



**PacificWIN**



*Vagahau Niue Trust*  
vagahaustrust.com

**FRAMEWORK FOR PACIFIC REGIONALISM  
REGIONAL INITIATIVE SUBMISSION 2016  
“LISTENING TO THE PACIFIC”**

**1. Contact Details**

Name of individual or group submitting initiative

**Pefi Kingi QSM  
PacificWIN & Vagahau Niue Trust  
pp of Pacific Regional Languages Leaders, Stakeholders & Networks**

Name and position of primary contact

**Pefi Kingi QSM (Vagahau Niue Trust & PacificWIN)**  
**pp Emele Duituturaga (Executive Director, PIANGO/Pacific Islands Association of Non-Government Organisations); Mele Nemaia (Chairperson, Vagahau Niue Trust); Faatili Esera Iosua (Founder, Samoan Principal Association); Sai Lealea (Chairperson, Pacific Education Centre); Afamasaga Agnes Rasmussen (Principal, St Mary Mackillop Catholic School); Suzanna Tiapula JD (Director, Ho’omaluhia, FVSAI & Pacificwin-Hawai’i); Tanealaepa Pepe Tanuvasa (Pacificwin-Australia)**

Email address

Phone number

Fax number

Mailing address



**PacificWIN**



*Vagahau Niue Trust*  
vagahauNiueTrust.com

## 2. Name of Initiative

**“REO” Pacific Regional Roadmap for Pacific Languages**

## 3. What is the common regional issue or challenge that this regional initiative aims to address?

*You may also want to address the following: What are the causes of this issue? Are there links to national, regional or international goals/policies? Please limit your response to no more than 750 words.*

*If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head.*

*If you talk to him in his own language, that goes to his heart*

*Nelson Mandela*

### **Pacific Regional Issue**

The common regional issue and challenge addressed in this proposal and submission, “REO” Pacific Regional Roadmap for Pacific Languages, is the current and future endangerment and loss of Pacific languages. As we speak, endangered Pacific languages are in the process of dying. In reality, there is no “Pacific Way” without its Pacific languages to express and amplify it. Pacific languages are imbued with the mana (power) to profile and represent its peoples, including our nationhood, collective spiritual health, visions and futures. Language is the cornerstone of culture and the ultimate expressions of our identities, genealogies and belonging. Our Mother Languages share and transmit our cultures; and our special worldviews are expressed, developed and transformed through our respective authentic voices.

When languages are threatened, then a peoples, their worldviews, identities and spirit are potentially at risk. Leader and diplomat Her Excellency O’Love Jacobsen repeated a warning and continued concern, “Ko e Vagahau, hana ne aloalo mai”<sup>1</sup> (“There is our language, waving us good bye”). Previously in 1988, the language scientist Prof. Hornberger flagged this pending risk, ‘Indigenous languages are under siege...around the world - in danger of disappearing because they are not being transmitted to the next generation. Immigrants and their languages worldwide are similarly subjected to seemingly irresistible social, political, and economic pressures’.

<sup>1</sup> Meaning, “The Niue language is waving goodbye [to us]”, Vagahau Niue Week, a national New Zealand celebration of Vagahau Niue instigated by Dr Colin Tukuitonga, formerly CEO, Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, New Zealand



**PacificWIN**



*Vagahau Niue Trust*  
vagahaustrust.com

## **Pacific Regional Challenges**

The Pacific region is a unique nations with a rich, complex and amazing linguistic landscape as a result of its diverse histories and shared geography. *Ethnologue*<sup>2</sup> notes that there are about 38,469,889 Pacific peoples in the region who share and speak about 1,131 Pacific languages. It denotes that right now, 234 of those Pacific languages are in trouble and 208 to 311 Pacific languages are dying. On a global scale, it is known amongst language experts, advocates, activists and “language fighters” that on average, one language vanishes every two weeks and that half of the approximately 6,000 languages are expected to disappear within the end of the century and the majority of those will be indigenous languages.<sup>3</sup> Flores (2008)<sup>4</sup> emphasized, ‘If that happens, indigenous peoples’ intimate knowledge of their environments and ecosystems will essentially vanish and unique expressions of the human experience of the world, which maybe held the key to answering fundamental questions of the future, is irrevocably lost’.

## **Possible Causes of Potential Pacific Linguicide**

The factors determining language-death are typically non-linguistic (Swadesh, 1948; Campbell, 1994). The most commonly cited factors are socioeconomic (lack of economic opportunities, rapid economic transformations, ongoing industrialization, work patterns, migrant labour, resettlement, migration and other) and sociopolitical (lack of official language policies, discrimination, stigmatisation, repression, war and other). Climate change would now be a critical factor that needs to be included as a sociopolitical and socioeconomic determinant. Moving forward, the causes of this issue will include national, human and financial resources, insufficient levels of investment for regional coordination mechanisms for cultural protection; and lack of leadership championship. There are many links to national and international goals and policies. We attach for your reference, information regarding Pacific countries that are committed to different instruments and conventions.

Some of the reasons of armed movement and uprising of indigenous peoples in several countries, besides other fundamental rights, is the non-recognition of the indigenous languages by their government[s].<sup>5</sup> The non-recognition and the prohibition of the use of indigenous languages in the education and work place has impacted the lives of many indigenous peoples, it has affected them from childhood to adulthood, in the creation of their identity and development of their communities. This is borne out in many of the Pacific nations where under other power-administrations, Pacific indigenes were disallowed, prevented, penalised and punished for speaking their own languages. Tutagaloa Tutose Tuhipa NZOM recalled that children were punished, physically and mentally, if they spoke Vagahau Niue “back in the day”.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ethnologue.com/angered-languages> Retrieved 01 April 2016.

<sup>3</sup> See UNECO Portal on Endangered Languages at <http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php>. Also see Harrison, David, “Indigenous Languages Dying,” Director, Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania on Al Jazeera at <http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/5A3D288A-CB05-46D0-87A6-56C71D7C0973.htm>

<sup>4</sup> ‘The Role of International Labour Organization in the Promotion and Protection of Indigenous Languages’ International Expert Group Meeting on Indigenous Languages. UN Doc PFI/2008/EGM1/14.

<sup>5</sup> For example, the indigenous movements in Mexico, Guatemala, Bolivia, Peru, and Nepal have expressed concerned about their languages being discriminated especially in the education system. Refer Flores (2008), UN Doc PFI/2008/EGM1/14.

<sup>6</sup> Key note speaker, ‘Inaugural Hulaaga Vagahau Niue Conference’ 2001, Auckland, New Zealand.



**PacificWIN**



*Fagahau Niue Trust*  
fagahaustrust.com

#### **4. Briefly describe this regional initiative**

*You may also want to address the following in this section: How would this initiative contribute to a positive change to the region? Who are the main beneficiaries? How would the initiative contribute to the vision, values and objectives of the Framework for Pacific Regionalism? Has the initiative been carried out previously? What are the key risks in implementing this initiative? Are there any complementary projects and programmes that are currently active? Please limit your response to no more than 750 words.*

The “REO” Pacific Regional Roadmap of Pacific Languages aims to develop a regional strategy that includes the following key outcomes:

- A regional roadmap that will provide Members with an agreed position from which to advance the rights of their respective indigenous languages, with particular focus on indigenous languages that are at risk; and it should provide the Members with a unified voice[s] in global fora where human rights and linguistics rights are focused and prioritized.
- A regional policy that will safeguard the indigenous status of all Pacific languages and ensuring it is protected, retained, maintained and developed for its future generations’ linguistic, cultural, social, societal and economic growth in the region. In addition, the cross-cutting nature of all strategies should ensure that “REO” recognizes that all other sectors have a major role in the implementation of all regional strategies, especially in building increased resilience and suitable solutions to deliver tangible results for Pacific communities and stakeholders.
- “REO” requires the establishment a regional sub-committee to oversee the development of the Regional Roadmap, including a wide representation of expertise – from Members, agencies and civil society organisations. The sub-committee will have responsibility for providing high level advocacy, operationalising, coordination, and monitoring of the implementation of “REO”.
- “REO” seeks an integrated approach and synergy amongst all key stakeholders which is efficient use of resources and capacities, improving policy coherence, reducing duplication of efforts and uniting strategic efforts across jurisdictions. The agreed synergies should ensure coherence and linkages across relevant strategies to minimize any undue weight on Members, civil society organisations and agencies.
- The “REO” approach should focus on strengthening the resilience of indigenous languages communities, businesses and households to increase the impact and cost effectiveness of their civil participation and engagement. A shared commitment to this approach should prevent possible and potential linguistic where pertinent and provide speedier and practical sustainable solutions to linguistic



**PacificWIN**



*Fagahau Niu Trust*  
fagahautrust.com

alerts where prevalent.

- “REO” needs to consider the management of a regional research on the current situation; key areas to address to ensure protection of dying languages; opportunities for durable futures for refugees; potential policy options for Member Countries who need to make the required legislative amendments.
- The “REO” sub-committee could commission technical advice for ratification and implementation of policy advice would need to be costed. This research could be conducted by language scientists with a background in human rights law, linguistic law and an understanding of the linguistic health of the regional Members. The findings will inform the sub-committee of the challenges facing PICs in fulfilling their obligations to specific international treaties and conventions.
- “REO” should allow Members to assess their capacity and capability to provide sustainable options for the revival and rejuvenation of their respective indigenous languages.
- “REO” should provide resources to implement the policies that will enable Members to meet their obligations to the international community. A key risk of not implementing the UN and UNESCO Declarations and Conventions Relevant to Linguistic Rights and UN and UNESCO Recommendations Relevant to Linguistic Rights is the potential for PICs to not meet their obligations under the agreed Conventions.

The major key risk is that “REO” will not be supported by the Regional Leadership. “REO” is premised on the given belief that deeper regionalism will complement and increase nationhood, cultural strength, socio-economic and development prospects, expand market opportunities, improve service delivery, and contribute to security and good governance for Pacific peoples and for the region as a whole. We need best practice processes and clear political direction and leadership to drive effective regionalism. So the main key risk is that that national strategies will remain piecemeal and unprioritised amongst many Members if it is not elevated and “stated” as a regional priority. “REO” can be an inclusive process for a regional initiative to address a key challenge facing the Pacific.<sup>7</sup> The main beneficiaries will be the Pacific peoples in the region, and moreover, the protection of an important and intact legacy for our future generations. The proposed “REO” Pacific Regional Roadmap for Pacific Languages has not been carried out previously.

The other main risk would revolve around developing a clear governance mechanism to guide this process, with a network that builds on existing communities and civil society organisations of experienced practice. The challenges will include funding and support for programmes that would be proposed for implementation which can be mitigated by clear ‘talanoa’ towards an effective and inclusive plan to implement the “REO”. Should “REO” not be adopted, there are wide ranging potential social costs that need to be considered such as cultural tensions, potential conflicts, continued marginalization and increased under-development of indigenous Pacific peoples.

---

<sup>7</sup> PIFS comunicado.



**PacificWIN**



*Vagahau Niue Trust*  
vagahau@niuetrust.com

## 5. Why does this initiative require the attention of the Leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum?

*Please consider whether this initiative requires the attention and consideration of the Leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum in order to be implemented and outline why this is the case. Could it not be overseen or implemented at the level of Ministers, officials or by a regional agency? Please limit your response to no more than 750 words.*

*Over the last thirty or forty years there has been a downgrading of Pacific languages, brought about, in part, by their neglect and relegation and, in part, by uncertainty and misguided advice given to Pacific communities in New Zealand... It is also, in part, the consequence of a lack of concern, and interest, shown by the various Pacific communities, the education system, and New Zealand society more generally.*

*Prof Hunkin-Tuiletufuga, G. (2001)*

We believe our proposed “REO” Pacific Roadmap for Pacific Languages will ultimately contribute towards the protection of a critical asset for the Pacific Region that is focused on sustainable development, combining cultural, spiritual, social and societal development in ways that improve livelihoods and well-being. The Pacific regional context is one of the most complex linguistic demographics in the world; therefore, our indigenous languages are now intertwined with other complex groupings of new settler and immigrant languages which have subjected our indigenous languages to modifications reflecting new landscapes, new communicative ecologies, new statuses and new forms of death. The briefly cited examples and appended list of Pacific countries with endangered languages demonstrate the need for a robust regional languages framework and solution to guide Pacific Leaders in determining appropriate policies for endangered and dying languages. Pacific Leaders hold sacred the principles of inclusivity, equity, and equality, and they know to have adequate resources to draw upon when making decisions relating to the regional health and livelihood of our Mother Languages. The huge concerns and impacts pertinent to a possible regional Pacific linguicide makes it clear that a more concerted and coordinated effort is required to ensure the situation does not deteriorate further and exacerbate over time.

Our “REO” Pacific Regional Roadmap policy should clearly outline that we are collectively aware of the results of non-action/nil-action. We should all be aware of the five stages of languages endangerment that is currently borne out in many Pacific households and communities. A language is potentially endangered if the children start preferring the dominant language (like English) and learn the obsolescing language imperfectly (as for many Vagahau Niue speakers). It is endangered if the youngest speakers are young adults and no or very few child speakers (as for many Cook Islands households). It is seriously endangered if the youngest speakers are middle-aged or past middle age (as for Chamorro speakers). It is a terminally endangered or a moribund language if there are only a few elderly speakers left (as for the Woleaian language of Micronesia and the Arha language of Melanesia). It is a dead language when there are no speakers left at all. This is also referred to as ‘linguicide’ (Phillipson, 1995) also known as sudden death, language genocide, physical language death and biological language death. Detailing these processes logically in a Pacific Roadmap will assist all



**PacificWIN**



*Fagahau Niu Trust*  
fagahanuistrust.com

communities to rethink and restructure a treasure (their indigenous languages) that they have taken for granted.

Our “REO” initiative will not be possible without the endorsement of the regional leadership, collective local leadership, stakeholder collaborations, community support and political will. The regional Leaders have the potential to impact on domestic and regional security, stability, economic growth and prosperity. This regional initiative should empower the Members by articulating a regional position on indigenous languages, inclusivity, equity and equality for all. The regional stability, security and wellbeing of Pacific peoples, depends on inclusive and equitable development and growth that is augmented by strong linguistic policies. Indigenous linguistic developments have not been given sufficient consideration and thought about how it could boost economic growth. The potential for a major development generated by a valued indigenous strategy should not be underestimated.

The Pacific Leaders envision the Pacific region as “a region of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion and prosperity so that all Pacific peoples shall have prosperity. It will align with the regional vision by establishing a shared direction on the agreed value of our respective indigenous languages. The proposal involves a focus that markets will not only provide well, but provide with ‘ofa/aloha/aloha (love) and high loyalty and commitment. Our “REO” proposal will maintain high degrees of effective sovereignty held by national governments and its peoples. In terms of regionalism, it will maintain a shared norm and standard, establish common policies and strategies. We believe our proposal will bring about substantial net benefits for all stakeholders, although we did not have time to undertake a cost-benefit analysis. Agency efforts, international UN instruments and conventions and strategies by other civil society organisations are not fully possible without the endorsement and collaboration of the Regional Leadership, Members, Groups and Peoples who are the very core of the Framework for Pacific Regionalism. Without the high-level commitment to pursuing deeper regionalism and establishing a process for developing and prioritising regional public policy. Significant national initiatives have been implemented by Members, agencies and civil society organisations; however, a regional approach would be much more significant.