**PACIFIC ISLANDS
FORUM SECRETARIAT**

CONNECT THE BLUE CONTINENT

FRAMEWORK FOR PACIFIC REGIONALISM – REGIONAL INITIATIVE TEMPLATE

Please complete each section below.

1. Contact Details

Please provide the following contact details:

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2. Name of Initiative

Connect the Blue Continent

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3. What is the <u>common regional issue or challenge</u> that this regional initiative aims to address?

The Pacific Islands region needs a more visionary and strategic approach to harnessing the power of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to enable culturally-intact social, economic and environmental well-being and underpin the pathway to a region of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion and prosperity as envisaged by the Framework for Regionalism.

As the world moves into the digital era, nations and regions across the world are building the information super-highway infrastructure, skills and systems needed to support their societies' sustainable future in this new age.

Nations are co-operating within and across continents to support the international internet connectivity and knowledge-sharing needed for economic and social development.

The Pacific Ocean is host to numerous island nations and communities which are in danger of being left behind in this transformational process.

These communities are at risk of a new cycle of long-term poverty and aid dependency because they are less equipped to engage in global activity and knowledge-sharing enabled by affordable internet access.

Pacific Island governments and regional organizations have been examining this risk and some valiant efforts are being made to address the issue. However, a more visionary and strategic approach at the regional level will lower barriers and help to empower governments, industry, research and social innovation to operate more collaboratively and freely to ensure the sustainable future of these vibrant communities of the 'Blue Continent'.

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4. Briefly describe this regional initiative

ICT is at the heart of modern human collaboration and knowledge-sharing across all fields of human endeavor. The future of education, community health and well-being, public service administration, tourism and other economic development activities – all have a fundamental reliance on effective ICT to enable communities to operate in the global economic and social development environment that the world is moving into.

Island communities cannot navigate a sustainable future without embracing and taking local ownership and leadership on the strategic take-up of this technology.

The most significant contribution of ICT, particularly affordable high speed internet access, is the increased capacity for knowledge sharing and co-ordination of human activity in an ever-more-complex environment.

Key areas of priority for the island communities require collaborative effort across the region, between nations and communities. The region needs to inter-operate effectively to build self-sufficiency and resilience…and needs to strategically engage with external parties to help foster the skills and capacity to build a prosperous region.

ICT is vital for:

- Energy efficiency
- Environmental sustainability
- Effective health services into the future
- Education
- Sustainable infrastructure planning and design/construction/management co-ordination
- Regional security
- Disaster resilience planning and recovery
- Research collaboration (eg. ocean and fisheries health, crop yield and resilience to climate change)
- The future of work and viable economic development in the region
- Social cohesion when family members have to work away from home
- Social justice through effective public administration systems
- Cultural intactness and sense of identity – ensuring the island communities' diverse cultures and languages are represented and celebrated online

A vast spectrum of explicit knowledge is available online and the tacit knowledge expertise of experts around the globe can be accessed through online communications technology such as video-conferencing. With affordable internet connectivity, Island communities can better take part in this global knowledge environment.

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

A visionary strategy at the regional level needs to incorporate a coordinated master-planning approach to establishing interconnected regional ICT infrastructure and the strategic development of a regional ICT Industry in the Pacific.

The attention and consideration of the Leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum is vital for this to become understood and recognized as a key priority at the heart of social and economic development endeavours across all aspects of the Islands' future prosperity and sustainability.

Pacific Island communities cannot afford to be merely consumers of other nation's digital products and services. The Island communities must take the reins of their own future by growing their own skills base and their own software and technology innovation industries in order to position their region for digital age economic and social sustainability.

A regional master-planning approach to ICT infrastructure will provide the wider context for national and multi-lateral network and computing infrastructure projects.

A regional master-planning approach to ICT skills development and digital age systems for powering the region's social and economic future will improve self-sufficiency and build regional economic and social resilience.

The establishment of an ICT industry in the region is the only way to truly achieve this.

Regional and bi-lateral trade agreements and major contracts need to include this aspect of strategic skills development and local empowerment.

An unstrategic approach to foreign investment and foreign telecommunications and ICT sector is a threat to local skills development and universal, affordable access for all communities.

The region needs to establish a partnership mesh involving government, civil society, industry and the research and academic sector to harness the true value of ICT for the region's collective sustainable future. This is a vital role for the Pacific Islands Forum and the regional initiative.

The attention of the Leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum is vital.

Connect the Blue Continent has been established to assist in the thought leadership, planning and implementation of this approach.