



PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM SECRETARIAT

REGIONAL INITIATIVE TEMPLATE

1. Contact Details

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2. Name of Initiative

Building Capacities of Local Governments: Adaptation and Sustainability at the frontlines

3. Background and Rationale

In the Pacific context, local governments are the most under developed and poorly financed institutions of governance.

The outer islands are basically empty with the majority of the people living in the Urban centres leaving little in the number of people in the outer islands to support outer island economies. Businesses are generally non-existent in the islands and small businesses in the islands struggle to gain decent revenues to support business growth.

The local government act in most Pacific island countries gives full authority for the operation of an administration to manage the affairs of island governments within the jurisdictions they serve. The law also empowers the LGs to make ordinances for the welfare of communities living within its jurisdiction, and specifically the power to make such laws as to empower grass-root communities.

Despite how clear the Local Government Acts are in terms of what it can and cannot do, the local governments lack the full support of the National Government because of the clear disconnection between Parliament and the Local Governments.

In most cases there is quite a struggle between the Local elected officials and national elected officials over who should take the lead in rural development and who should take credit for any positive development. Most elected officials are only interested in running projects as a campaign initiative, but overall there is no real gain to the rural communities and the projects are mostly short term developments with no real intention for success, otherwise in most other cases, the local Governments have failed to finance the continuation and maintenance of any projects. Therefore sustainability at the forefront of development needs are being pushed aside in favour of unworkable national plans.

Despite the legislative powers, the economic situations in rural areas cannot allow for the generation of sufficient income to finance the activities of the LGs. Financial needs are a top priority within the LGs and the case is always that the islands are predominantly empty of people who would be the actors in the economy. National Government financial support towards LGs is very small and does not fully satisfy the financial needs in the islands.

Donors are weak to influence national policies that does not reflect on nation building and continue to appreciate political support. Regional bodies are also the same, despite the many officials working for them they still could not connect with the real needs in Pacific island state, or rather continue to treat it in piecemeal approaches.

Corruption and distrust amongst political foes continue to be the main battlefield in island states.

The limited financial resources of the nation cannot allow it to fully satisfy every community need in the country. However, proper use and effective allocation of the national budget can be improved to address priority needs, especially to improve the disconnection with the outer islands. National Strategy Plans which outlines economic and development objectives also contains plans to develop the outer islands, with no real commitment from anybody.

Transportation, Communication and health services are predominant service areas that need improvements in the rural areas, including education. These will allow people to have good confidence to stay and live in the islands and contribute to a growing economy that will accommodate job opportunities and service provision. Yet national policies are fuelling mass urbanization and have been driving people out of the rural areas and into town adding further chaos to public systems.

The real victims of climate change are those in the rural areas, people who do not have immediate access to the most basic of things that they would need to address each day. And yet they continue to face hardship and political games that is based on dumping national resources.

To reverse the trend of urbanization in the Pacific, regional bodies like the Pacific Islands Forum must work to reduce the obstacles and work on a clear and precise decentralization program. This is very important for the success of outer island and rural economies.

Sustainable Development Goals will succeed only if we include rural and local governments on our agenda to improve the lives of communities. Climate change adaptation measures will only work if we proceed on a decentralization plan that addresses the battle at the frontlines faced in rural settings.

4. Description

Pacific communities will only address real growth if local governments are included in nation building. Urbanization is the common cause of development breakdowns in countries in the Pacific region. The lack of concentrated populations in rural areas is the main excuse of National Governments to avoid direct investments in the jurisdictions of Local Governments.

National Governments often lack the financial commitment to allow basic development needs in rural areas and the assistance of donor countries must be incorporated to assist in this area.

The PIF must put rural development in its core policy to influence national leaders to commit to rural development as a regional initiative. A policy of decentralization will allocate sufficient national revenue and donor funds for the benefit of rural populations and the potential to reduce urban pressure.

The main beneficiaries to this policy are the Pacific people whose lives and traditions rely on living in harmony with their environments.

Challenges in terms of transportation, communication and urbanization in the Pacific are clear results of development that has overlooked developing the rural areas. Access to education in rural areas is often an underdeveloped program in the Pacific region and it continues to be to this day.

This policy is a long term development goal that would require the commitment of all leaders in the Pacific countries to come together and endorse this as a priority area.

The major issues affecting this policy are the lack of development funds and national commitments to pursue them. Corruption is also a major problem given the lack of efficient government systems in rural areas as well as official corruption.

This project should be a rolling policy development that should include strengthening governance systems of local governments and building their capacities to become reliable development partners in the Pacific region.

5. Alignment to Regional Vision, Values and Objectives

The onslaught of climate change and the pressure on food security needs coupled with health issues Pacific Islands need to empower the local governments by improving on the delivery and implementation systems so that the populations can have access to better services and opportunities. Decentralization must be implemented in such a way so people don't flock urban centres but rather live happily and healthily in the pristine environment of the outer islands.

Building strong resilient and reliable local government frameworks will improve livelihoods in the Pacific.

6. Additional Information

For evidence on these factors, please look at:

- i) An artificial local government set up in the Marshall Islands
- ii) Urbanization in Kiribati
- iii) Corruption in local governments in PNG
- iv) Lack of an effective local Government in Tuvalu
- v) Communication and Transportation issues in Pacific island countries
- vi) Lack of economic development in local government jurisdictions
- vii) Power struggle between local and national government in the RMI
- viii) Corruption in National Government systems
- ix) Infrastructure development challenges in the Pacific as a whole
- x) SIDS and climate change
- xi) The rise in NCD cases in the Pacific region, i.e., RMI and the rising cost of health.
- xii) The new UN Sustainable Development Goals
- xiii) Millennium Development Goals shortcomings