the Solomon Islands. The Forum could critique models of economic development drawing on its understanding of Pacific wants, cultural context, history, decision making, and benefit distribution systems.

For example, there should be a proper assessment of the impact on security of the economic elements of the plan. An extremely cautious approach should be taken if an economic development model relies heavily on large-scale land based or natural resource developments, because of their historic relationship to conflict and corruption throughout the Pacific. Population movements as a result of plantations, land disputes over mining or forestry concessions, and environmental and social damage can all trigger, and quickly escalate into, larger conflicts. Social breakdown, destruction of traditional authority structures, increases in alcohol, gambling, and the sex industry have all been evidenced as negative consequences of badly planned economic development in the Pacific. Exploration of the relative appropriateness of smaller-scale and more diverse economic opportunities should be a priority.

Also it is not clear that the issue of sustainability has been properly taken into account in the program. A common feature of interventions such as RAMSI is the rapid disappearance of anything that was achieved after the outside assistance program is withdrawn. For example government officials whose skills or qualifications have been enhanced as a result of the program

become very employable and leave government service for more remunerative opportunities elsewhere. Measures need to be taken from the outset to minimise unsustainability.

♣ Supporting the proposed Pacific Regional Assistance for Nauru.

Comment:

Whilst recognising that Nauru has economic difficulties, we nevertheless fail to understand why large scale Pacific regional assistance is required for Nauru under the Regional Security agenda.

Enhancement of national police forces through regional training (e.g. the Pacific Regional Policing Initiative and the Pacific, Transnational Crime Coordination Centre) and short-term attachments.

Comment:

We agree with the need for enhancement of national police forces through regional training and assume that together with this training, infrastructure and ongoing maintenance assistance (e.g. to keep vehicles on the road), will form part of this overall support. We see potential for police training through attachment to police forces in Australia and New Zealand.

The Forum should be proactive in determining the focus of policing support. Family, gender, and sexual violence are priority issues for many Pacific Islanders, particularly women and children, but have been ignored or inadequately addressed in policing initiatives to date. There are highly skilled professionals and institutions within the Region that could be drawn upon for support in this area (Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, Fiji Women's Rights Movement, Pacific Network Against Violence Against Women).

Improving maritime security through a regional strategy (including compliance with the IMO International Shipping and Port Security (ISPS) Code.)

Comment:

We assume this will be undertaken through work of the CROP agencies.

Strengthening relationships between and alignment of strategic planning regimes of regional specialist organisations; better intelligence services; identifying potential regional stresses and drivers of conflict; and common policing standards, policies and values to underpin regional security work. (Medium-term benefit).

Comment:

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Improved bio-security (Medium-term benefit).

Comment:

We recognise the importance of improved bio-security and assume that this will be undertaken in association with CROP agencies.

One of ACFID's members is actively working on 'invasive species' (human, animal and plant) and this work is compatible with governments' concerns on bio-security. There is room for government bio-security agencies to cooperate with NGOs, such as WWF, to satisfy outcomes for both.

IV. Implementation Strategies

National ownership and commitment

National implementation of regional policies and programs achieved through high-level coordination mechanisms for regionalism (political level commitment).

Comment:

As well as national political commitment to regional policies and programs, it will be important to establish a mechanism for informing civil society in order to gain their commitment.

Strengthening of sub-regional groupings (as appropriate)

Comment:

Appropriate - as determined by Pacific island countries.

Strengthened national capacity for effective participation in regional cooperation (through national planning and budgeting process).

Comment:

As previously stated, national mechanisms for provision of information to civil society will be important.

Pooling of regional expertise (between Pacific countries and/or a Pacific Volunteer Scheme)

Comment:

We strongly support the concept of a Pacific Volunteer Service. This should be expanded beyond public sector co-operation, to include community-based development programs, drawing on the experience of Pacific NGOs in community and rural development.

We believe there would be considerable scope for strong linkages and experience-sharing between the ACFID member volunteer-sending agencies and the Pacific Volunteer Service. Australian volunteer-sending agencies have been active in the Pacific for more than 40 years.

Gender

Given that family, gender, and sexual violence are priority issues for many Pacific Islanders, particularly women and children, we believe that gender should be included in the Pacific Plan as a crosscutting issue.

Pacific partnerships

Closer association between the Forum and non-sovereign Pacific island countries and territories – expansion of membership of regional agreements and associations

Comment:

We believe that the Forum should be working to actively support the right to self-determination for non-self-governing territories, in line with UN principles and practice on decolonisation.

The Pacific Plan should involve more active engagement with the UN Special Committee on Decolonisation, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

Stronger partnership on a regional and national level with non-state actors (NSAs) - - regional accreditation policy and framework for engagement with NSAs –

encouraging national governments to institutionalise a framework for engagement with national civil society organisations.

Comment:

There is contention associated with the term non-state actors (NSAs). Grouping civil society not-for-profit bodies (NGOs, faith-based organisations, and community-based organisations) together with the private (for-profit) sector and business lobbyists under one NSA label, understates the complexity of civil society relationships. The not-for-profit and the for-profit bodies obviously have different mandates and constituencies. Many people believe that 'NSA' is a donor-created term and we would urge the Forum to avoid use of the term NSA in the Pacific Plan.

We welcome the proposal for stronger partnerships on a regional and national level with civil society. However, governments will need some transparency about accreditation processes, to ensure that NGOs are legitimately serving their constituencies. Australian and New Zealand NGO accreditation processes could be used as models on which to base accreditation of Pacific NGOs. These could be sourced through ACFID and its sister organisation, the New Zealand Council for International Development (CID).

What sort of appeal process is there if civil society organisations are refused regional accreditation? How can civil society organisations appeal if just one government blackballs an organisation, when everyone else has said they can get accredited?

Maximising efficiency of regional organisations – promoting complementarity and reducing duplication.

Comment:

We recognise the importance of regional organisations and the fact that they have been in existence and provided effective support for a number of years (over 50 years in the case of SPC). We acknowledge that Pacific island countries and territories identify strongly with their regional bodies and that regional organisations are increasingly attracting Pacific island nationals to their staff and thus further strengthening the pool of highly trained regional expertise.

Through CROP, regional organisations are honing their mandates and working to promote complementarity and reduce duplication. We assume that the CROP agencies themselves would be best placed to provide advice on maximising efficiency. As Pacific regional bodies responsible through their annual meetings to their Pacific island membership (as well as Australia and New Zealand), we believe that there is already a mechanism for keeping these bodies efficient, accountable and in tune with changing Pacific island needs.

Stronger engagement and better alignment with development partners and multilateral organisations.

Comment:

Moves over recent years for greater donor harmonisation are showing positive results. For many years, the need for a regional partnership framework has been obvious. The Pacific Plan is therefore addressing an important Pacific regional need.

Operational strategy

Implementation Plan and Monitoring and Evaluation Plan.

Comment:

Not possible to comment at this stage as the Implementation Plan and Monitoring and Evaluation Plan are yet to be developed as part of the draft Pacific Plan. However, we believe that Pacific island civil society should be involved in monitoring and evaluation and that amongst the Pacific Plan Development Indicators (PPDIs) there should be one relating to impact on civil society. Members believe it will be important that Pacific civil society organisations are given the opportunity to comment on the Implementation Plan, given the importance of detail that can be contained in implementation plans.

Communications

Communications Strategy

Comment:

We note the importance of the Communications Strategy as a mechanism for on-going debate about the future of Pacific regionalism. We note in the Strategy that radio will be one form of communications medium and believe that adequate budgetary allocation should be provided to radio to ensure as wide as possible outreach to the community.

Mechanisms to stimulate debate

We note in Attachment C (Regional Cooperation Priorities – Matrix) reference to:

“Support of processes (such as workshops), for national and regional NSAs, particularly through current mechanisms to deepen and broaden dialogue on regionalism and to develop harmonised and complementary work programs to increase benefits to countries”

Comment:

We welcome this proposed closer engagement with civil society.

The Future

We note that:

- ♣ the general timeframe of the Pacific Plan will be ten years;
- ♣ it will have flexibility so that the vision of the Leaders and the goal of regional integration extend far beyond;
- ♣ Forum Leaders will revisit their Vision and evaluate the Pacific Plan on a regular basis;
- ♣ Pacific Island Forum Secretary General will oversee management of the Pacific Plan and provide recommendations to Leaders on future directions – establishing processes to gather and utilize broad-based views and insights on the future of the region from all stakeholders; and
- ♣ The Pacific Plan will be a living document.

Comment:

We consider that these are important elements to the Plan and look forward especially to the establishment of processes to gather and utilize views and insights from all stakeholders.

APPENDIX 1
ACFID MEMBERS (57) WORKING WITH LOCAL PARTNERS IN
PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES

Adventist Development Relief Agency (ADRA)
AIDWATCH
Amnesty International
Anglican Board of Mission (ABM)
Anglicord
Appropriate Technology for Community and Environment (APACE)
Austcare
Australian Business Volunteers (ABV)
Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF)
Australian Doctors International (ADI)
Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO)
Australian Foundation for the Peoples of Asia and the Pacific (AFAP)
Australian Legal Resources Institute (ALRI)
Australian Red Cross (ARC)
Australian Reproductive Health Alliance (ARHA)
Australian Volunteers International (AVI)
Baptist World Aid Australia (BWA)
Burnet Institute – Centre for International Health
CARE Australia
CARITAS
Compassion Australia
Christian Blind Mission International (CBMI)
Christian Children’s Fund Australia (CCFA)
Credit Union Foundation Australia (CUFA)
Diplomacy Training Program (DTP)
Foundation for Development Cooperation (FDC)
Franciscan Missionary Union
Fred Hollows Foundation
Friends of the Earth (FOE)
Habitat for Humanity Australia
International Centre for Eyecare Education (ICEE)
International Needs Australia
International Women’s Development Agency (IWDA)
Interplast Australia: Royal Australasian College of Surgeons
Leprosy Mission Australia
Live and Learn Environmental Education
Lutherans
Marie Stopes International
Marist Mission Centre (MMC)
Melbourne Overseas Mission Fund
Mineral Policy Institute
Mission World Aid Inc.
National Council of Churches in Australia – Christian World Service (NCCA/CWS)
Oxfam Community Aid Abroad (OCAA)
Oz Green – Global Rivers Environment Education Network Australia Inc
PALMS – Australia
Quaker Service Australia (QSA)
Salesian Society Inc.
Save the Children Australia (SCFA)
Sexual Health and Family Planning Australia (FPA)

TEAR Australia
UNICEF Australia
Union Aid Abroad - Australian People for Health, Education and Devt. Abroad
(APHEDA)
Uniting Church Overseas Aid (UCOA)
Water Aid
World Vision Australia (WVA)
World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) – South Pacific Programme

APPENDIX 2 PACIFIC REGIONAL NON GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS WITH WHOM ACFID MEMBERS INTERACT

As well as a large number of national Pacific island partners, Australian NGOs also work with the following Regional NGOs:

- ♣ Disabled Peoples' International Oceania Sub Region
 - ♣ Eucumenical Centre for Research, Education and Advocacy (ECCREA)
 - ♣ Foundation for Peoples of the South Pacific International (FSPI)
 - ♣ Pacific Concerns Resource Centre (PCRC)
 - ♣ Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC)
 - ♣ Pacific Island Association of Non Government Organisations (PIANGO)
 - ♣ Pacific Islands Broadcasting Association (PIBA)
 - ♣ Pacific Foundation for the Advancement of Women (PACFAW)
 - ♣ Pacific Network Against Globalisation (PANG)
 - ♣ Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women
 - ♣ Regional Rights Resource Team (RRRT)
 - ♣ South Pacific Confederacy of Trade Unions (SPOCTU)
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For further information:

Neva Wendt,
Pacific Policy Officer,
ACFID,
14 Napier Close,
Deakin ACT 2600
Phone: (612) 6285 1816
Fax: (612) 6285 1720
Email: nwendt@acfid.asn.au
Website: www.acfid.asn.au

ⁱ ACFID Pacific Working Group is also referred to as the ACFID PNG-Pacific-Solomon Islands Working Group in recognition of the main group and its sub-groups. See Appendix 1 for a list of ACFID members who undertake work with local partners in Pacific island countries.

ⁱⁱ Pacific regional non government organisations with whom ACFID members interact are listed in Appendix 2.

ⁱⁱⁱ The GEF-funded International Waters Programme involves regional cooperation between several CROP agencies [the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme – now Secretariat of Pacific Regional Environment Programmes (SPREP), the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), the South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC) and the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA)].