



COMMON COUNTRY ANALYSIS

United Nations in the Pacific

December 2020

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List of Abbreviations/Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASRH	Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health
ATM	Automated Teller Machine
BBNJ	Beyond National Jurisdiction
CAT-DDOs	Catastrophe Deferred Drawdown Options
CCA	Common Country Analysis
CCRT	Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust
CDRF	Climate Disaster Risk Financing
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CF	Cooperation Framework
CF	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
COFA	Compacts of Free Association
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CROP	Council of Regional Organizations in the Pacific
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DAC	OECD Development Assistance Committee
DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey

ECE	Early Childhood Education
ESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FRDP	Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific
FSM	Federated States of Micronesia
GANHRI	Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions
GAO	US Government Accountability Office
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women Empowerment
GNI	Gross National Income
GOS	Global Outsourcing Services
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organization
ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IFI	International Financial Institutions
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMO	International Maritime Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
JCAP	Joint Country Action Plan
LDC	Least Developed Country
LGBT+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and related communities
LNG	Liquefied natural gas
LNOB	Leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind first

MAPS	Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MICS	Multiple indicator cluster survey
MPA	Marine Protected Area
MSME	Micro, small and medium enterprises
mVAM	mobile Vulnerability and Analysis Mapping
MW	Megawatt
NCD	Non-communicable disease
NDC	Nationally determined contribution
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NHRI	National Human Rights Institution
NMRF	National Mechanisms for Reporting and Follow-up
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
PacMAB	Man and Biosphere Reserves Network in the Pacific
PCRAFI	Pacific Catastrophe Risk Assessment and Financing Initiative
PFRPD	Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
PHC	Primary health care
PICT	Pacific Island Countries and Territories
PIDSOGIESC	Pacific Islanders of Diverse Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Sex Characteristics
PIF	Pacific Islands Forum
PIFS	Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
PLGED	Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration

PNG	Papua New Guinea
PPA	Pacific Platform for Action for Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
PPY	Pre-Primary Year
PRP	Pacific Resilience Partnership
RH	Reproductive Health
RMI	Republic of Marshall Islands
RMNCAH	Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health
SADATA	Samoa Human Rights Database
SAMOA	SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action
SB	Solomon Islands
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SDR	Special Drawing Rights
SEIA	Socio-economic impact assessment
SERP	Socio-economic response plan
SG	UN Secretary General
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SPC	Pacific Community
STI	Sexually transmitted infections
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UHC	Universal Health Coverage
UN	United Nations
UNCAC	United Nations Convention against Corruption
UNCT	United Nations Country Team

UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNPS	United Nations Pacific Strategy
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Fund
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
US	United States
USD	United States Dollar
VNR	Voluntary National Review
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WB	World Bank
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WS	Samoa
WTO	World Trade Organization

1. Executive Summary

The main purpose of the Common Country Analysis (CCA) 2020 is to identify recent developments and emerging trends in the Pacific region which should be considered in the formulation of the new Joint Country Action Plans (JCAPs) for 14 Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs)¹. Under the assumption that the six Outcomes of the UNPS 2018-2022 remain relevant, recent changes in the Pacific context should be reflected in adjusted or new outputs and activities of the new JCAPs. By using the 2019 global CCA/CF guidance and a wide range of recent information and data sources, the CCA 2020 also supports the transition to the new UN programming cycle for the Pacific region which should start with a CCA/CF roadmap and a new CCA in the last quarter of 2021.

Major changes in the Pacific region since 2017 include important steps in tailoring the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs to the Pacific context. This includes the endorsement of the Pacific Roadmap for Sustainable Development in 2017, the identification of 132 Pacific Sustainable Development Indicators, the issuance of a first quadrennial Pacific progress report on sustainable development in 2018, and Voluntary National Review (VNR) reports from Fiji, Kiribati, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu.

In line with all Asia-Pacific subregions, PICTs remain off-track on all 17 SDGs and have only made slow progress on goals related to gender equality, access to basic services including healthcare, water, sanitation and hygiene, sustainable cities and communities, the environment and the means of implementation. The COVID-19 pandemic and its longer-term implications are most likely to further complicate the trajectory of sustainable development in the region.

The data is scarce for the Pacific region, with insufficient data for most SDG indicators. Although data analysis has been strengthened in response to COVID-19, including through high frequency mobile food security monitoring,² there is a clear need to improve data sharing. Due to gaps in monitoring and data siloes. The progress described in the report focuses on the indicators with sufficient data to project indicative trends, with more data required to substantiate a more comprehensive assessment at the goal level.

Although data availability in the Asia-Pacific region to measure SDG indicators has increased from 25 percent in 2017 to 42 percent in 2020, closing the data gap on more than half of the SDG indicators remains a challenge for national statistical systems in Asia and the Pacific. At the time of publishing the 2018 quadrennial Pacific progress report, only 48 percent of the 132 Pacific Sustainable Development indicators could be measured, with data missing on crucial themes such as climate change, targets related to SDG 14 “Life below water”, as well as quality education and SDG 11 “Sustainable cities and communities”.

The macroeconomic impact of COVID-19 has far-reaching socio-economic implications for the Pacific region and all PICTs. In this regard, the findings of Socio-Economic Impact Assessments (SEIAs), which continue to be conducted in many PICTs to assess short-term consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic,

¹ Cook Islands, Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu

² See WFP mobile Vulnerability and Analysis Mapping

need to be considered together with the CCA which focuses mainly on longer-term and structural sustainable development challenges based on pre-COVID-19 data.

Before the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, PICTs had not only taken important steps towards achieving the 2030 Agenda, but also launched a broad-based consultative process involving all key stakeholders in the region towards defining a visionary 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent. Faced with the severe impacts and shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic, these consultations provide a unique opportunity for PICT governments to reach out widely to the Pacific people, with a focus on the most marginalized and vulnerable populations, and jointly explore bold and innovative ideas and approaches which enable PICTs to “build back better” and stay on course to achieve the SDGs.

The integrated and people-centered assessment of SDG progress in this report shows several groups that are left behind or at risk of being left behind, including women and girls, persons with disabilities, LGBT+ people, children, youth and the elderly. The report also shows that the furthest behind groups are often suffering from an intersection of disadvantages, such as being poor, a woman, and living on a remote outer island or an urban informal settlement.

The CCA 2020 provides an overview of the financing landscape and partnerships to achieve the SDGs. Recent assessments show a trend of increasing financial flows, including a rise in overseas investment and international development assistance, and growing revenues in the fisheries and tourism sectors, as well as in the extractive industries. Positive trends were noted in external financing from climate finance, multilateral development banks, South-South Cooperation and FDI flows, especially from Asia. These trends offer opportunities to leverage new and additional sources of development finance and are complemented by PICTs’ ongoing efforts to strengthen the effectiveness and impact of domestic and external financing flows.

Finally, the CCA 2020 explores in chapter 5 some key topics and themes that came out strongly during the desk review with regards to their multidimensional risks and opportunities for transformational development of the Pacific region. These include: COVID-19; climate change and environmental degradation; population growth, youth and urbanization; gender equality and women empowerment; digital governance; inclusive, green and resilient growth; and regional collaboration. While these topics and issues do not represent an exhaustive list, they should be strongly considered in selecting priority areas for joint and complementary UN programmatic engagement.

2. Introduction

2.1 Purpose, scope and methodology

This analysis - which focuses more on the structural and underlying causes of PICTs' development challenges - relies largely on pre-COVID-19 data. Preliminary data show that many of the development issues and inequalities have been compounded by the impact of COVID-19 and the associated economic downturn for PICTs.

Purpose and scope

The UN Common Country Analysis (CCA) 2020 is guided by the UN Secretary General's reform agenda and vision to reposition the United Nations development system to deliver on the universal, integrated and transformational 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and to align development programming to the SDGs. The decision of the Pacific UNCT to conduct a CCA at the end of the third year of the programming cycle of the UN Pacific Strategy 2018-2022 is based on the new UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) Guidance³ which asks UN Country Teams to "shift the CCA from a one-off event to a real-time core analytical function." Updates of the CCA in the course of an ongoing multi-year programme cycle ensure that annual UN system planning can stay informed of important contextual changes, developments and trends, thus strengthening the continued relevance of UN programme interventions. In addition, the new UNSDCF guidance emphasizes that periodic updating of the CCA reduces the period for formulating a new Cooperation Framework.

Based on the above, the CCA 2020 provides a holistic, strategic-level update to inform the formulation of the new Joint Country Action Plans (JCAPs) which contain the specific programmatic results, activities and budgets for UN programming in each of 14 Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs), namely Cook Islands, Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. In the context of the COVID-19 crisis, the formulation of the new JCAPs draws not only on the CCA 2020, but also on the Socio-Economic Impact Assessments (SEIAs) and Socio-Economic Response Plans (SERPs) for PICTs which support the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19 with a focus on five pillars: protecting health services and systems; social protection and basic services; economic response and recovery; macroeconomic response and multilateral collaboration; and social cohesion and community resilience.⁴

In addition to providing an update to the 2016 CCA Meta-Analysis⁵ which served as the analytical foundation for developing the UNPS 2018-2022, the CCA 2020 applies the new UNSDCF guidance by including 1) an integrated assessment of progress towards achieving the vision and principles of the 2030 Agenda, with a focus on each of the 17 SDGs, 2) an update on financing and partnerships for achieving the SDGs and other international commitments, and 3) an overview of multidimensional risks and opportunities for transformational development in the Pacific region. To better support its purpose of

³ UNSDG (2019). United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework Guidance (June 2019) <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/united-nations-sustainable-development-cooperation-framework-guidance>

⁴ United Nations Pacific (2020). UNCT FIJI COVID-19 MULTISECTORAL RESPONSE PLAN (August 2020)

⁵ United Nations Pacific (2016). Pacific CCA Meta-Analysis 2016 (September 2016) https://fscluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/pacific_cca_-_draft_final_18_9_16.pdf

informing the development of the new JCAPs, the integrated assessment of progress towards the 17 SDGs is structured in line with the six priority areas of the UNPS 2018-2022.

By using the principles and key elements of the new UNSDCF guidance, and by focusing on the latest information and data sources, the 2020 CCA also serves to support a smooth and efficient transition to the preparations for the next multi-year programming cycle, including a new CCA, which should start in the last quarter of 2021.

Methodology

The CCA 2020 is based on an extensive desk review of documents and data from the UN, Pacific regional institutions, national governments, and global, regional and national sources. At all stages of the design and formulation process of the CCA 2020, close consultations were held at UN Resident Coordinator level and with members of the two Resident Coordinator Offices. In addition, meetings with the UNPS Coordination Group took place at critical stages of the process, and consultations took place with each of the six UNPS Outcome Groups to ensure that 1) relevant emerging trends and new themes within the priority areas of each Outcome Group are reflected in the CCA document, and 2) CCA findings and conclusions can inform the formulation of the new JCAPs. Due to the travel constraints of the COVID-19 crisis, all consultations were limited to virtual interactions. The final draft version of the CCA was shared with the UN Country Team for validation and approval.

In line with the SG's global-level request to DESA and Regional Economic Commissions to provide strategic and substantive support – including SDG-related analytical tools and products – to the reinvigorated Resident Coordinator system and the new generation of UNCTs, the development of the CCA 2020 received contributions from DESA and UNESCAP to central parts of the report, including a macroeconomic chapeau in the introduction chapter, and substantive inputs to key themes such as SDG financing and partnerships, and risks and opportunities for transformational development.

Applying the principles and scope of the new UNSDCF guidance - which is designed to assess individual countries at national and sub-national levels - to a regional-level assessment of 14 PICTs that are supported by the UN system in the Pacific - revealed a number of limitations. Many regional studies, assessments and reports are not focusing on the 14 PICTs but on the entire Asia-Pacific region or on different larger or smaller subsets of Pacific Island countries. A systematic and complete assessment of SDG progress, e.g. through application of the MAPS approach,⁶ is not yet available for the Pacific. Although data production and availability are improving, this limited the extent and depth of the integrated assessment of SDG progress across the six priority areas. That said, close attention has been given to reference all sources and data which should facilitate the creation of a CCA data repository as recommended by the global UNSDCF guidance.

2.2 Localization of the 2030 Agenda

Since the formulation of the 2016 CCA Meta-Analysis and the UN Pacific Strategy 2018-2022 which supports the 14 PICTs in achieving national development priorities and the vision, principles and goals of the 2030 Agenda, Pacific leaders have undertaken important steps in advancing the localization and reporting on the SDGs. In 2017, the members of the Pacific Islands Forum endorsed the **Pacific Roadmap for Sustainable Development**⁷ which guides regional responses in achieving the 2030 Agenda and the

⁶ UNSDG (2015). <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/maps-mainstreaming-acceleration-and-policy-support-2030-agenda>

⁷ PIFS (2017). Pacific Roadmap for Sustainable Development
<https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/The-Pacific-Roadmap-for-Sustainable-Development.pdf>

SDGs within the context of national plans and priorities, the SAMOA Pathway and the Framework for Pacific Regionalism. In addition, the **Pacific New Urban Agenda**, provides a broad framework and platform for the localization of the 2030 Agenda in Pacific towns and cities⁸.

The Pacific Roadmap for Sustainable Development prioritizes a set of themes and issues for collective action, including climate change and disaster risk management; oceans and integrated oceans management; non-communicable diseases and cervical cancer; improving connectivity, empowering women, girls and people with disabilities; poverty reduction; reducing inequality; and improving the quality of education. In alignment with the global SDGs, these priority themes and issues served as a foundation to identify **132 Pacific Sustainable Development Indicators** which guide implementation, monitoring and reporting on global and regional sustainable development commitments.⁹

Based on these indicators, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat issued a first **quadrennial Pacific progress report on sustainable development** in 2018 that was tabled at the 74th UNGA in 2019 as a unique Voluntary Regional Review of the 2030 Agenda.¹⁰ It highlights common regional challenges, as well as development opportunities based on Pacific-specific know-how, cultural traits, and significant biodiversity and oceanic resources. Drawing on extensive collaboration of UN entities and regional organizations on the social, environmental and economic dimensions of sustainable development, as well as on the means of implementation, this regional progress report complements country-level monitoring and reporting which, to date, has resulted in **Voluntary National Review (VNR) reports from Fiji, Kiribati, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu**.¹¹

While the publication of the quadrennial progress report represents an important step, more efforts will be required to expand its data sets, given that only 48 percent of the 132 indicators could be measured at the time, with data missing on crucial themes such as climate change, targets related to SDG 14 “life below water”, as well as quality education and SDG 11 “Sustainable Cities and Communities”.¹²

The Pacific Platform for Action on Gender Equality and Women’s Human Rights 2018–2030 provides a roadmap for action on gender equality commitments made by PICTs under the SDGs and the Pacific Leaders’ Gender Equality Declaration.¹³

⁸ These include Social Equity and Urbanisation, Environment, Resilience, Infrastructure and Urbanisation, Urban Economy and Urban Governance. (See: A New Urban Agenda for the Pacific, Pacific Urban Forum 2015. https://www.fukuoka.unhabitat.org/projects/pacific_islands/pdf/New_Pacific_Urban_Agenda2015_Pacific_Urban_Forum_Resolution_and_Outcomes_Document002.pdf)

⁹ PIFS (2018). First Quadrennial Pacific Sustainable Development Report 2018 (prepared by Pacific Islands Forum Member Countries with the support of the Council of Regional Organizations in the Pacific and UN Agencies in the Pacific) <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/First-Quadrennial-P.S.D.R.-Full-Report.pdf>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ UNESCAP (2020).

¹² PIFS (2018). First Quadrennial Pacific Sustainable Development Report 2018 (prepared by Pacific Islands Forum Member Countries with the support of the Council of Regional Organizations in the Pacific and UN Agencies in the Pacific) <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/First-Quadrennial-P.S.D.R.-Full-Report.pdf>

¹³ The Pacific Platform for Action on Gender Equality and Women’s Human Rights 2018-2030 was endorsed by Ministers for Women’s on 5th October 2017. https://spccfpstore1.blob.core.windows.net/digitalibrary-docs/files/71/7181f67b97a6d6a6a06087c136e6b732.pdf?sv=2015-12-11&sr=b&sig=YKq3gBst8M9uL2KX%2F6c0Per%2FgRsh47xnBCNsCD0vZ%2F4%3D&se=2021-05-30T23%3A52%3A27Z&sp=r&rscc=public%2C%20max-age%3D864000%2C%20max-stale%3D86400&rsct=application%2Fpdf&rscd=inline%3B%20filename%3D%22PPA_Gender_Equality_Womens_Human_Rights_003.pdf%22

The **Pacific Data Hub**, established in 2018 by the Pacific Community (SPC) with support from the Government of New Zealand, represents another milestone in strengthening availability and access to quality data. It provides a central data repository and serves as a gateway to the most comprehensive collection of data and information about the Pacific across key areas including population statistics, fisheries science, climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction and resilience, public health surveillance, conservation of plant genetic resources for food security and human rights. It contains an **SDG Dashboard for 22 Pacific Island Countries and Territories** to enable monitoring of progress against the 2030 Agenda and holds data on the above mentioned 132 Pacific Sustainable Development Indicators endorsed by Pacific Island Forum Leaders. It also features **Pacific SDG Progress Wheels** for the region and for individual PICTs which quickly visualize progress against targets of the 17 SDGs. Data for the SDG Dashboard is being collated from numerous sources, including national household collections, civil registry data, education management information systems, health information systems, treasury papers, and published reports from countries and development partners. SDG progress assessment for Asia and the Pacific and other subregions has also been made available at the Asia Pacific SDG Data Gateway, drawing on official global databases and analysing progress based on a measurement of how far the region has progressed and expected achievement of the SDG targets.

While extensive efforts and investments have been made in localizing and tracking the SDGs in the Pacific region, implementation of the 2030 Agenda has been constrained by SIDS specific development barriers and entrenched vulnerabilities. That said, not only PICTs, but the Asia-Pacific region as a whole, remain off-track on all 17 Goals.¹⁴

2.3 Long-term Pacific vision and strategy

In addition to localizing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, leaders at the 2019 Pacific Islands Forum meeting endorsed the development of a **2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent**. Based on the integrated vision of a Blue Pacific Continent as “a region of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion and increased prosperity so that all Pacific peoples are leading free, healthy and productive lives”,¹⁵ Pacific Islands Forum member countries across the region are currently holding consultations to seek the views of key stakeholders, including civil society, private sector, academia and the Council of Regional Organizations of the Pacific, and the Pacific people, on the most important “**drivers of change**” – which are emerging events, issues or trends that could have significant and multiple impacts on the region’s ability to achieve the region’s 2050 vision. “Drivers of change” are characterized by their potential to generate significant disruption and/or transformation on the long-term path to sustainable development. In the Pacific context, climate change - which is already causing significant disruption across all sustainable development domains - is considered a key “driver of change”. Other examples include emerging new technologies and health pandemics such as COVID-19 and access / logistics.

The basis for the ongoing broad-based consultations to forge a 2050 vision and strategy for the Pacific region, lies in the recognition of Pacific Islands Forum members that the “Blue Pacific Continent” faces a number of fundamental challenges,¹⁶ including:

- Ongoing vulnerabilities to environmental, climate change and economic shocks
- Continued dependencies on aid and external financing

¹⁴ UNESCAP (2020). Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2020.

¹⁵ PIFS (2017). Pacific Roadmap for Sustainable Development
<https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/The-Pacific-Roadmap-for-Sustainable-Development.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://www.forumsec.org/pacific-regionalism/>

- Low levels of economic growth combined with a narrow economic base
- Stubborn levels of poverty and rising inequalities
- Dispersed populations, leading to high service delivery costs
- Structural constraints, such as distance from markets, small productive base, high transport costs

In addition, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat highlights changes and emerging challenges in the global and regional context,¹⁷ such as:

- The COVID-19 global pandemic which has seen unprecedented border closures resulting in immediate and long-term health, economic and social challenges
- Emerging tendencies towards populism and nationalism
- Challenges to multilateralism, including willingness to withdraw from regional political groupings and multilateral trade agreements, and increased preferences for bilateral action
- Rising inequalities, causing social and political instability, and undermining development
- An increasing number of political actors and donors, including in the Pacific
- Challenges to the stability of the global rules-based order and competition between Pacific Rim major powers
- Continued degradation of, and disputes over, natural resources; stagnation in access to basic services such as water, sanitation at community levels¹⁸

At the same time, it is recognized that the shifting regional and global context provides new opportunities for the Pacific region,¹⁹ i.a. through:

- Increased political attention to the role of oceans in development
- Increased political attention to the climate crisis and its effects on Pacific island nations
- Advances in technology that can enable the region to strengthen connectivity and collaboration
- A set of agreed values that underpin Pacific regionalism, including Pacific cultural values
- New global frameworks and methodologies for valuing the immense ecosystem and biodiversity of the Pacific
- Significant increase in aid/investments in the Pacific by DAC and non-DAC donors, as well as multilateral development institutions²⁰

The world of work is also undergoing transformative changes, driven by technological innovations, demographic shifts, environmental and climate change and globalization. In the Pacific, country-specific “future of work” challenges need to be addressed throughout economic, social and environmental transitions to ensure a fair, inclusive and secure future of work with full, productive and freely chosen employment and decent work for all.²¹

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Some PICTs like Tonga put strong emphasis on basic services in the current budget cycle. Ref: MOF, Budget Statement 2020-2021.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰The risk of growing debt which comes with some of these investments and other interesting points are discussed here: https://www.lowyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/Rajah%2C%20Dayant%2C%20Pryke_Belt%20and%20Road%20and%20the%20debt%20diplomacy%20in%20the%20Pacific_WEB.pdf

²¹ ILO (2017). A study on the future of work in the Pacific; ILO (2019) Labour Mobility in Pacific Island Countries; ILO (2019) Digitalization and Decent Work: Implications for Pacific Island Countries; ILO (2019) Employment and environmental sustainability in Asia and the Pacific

The ongoing global crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a massive disruption to economies and labour markets in the Pacific. It constitutes an enormous challenge for the Pacific region and PICTs to achieve agreed regional and national development priorities and goals. In this context, the process of developing a 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent provides a unique opportunity to reach out widely to the Pacific people, with a focus on the most marginalized and vulnerable populations, to jointly explore bold and innovative ideas and approaches which enable PICTs to “build back better” and stay on course to achieve the SDGs.

Any long-term vision and sustainable development strategy for the Pacific needs to closely consider the **population dynamics of PICTs** as a prerequisite for meeting the future demand for resources from a growing and more prosperous population, while protecting the environment and combating climate change. Policies and programmes for sustainable development should take account of changes in population size or age structure and processes of migration or urbanization.²² The demographic characteristics of the population are a key determinant of the type and range of services needed by a community in the areas of housing, education, health care, decent work and a safe environment. The large proportion of youth in the Pacific presents particular challenges but also substantial development opportunities (see chapter 5). Likewise, a deeper understanding of demographic dynamics will be the basis for any serious discussions in the framework of climate negotiations.²³ While reliable statistics are scarce and census data is collected infrequently across the region, evidence suggests that population growth is set to be the single greatest influence on every development sector in the Pacific Islands, from infrastructure and services capacity to outcomes in health, education, employment, economic development, peace, and security.²⁴

It is also critical that UN policy and programme work going forward is aligned, supportive and complementary to the **Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific: An integrated approach to address climate change and disaster risk management 2017 - 2030 (FRDP)** and the **Pacific Resilience Partnership (PRP)**. The FRDP, which was approved by Pacific leaders in September 2016, is the overarching regional framework for providing an integrated all-stakeholder approach for coping with and managing climate change and disaster risks, in order to make more efficient use of resources, to rationalise multiple sources of funding which address similar needs, and for more effective mainstreaming of risks into development planning and budgets. It is closely aligned to key global agreements, including the Paris Agreement on Climate Change 2015, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, and the Small Islands Developing States Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway 2014, and identifies three interrelated goals to enhance resilience to disasters and climate change in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty:

- strengthened integrated adaptation and risk reduction to enhance resilience to climate change and disasters;
- low-carbon development;
- strengthened disaster preparedness, response, and recovery.

²² United Nations Population Division (2019). Review and appraisal of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and its contribution to the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/trends/ConciseReport2019/English.pdf>

²³ UNFPA, IIED and El Colegio de Mexico (2013). The Demography of Adaptation to Climate Change. <https://www.unfpa.org/publications/demography-adaptation-climate-change>

²⁴ Lowy Institute (2020). Demanding the future: Navigating the Pacific’s youth bulge

The governance and operationalisation of the FRDP is supported by the multi-stakeholder Pacific Resilience Partnership (PRP), which consist of government, civil society, private sector, regional agencies, development partners and academia. The PRP is mandated by Pacific leaders to support national implementation and monitoring of the FRDP. The PRP also acts as a key forum for regional policy deliberations on climate change and disaster risk reduction through the biennial Pacific Resilience Meeting, Technical Working Groups, and provision of policy and technical advice. The UN is one of 15 constituencies represented on the PRP and is also represented as chairs and members of the Technical Working Groups. This representation provides a direct link between UN strategic support and programming (at the regional and national level) and the FRDP.

The Pacific Islands Meteorological Strategy 2019-2021²⁵ ensures the provision of more accurate, reliable, and actionable weather, climate, and climate and hydrological information through the National Meteorological and Hydrological Services, thus reducing Pacific people’s exposure to risks and harm from the impacts of climate change, including natural disasters from hydro-meteorological related events and shocks.

2.4 Macroeconomic outlook

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 has inflicted multiple shocks on the economies of PICTs. The collapse of international tourism has deprived these nations of a vital source of foreign exchange revenue, with a devastating impact on livelihoods and income. For many of these economies, external trade has also been adversely affected by supply chain disruptions, including in the fisheries industry. Amid a deteriorating global economic outlook, the Pacific states have also seen a decline in commodity exports, remittances, and foreign direct investment, all of which are important external sources of finance for these countries.

The fallout from the pandemic shock has been compounded by the continued vulnerability of the Pacific to recurrent natural disasters and weather-related shocks. In the aftermath of Cyclone Harold, which devastated Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu in April 2020, humanitarian relief efforts were delayed due to strict quarantine rules and lockdown measures in the affected countries, hindering the movement of emergency personnel and supplies. Against these bleak backdrops, the Pacific island economies as a group are projected to contract by 5.5 percent in 2020, before experiencing a modest growth recovery of 3.7 percent in 2021. In contrast, GDP of these island economies contracted by only 0.6 percent in 2009 in the aftermath of the global financial crisis. Among the different economies, however, there is a stark variation in the growth outlook (Figure 1).

Figure 1: GDP growth rates and forecasts for PICTs (except Niue and Tokelau)

Economy	2009	2019	2020 ^e	2021 ^f	2022 ^f
PICTs	2.2	3.8	-5.5	3.7	0.2
Cook Islands	-0.1	5.3	-9.0	1.0	0.8

²⁵ <https://www.sprep.org/attachments/Publications/PacificIslandsMeteorologicalStrategy.pdf>

Fiji	-3.0	1.0	-15.0	5.3	1.8
Kiribati	-0.7	2.0	0.6	3.9	-1.8
Marshall Islands	0.0	3.8	-5.5	3.7	0.1
Micronesia (Federated States of)	-1.0	3.0	-2.0	3.0	1.0
Nauru	0.0	1.0	-2.4	1.1	3.9
Palau	-2.1	-3.1	-10.5	1.2	0.6
Samoa	-4.9	2.9	-5.0	3.3	2.2
Solomon Islands	-1.2	2.8	-6.0	3.9	1.6
Tonga	-0.4	3.0	-3.0	2.5	4.1
Tuvalu	-1.7	4.1	2.7	3.2	3.3
Vanuatu	3.8	3.0	-9.8	5.3	2.4

Source: UN ESCAP (August 2020), [Can this time be different? Challenges and opportunities for Asia-Pacific economies in the aftermath of COVID-19](#) ; UN ESCAP (May 2011), [Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2011](#). f: forecast, e: estimate

The interactions of the simultaneous shocks arising from the pandemic, the global economic downturn and depressed aggregate demand, and natural disasters, pose significant downside risks for the Pacific island States. Amid narrow economic bases and weak productive capacities, most of these countries do not have sufficient domestic financial resources to effectively address these compounding challenges on their own. Importantly, the pandemic will disproportionately influence the lives and well-being of the poorest and the most vulnerable in society in the absence of adequate social safety nets.

Swift measures contained the pandemic, but fragile healthcare systems remain a risk

PICTs have thus far managed the public health threat from the pandemic remarkably well, with only few countries recording relatively small numbers of cases and few deaths.²⁶ The success of the Pacific island economies in preventing the spread of the virus has been largely attributed to swift responses by the authorities at the initial onset of the pandemic, which included border closures, travel restrictions, and

²⁶ WHO COVID 19 Dashboard, December 11, 2020

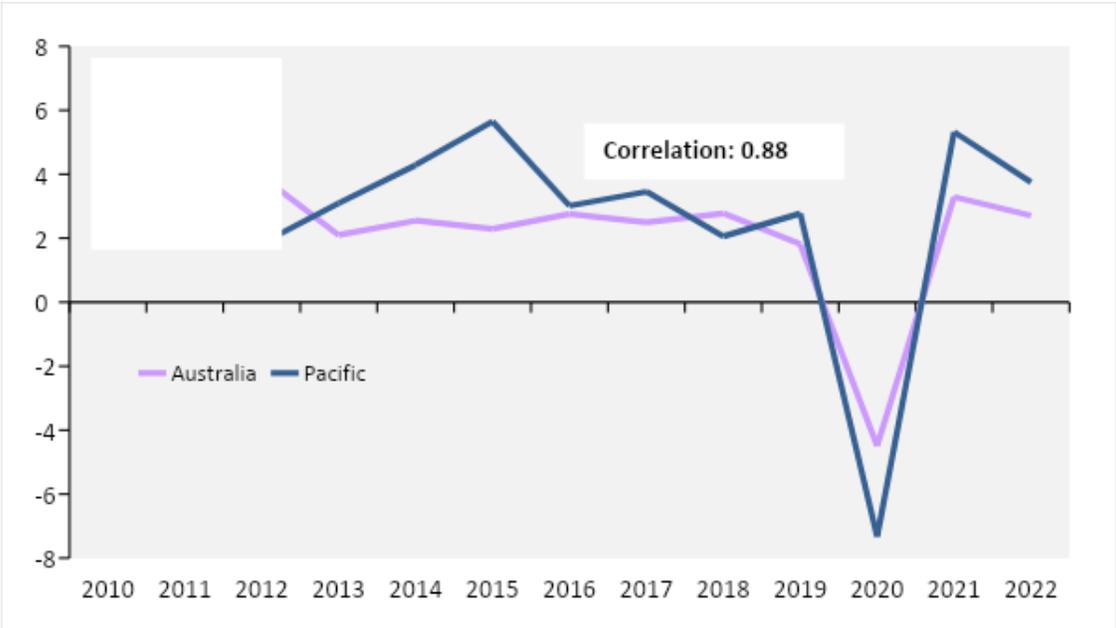
state of emergency declarations. Geographical isolation, to a certain extent, has also thwarted the transmission of the disease to these countries.

Given the continued rapid increase in new infections across the world, there still remains a risk that the virus could gain a foothold in PICTs. Amid fragile national healthcare systems with limited capacity to detect and treat a new disease, failure to contain the spread could quickly turn into an uncontrolled community outbreak. Given the small size of the population, this would have debilitating effects on the functioning of the economy and society.

Growth prospects hinge critically on Australia’s economic outlook

For many of the Pacific island States, the economic recovery will be constrained by the modest growth prospects of the Australian economy going forward. The Pacific Island economies generally grow and contract in lockstep with the Australian economy, with usually high degree of correlation between their GDP growth rates (Figure 2). This is based on high levels of dependence of these nations on Australia as a source of demand, remittance flows, and development aid. Following an estimated contraction of 4.0 percent in 2020, the Reserve Bank of Australia projects a modest recovery of 5.0 percent in 2021 and 4.0 percent percent in 2022.

Figure 2: GDP growth (%) of Australia and the Pacific island economies



Note: Pacific islands GDP growth is the simple average of GDP growth in Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu, Source: UNDESA

In the second quarter of 2020, Australia’s real GDP contracted at a sharp pace of 6.4 percent on a year-on-year basis, as lockdown measures weighed heavily on consumer spending. By June 2020, most regions of the country were successful in bringing new infection cases down to very low levels, enabling the easing of mobility restrictions. However, a second wave in the State of Victoria, which accounts for 25 percent of Australia’s economic output, prompted the authorities to reimpose strict containment measures on that State throughout most of the second half of 2020. This reflects the lingering risk of more prolonged and widespread lockdowns across the country, given the persistent threat of new virus outbreaks. This

would in turn further dampen household spending and business revenues, while weighing on job creation. With a high level of spare capacity in the labour market, the unemployment rate is expected to peak at 8 percent by the end of 2020 (2019: 5.2 percent), and only decline gradually over the next two years.²⁷ Amid high uncertainty and weak sentiments, business investment will remain sluggish. Nevertheless, domestic demand has been supported to a certain extent by policy stimulus measures, including wage subsidies and social assistance payments, though largely only for those in the formal sector.

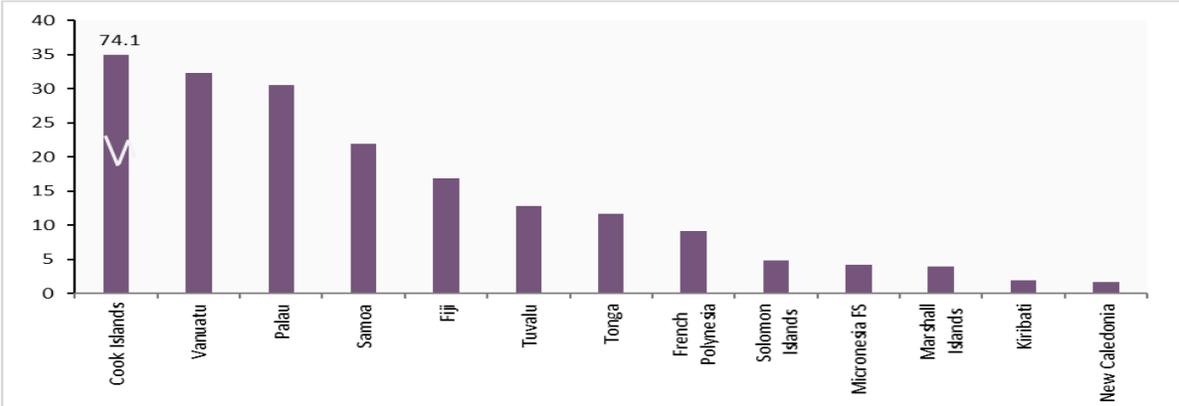
On the external front, while iron ore and base metal exports are likely to remain robust, weak global demand and prices will weigh on Australia’s earnings from its energy exports, particularly coal and liquefied natural gas (LNG). LNG exports will also be further constrained over the next year due to extended maintenance at facilities. In addition, the outlook for migration flows as well as tourism and education exports are very bleak given that international borders are unlikely to be fully reopened before late 2021. These headwinds are compounded by rising geopolitical and trade tensions with China, which could significantly impact exports from, and foreign investment flows to, Australia.

Impact on the tourism industry

Tourism is the economic lifeline of many PICTs, being the main source of foreign exchange revenue and a key driver of job creation and economic growth. Since April 2020, there have been minimal tourist arrivals in all Pacific countries, as most countries in the region have closed their borders to contain the pandemic. Figure 3 shows international tourism receipts as a share of GDP across the various Pacific Island economies. These figures, however, only partly reflect the importance of tourism to their economies, given the spillover effects of direct tourism revenue on other economic sectors. The collapse in tourist arrivals has not only directly affected income and employment in the sectors directly related to travel, such as airlines, ground transport, and hotels, but it has also had a magnified impact on the rest of the economy, through indirect effects on other sectors, including agriculture and construction. Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), which make up about 80 percent of the tourism sector globally have been particularly affected.

Figure 3: International tourism receipts in selected Pacific island economies

Percentage of GDP



*Note: Data for all countries are for 2019, except for Cook Islands and New Caledonia which are for 2017.
Source: UN World Tourism Organization.*

²⁷ <https://www.rba.gov.au/publications/smp/2020/nov/pdf/statement-on-monetary-policy-2020-11.pdf>

In Fiji and Vanuatu, many MSMEs depend on the cruise industry as they provide various services, including selling handicrafts and souvenirs, to cruise ships passengers. In addition, the sharp fall in tourism, and subsequently, reduced tax revenues, have weakened fiscal balances of many of the small island economies and also reduce the flow of foreign direct investment (FDI), as the tourism sector is often the largest recipient of FDI. In countries such as Fiji, Samoa and Vanuatu, the tourism industry contributes about 30 - 45 percent towards GDP, and 15 – 35 percent of total employment. In the Cook Islands, the contribution of the tourism sector to the economy is as high as 85 percent of GDP.²⁸ Importantly, the prolonged decline in tourism revenues will have disproportionately high impact on the vulnerable segments of society, given that the tourism industry comprises largely of small and medium enterprises as well as jobs with a high degree of informality, with little social protection coverage (see also 3.3.1).

Many PICTs are extremely dependent on tourism revenue from Australia and New Zealand, with tourist arrivals from these two countries accounting for almost half of total tourist arrivals to the Pacific.²⁹ This makes them highly susceptible to economic downturns and travel restrictions imposed by these two countries. Several Pacific countries, such as the Cook Islands, Fiji, and Vanuatu, have indicated interest in establishing a travel bubble with Australia and New Zealand. This would help them to revive their domestic industries and alleviate the severe strains on livelihoods.

Merchandise trade and commodity prices suffering significant setbacks

The pandemic has also significantly affected merchandise trade in the Pacific economies, due to both weaker global and regional demand as well as disruptions to transportation networks. In countries that have a strong reliance on the fishing industry, including Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, and Nauru, fishing revenues were impacted by port closures, quarantine requirements, and limitations on the number of observers to monitor catches. In Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu, headwinds to agriculture production and exports have been compounded by extensive damages caused by Cyclone Harold to crops and infrastructure.

Potential decline in remittance inflows can exacerbate economic downturns

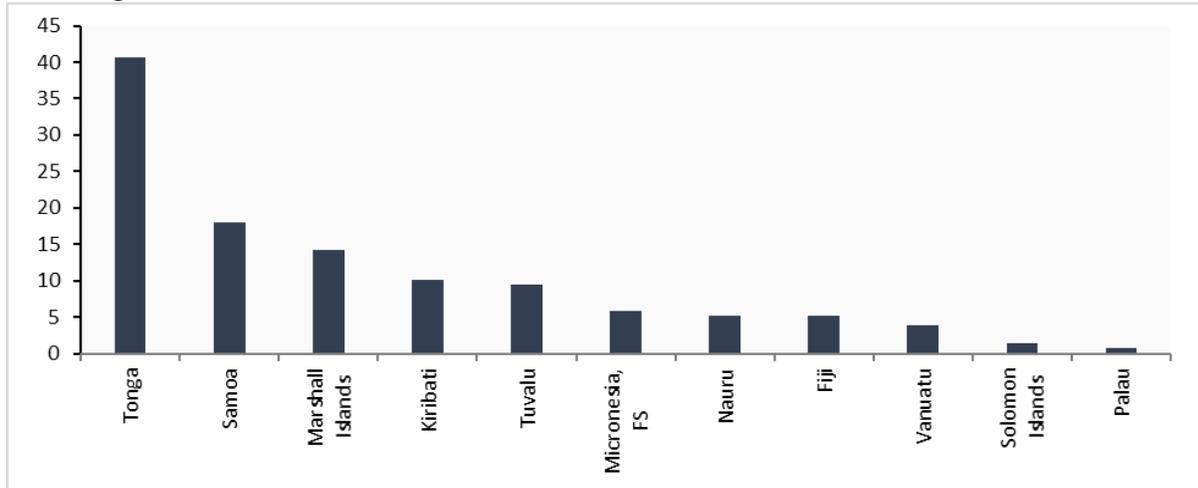
The deterioration in global economic conditions has also sharply reduced remittances, which is a major source of income for households in many Pacific countries (Figure 4). Many migrant workers from the Pacific were employed as seasonal workers in Australia and New Zealand, which have experienced disruptions due to mobility restrictions. In Tonga, remittance inflows account for over 40 percent of GDP, making it one of the most remittance-dependent economies in the world. Kiribati, Samoa, and Tuvalu also receive substantial remittances, amounting to around 10 percent of GDP. In Fiji, Federal States of Micronesia and Nauru, remittances account for about 5 percent of GDP. As migrant workers face employment losses and wage cuts, the possible decline in remittances will not only constrain consumer spending but also threaten livelihoods.

²⁸ Data from the South Pacific Tourism Organization. <https://corporate.southpacificislands.travel/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Pacific-Tourism-Sector-Status-report-Final.pdf> /

²⁹ <https://www.corporate.southpacificislands.travel/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/2017-AnnualTourist-Arrivals-Review-F.pdf>

Figure 4: Personal remittances in selected PICTs

Percentage of GDP



Note: Data for all countries is for 2018.

Source: World Development Indicators, World Bank.

Investments dwindle amid high uncertainties and weak demand

Amid high uncertainties and disruptions due to pandemic-related measures, investments in the Pacific have slowed significantly. In Kiribati, Nauru, Tuvalu, restrictions on labour mobility and equipment have resulted in delays to ongoing large infrastructure projects. This has in turn impacted jobs and income in the construction sector.

In addition, the Pacific island States are also expected to experience a slump in foreign direct investment flows, in tandem with the expected contraction in global foreign direct investment (FDI) in 2020 and 2021. In Fiji, for instance, the government has estimated a 40 percent plunge in FDI for the whole of 2020. Across the Pacific economies, while weak global demand is likely to weigh on FDI across all sectors, the outlook for FDI into the tourism as well as commodities sectors are particularly bleak. Importantly, the pandemic has compounded existing challenges for the Pacific countries in attracting strong and high quality FDI flows. These challenges include small market size, remoteness from international markets, inadequate infrastructure and high transport costs. The region's high vulnerability to natural disasters will also continue to weigh on FDI into the region.

Inflationary pressures to remain subdued

Inflation is expected to remain subdued across most of the Pacific, reflecting weak aggregate demand and low global commodity prices. In the Solomon Islands, the imposition of price regulations on basic consumer goods will also exert downward pressure on overall prices. However, prolonged border closures in the Pacific and renewed lockdowns across the world could result in more severe supply chain disruptions, resulting in shortages of certain goods and fueling higher inflation. In addition, depreciation in domestic currencies could also drive up the cost of imported goods including food prices, as many of these Pacific island economies are net food importers.

Fiscal stimulus prevented economic collapse

Alongside the imposition of stringent pandemic containment measures, many Pacific island States announced fiscal stimulus packages aimed at mitigating the adverse health, economic, and social consequences of the pandemic. In Fiji, which is one of the more developed Pacific economies, the fiscal response to the crisis has been large and well-targeted. The government introduced two major stimulus packages, amounting to an estimated total of 26 percent of GDP. Measures announced include unemployment assistance, tax and tariff cuts, and a holiday program for loan repayment. The government also guaranteed the debt of its national airlines and allocated a subsidy to incentivize the first 150,000 tourists in the next fiscal year. These measures will help to stimulate consumer spending and investments necessary for an entrenched recovery. In addition, the Fijian Government also announced several measures to boost agriculture production in order to ensure food security.

Similarly, most of the other Pacific economies also introduced various fiscal measures, mainly targeted at easing and increasing the cashflow of households and businesses. Kiribati, Palau, and Samoa expanded unemployment benefits as many segments of society suffered large losses of income. Several countries, including Tonga, Vanuatu, and Samoa, announced moratorium on loan payments, which will help businesses, especially MSMEs, avert bankruptcies. In addition, Palau, the Solomon Islands and Tonga also provided temporary relief on payment of rental or utilities.

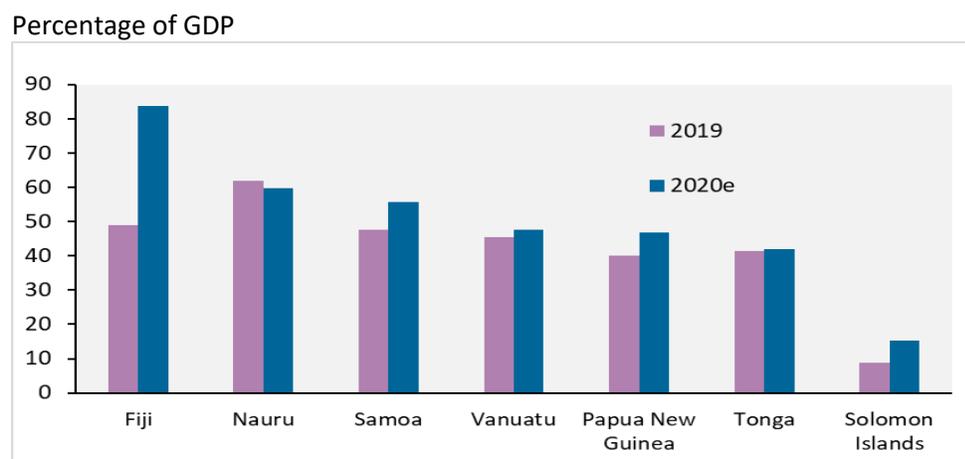
In most Pacific countries, the pandemic has significantly affected both the revenue and expenditure sides of government budgets. Emergency healthcare measures as well as stimulus measures to support domestic demand have resulted in a sharp increase in government expenditures. At the same time, revenues have fallen sharply amid the collapse in economic activity, particularly in the tourism and commodity sectors. Consequently, fiscal positions are likely to weaken significantly. The IMF estimates that the public debt-to-GDP ratio rose from 49 percent in 2019 to 84 percent in 2020 (Figure 5). While several Pacific islands States have relatively low public debt, this is a reflection of their lower income levels and limited access to external financing.³⁰ Against this backdrop, there are growing concerns over fiscal sustainability and increased risk of debt distress. In response to urgent balance of payments needs created by the pandemic, Papua New Guinea, Samoa and the Solomon Islands have received emergency financial support from the IMF (see also section 4.2). Other international organizations, such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank have also extended support in the forms of loans, technical assistance and grants to several Pacific countries including the Solomon Islands, the Marshall Islands, Samoa, and Tonga. In this challenging environment, financial support from the international community is more important than ever for the Pacific economies.

The expansionary fiscal policy response in Asia and the Pacific has been critical for countering a slowdown in economic activity and stemming losses in jobs and working hours. Regional analysis of the size of the fiscal stimulus relative to the labour market disruption due to COVID-19 during the first three quarters of 2020, measured in working-hour losses, shows that fiscal measures have not been sufficient to fully offset working-hour losses and highlights the need to fill the fiscal stimulus gap, particularly in the developing economies.³¹

³⁰ For 2019, the estimated median public debt for the Pacific island economies as a group is 30.6 percent of GDP, in comparison to above 50 percent for the middle-income countries as a group.

³¹ ILO (2020) Asia-Pacific Employment and Social Outlook 2020

Figure 5: Gross general government debt of selected Pacific economies



Source: IMF World Economic Outlook October 2020.

Central banks eased monetary policy to boost liquidity and credit flows

The massive economic shock from the pandemic also prompted many central banks in the Pacific to ease monetary policy stances. Interest rates were reduced in Fiji and Vanuatu, by between 25 to 200 basis points. Central banks also deployed a range of other policy tools aimed at boosting liquidity and supporting credit flows to the private sector. This included reducing bank reserve requirements, loosening countercyclical capital buffers, and expanding credit guarantee schemes for small and medium enterprises. Several countries, including Tonga and Palau also reduced or suspended loan repayments to ease the cashflow of households and businesses. In addition, given the severity of the shock, the central banks in the Solomon Islands announced their readiness to purchase government securities in the secondary market. Looking ahead, monetary policies in the Pacific economies are likely to remain accommodative given high downside risks and a fragile growth outlook. Nevertheless, given that monetary policy transmission mechanisms in the Pacific countries are weak, it is particularly important for policymakers in these economies to coordinate monetary and fiscal policies, as well as to explore all available tools (Yang et al, 2011).³²

Support from the international community critical for the recovery in the Pacific

COVID-19 serves as a reminder of how vulnerable the Pacific island States are to global shocks. This massive depletion of financial resources as a consequence of this pandemic will constrain the ability of these economies to address critical infrastructure bottlenecks, progress on climate adaptation measures and pursue sustainable development. The need to step up public health efforts has become even more pressing given the generally lower health security capabilities in the region. Furthermore, as unemployment rates increase sharply, the livelihood of low-skilled workers and the more vulnerable segments of society will be severely impacted. Many workers, particularly in tourism-related services, who are living just above the poverty line are now facing an elevated risk of falling into poverty. Amid high downside risks on multiple fronts, these economies could face even more devastation in the absence of sufficient assistance from the international community, encompassing financial, health resources, and

³²https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228118399_Monetary_Policy_Transmission_Mechanisms_in_Pacific_Island_Countries/link/00b7d5252f9beef000000/download

technical support. Global logistic networks must also be allowed to continue to operate to ensure that PICTs have access to essential goods such as food and medical supplies.

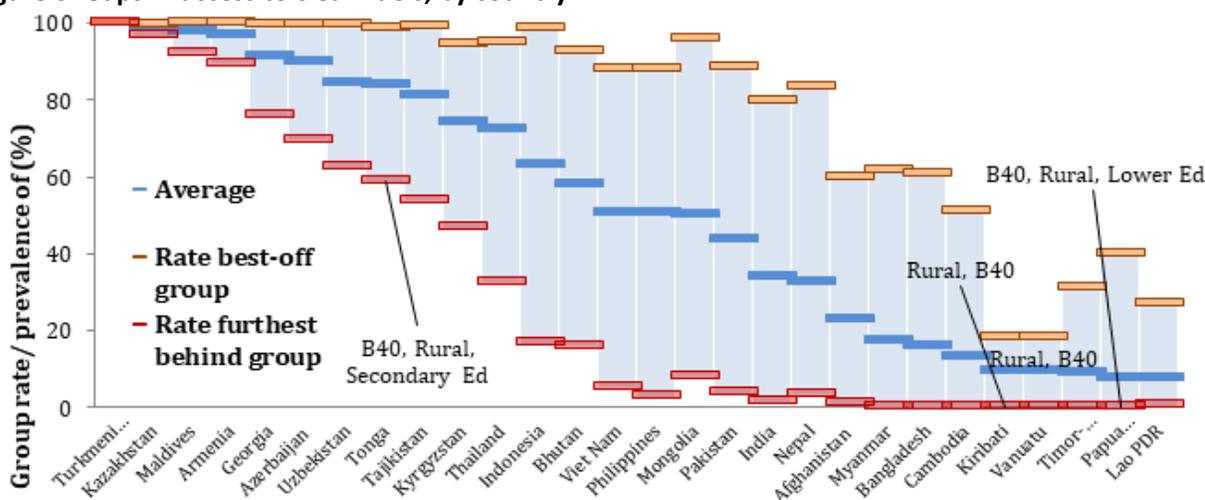
With effective support from the international partners, the current economic crisis presents an opportunity for PICTs to diversify their economies, reduce excessive dependence on imports, improve food security and accelerate structural transformation.

3. Integrated Assessment of SDG Progress

An integrated assessment across the dimensions of the 2030 Agenda and the 17 SDGs helps in applying the principle of “leaving no one behind” (LNOB). It also supports targeting and tailoring development programming to population groups which are disproportionately marginalized. As this chapter shows, the groups left furthest behind are not necessarily the same across different SDGs. In most cases several characteristics intersect to create disadvantage, such as being poor, a woman or from a rural area. Household surveys can be particularly useful to reveal how various circumstances, or disadvantages, intersect to form furthest behind groups.

In Tonga, for example, 84 percent of all households use clean fuels (Figure 6). The furthest behind group, with an access rate of only 59 percent, consists of poorer, rural households with secondary education as the highest education level. In Kiribati, 9 percent of the population has access to clean fuels. Here, the “furthest behind” group consists of rural, poorer households with an access rate of only 3.4 percent.

Figure 6: Gaps in access to clean fuels, by country³³



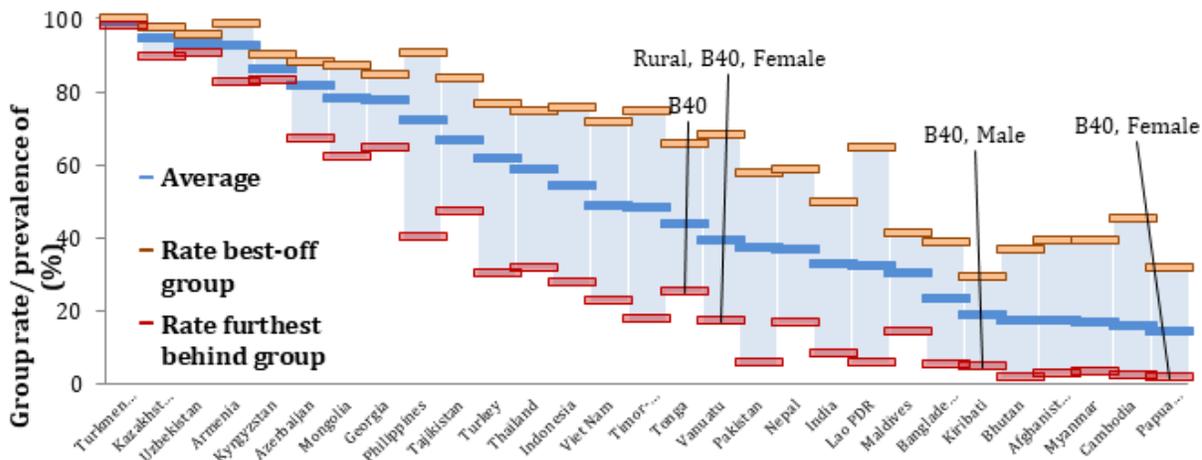
Note: The red legends describe the composition of the furthest behind groups. B40= households in the bottom 40 of the wealth distribution, Rural = rural households, Lower / Secondary Ed = highest education in the household is either lower or secondary.

The composition of these furthest behind groups also varies from one indicator to another, or from one PICT to another. For example, the group furthest behind in completion of secondary education in Kiribati

³³ Source: ESCAP analysis using CART methodology based on the latest MICS and DHS from Papua New Guinea (2018), Kiribati (2019), Tonga (2019) and Vanuatu (2006). For more information on the methodology, please see: <https://www.unescap.org/resources/leave-no-one-behind-decision-tree-user-reference-guide>.

is poorer men, of whom only 4.3 percent have complete secondary education, compared with an average of 18 percent (figure 7).³⁴

Figure 7: Gaps in secondary education completion, by country



Note: The red legends describe the composition of the furthest behind groups. B40= living in households from the bottom 40 of the wealth distribution, Rural = rural households.

More granular data, often available in household surveys or other microdata sources, have the potential to reveal valuable information on who is truly most marginalized and in which development area. Even in the smallest islands, the variation in opportunity levels among groups can be significant and merits more detailed analysis.

3.1 Climate Change, Disaster Resilience, and Environmental Protection

3.1.1 Assessment of SDG progress

A comparison of SDG progress in the Pacific with other subregions of the Asia-Pacific region shows above average performance towards achieving SDG 12 “Responsible consumption and production”, but relatively weak performance on SDG 13 “Climate action”, and on SDGs 14 “Life below water” and SDG 15 “Life on land”.³⁵

With regards to SDG 11 “Inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities and human settlements”, many PICTs – and mostly their urban poor and marginalized populations living in low-lying coastal areas susceptible to sea level rise and cyclone impacts, along floodplains, riverbanks and steep slopes - have been affected by multiple natural disasters in recent years. For example, 77,756 people in Fiji were directly affected by disasters in 2019 and 84,311 for Tonga in 2018³⁶, with post-disaster needs assessments

³⁴ Source: ESCAP analysis using CART Methodology based on the latest MICS and DHS from Papua New Guinea (2018), Kiribati (2019), Tonga (2019) and Vanuatu (2006). For more information on the methodology, please see: <https://www.unescap.org/resources/leave-no-one-behind-decision-tree-user-reference-guide>

³⁵ UNESCAP (2020). Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2020

³⁶ Pacific Data Hub (accessed 11/18/20). <https://mg.pacificdata.org/dashboard/sdg-11-sustainable-cities-and-communities>

indicating significant economic damage and labor market impact³⁷, equivalent to 30 percent of national GDP in Fiji (2016), 64 percent in Vanuatu in 2015³⁸ and 64 percent in 2020.³⁹

Given that Pacific Island countries are amongst the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change and disasters, the economic losses for PICTs due to natural disasters exceed those in almost all other countries in the world.⁴⁰ The World Risk Index 2019⁴¹ ranks five Pacific Island countries among the top 20 most at-risk countries, including Vanuatu and Tonga, which are ranked first and third respectively.

In terms of infrastructure investment, developing economies in the Pacific are under significant impacts of natural disasters. The average annual loss associated with natural disasters is about 18 percent of total investment, nine times as much as the average loss of Asia and the Pacific as a whole.¹³

Not only do most Pacific Islands – which the World Risk Index assesses under the Oceania country group - fall in the category of vulnerability or high vulnerability, but many of them also show a significant lack of coping and adaptation capacities compared to other regions (figure 8). Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Kiribati and Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) are amongst the countries with the lowest adaptation capacities in the world.

Figure 8: Comparison of medians by country groups (World Risk Index 2019)

Country group	Risk \bar{x}	Exposure \bar{x}	Vulnerability \bar{x}	Susceptibility \bar{x}	Lack of coping \bar{x}	Lack of adaptation \bar{x}
Africa	8.94	13.57	62.98	50.30	84.39	55.04
America	7.52	16.37	44.37	23.58	74.97	33.24
Asia	5.77	12.32	44.80	23.46	76.66	36.57
Europe	3.30	11.51	30.18	16.15	57.68	20.00
Oceania	16.24	29.03	49.46	31.15	79.81	42.93
Worldwide	6.49	13.16	45.42	23.77	75.61	36.41

The vulnerability of PICTs to climate change is also increasing due to economic and social changes and the degradation of natural resources. Key drivers include population growth and migration (internal and external), poor coastal development and land use planning, unplanned urban growth, and water and ecosystem degradation including pollution of sub-surface and coastal waters.⁴²

The average proportion of Pacific islanders (excluding PNG) living in areas classified as urban based on the most recent population censuses is 49 percent, with urban growth rates continuing to exceed rural growth rates in nearly all Pacific economies⁴³. Annual increases in the urban population are projected to reach

³⁷ ILO (2020). Pacific labour market review 2020: Pre-COVID-19 baseline labour market information for post-disaster recovery https://www.ilo.org/suva/publications/WCMS_754824/lang--en/index.htm

³⁸ Pacific Data Hub (accessed 10/18/20). <https://pacificdata.org/content/17-goals-transform-pacific>

³⁹ Government of Vanuatu (2020) Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (TC Harold and COVID-19, Vanuatu)

⁴⁰ IBRD/The World Bank (2016). Climate change and Disaster Management. Pacific Possible Background Paper No.6. <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/655081503691935252/pdf/119111-WP-PUBLIC-p154324-ppClimatechangebackgroundfinal.pdf>

⁴¹ Bündnis Entwicklung Hilft and Ruhr University Bochum (2019). WorldRiskReport 2019. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/WorldRiskReport-2019_Online_english.pdf

⁴² IBRD/The World Bank (2016). Climate change and Disaster Management. Pacific Possible Background Paper No.6.

⁴³ UN-Habitat (2020). National Urban Policy: Pacific Region Report. <https://unhabitat.org/national-urban-policy-pacific-region-report>

between 3.5 and 4 percent by 2050⁴⁴, greater in the Melanesia region where the urban growth rate of some countries such as the Solomon Islands already exceeds 5 percent⁴⁵. Importantly, most of these figures do not include peri-urban areas where most of the growth is occurring. The poor management of urbanization and pressure on available land has led to environmental degradation including the removal of mangroves to make way for private sector coastal development, a key natural barrier against storm surges and cyclones. At the Fifth Pacific Urban Forum held in 2019, leaders agreed on the need to strengthen current regional institutional and governance frameworks, along with changing the way cities are planned and infrastructure developed to reduce the vulnerability and contribution of Pacific cities to climate change and natural hazards⁴⁶.

The concept of Pacific “Ocean Cities” and a blue urban agenda has also been put forward to recognize and integrate the links between the impacts of urban growth and development (SDG 11), climate change (SDG 13), ocean health and coastal systems (SDG 14). Nature-based solutions, working closely with nature to create human settlements while maintaining healthy ecosystems, are at the core of such an approach, with the ability to provide multiple co-benefits across social-ecological-economic systems, enhancing community resilience and wellbeing alongside climate change mitigation⁴⁷. Through the ratification of the 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, 12 PICTs are working towards environmental sustainability through the active protection and management of a wide array of cultural and natural World Heritage properties, including oceans, forests, traditional livelihoods and their management practices.⁴⁸

On **SDG 12 “Responsible consumption and production”** inadequate waste management practices and restricted land availability continue to contribute to increased volumes of solid and hazardous waste in the region. Organic waste constitutes approximately 44 percent of the waste stream, and over 80 percent of ocean litter is derived from land-based sources. There is only limited data on recycling rates and hazardous waste treatment in the Pacific, although these are identified as priorities for sustainable development. The PIF quadrennial progress report highlights the steep increase in annual waste generation in PICT urban areas (Figure 9). Municipal waste collection services collect only a small amount of solid waste generated, the lowest in countries such as the Solomon Islands and Tuvalu⁴⁹, with open dumpsites and illegal dumping being key challenges that worsen problems of flooding, landslides, contamination to land, groundwaters and the breeding of disease vectors. Unclear municipal service boundaries also mean a large and growing informal settlement population remains unserved.

⁴⁴ WFP and SPC Regional Food Security Atlas of the Pacific, 2018

⁴⁵ Solomon Islands National Statistics Office (2019). National Population and Housing Census Provisional Count

⁴⁶ Fifth Pacific Urban Forum Declaration (2019).

<https://www.clgf.org.uk/default/assets/File/Fifth%20Pacific%20Urban%20Forum%20Declaration.pdf>

⁴⁷ ESCAP (2019). Ocean Cities Regional Policy Guide: Delivering Resilient Solutions in Pacific Island Settlements.

https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Ocean%20Cities%20Policy%20Guide_300519.pdf

⁴⁸ 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage

<https://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/>

⁴⁹ ADB (2014). Solid Waste Management in the Pacific. <https://think-asia.org/bitstream/handle/11540/411/solid-waste-management-appropriate-technologies.pdf>

Inadequate solid waste management is further complicated by climate change. Flooding and sea level rise are threatening the operability of many landfill sites.⁵⁰ The Pacific Regional Waste and Pollution Management Strategy (2016–2025) aims to help improve the management of waste and pollution, and the Cleaner Pacific 2025 Strategy seeks to strengthen institutional and human capacity, promote public-private partnerships, implement sustainable best practices and promote regional and national cooperation.⁵¹

Many PICTs such as Fiji, Marshall Islands, Palau, Samoa and Vanuatu have proposed, drafted or adopted waste and environment legislation to stimulate circular economy approaches, and to finance improved waste recovery systems and distribute the costs of managing end-of-life materials. These include bans on imports of plastic bags and other plastic products, extended producer responsibility, container deposit schemes such as *Kaoki Maange* in Kiribati, advance disposal fees, environmental taxes and levies e.g. on plastic bags to discourage consumer demand, and user pays or pay-as-you-go fees. To gather detailed national-level information and accurate data, comprehensive waste studies and audits have recently been completed in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands, and are currently underway in Tuvalu, Palau, Samoa, Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati and Tonga.⁵² Modern, sanitary landfill facilities and controlled dumps financed through external development assistance are in place in several PICTs including Fiji, Tonga, Vanuatu and Samoa, providing significant improvements over open dumping.⁵³

The achievement of **SDG 13 “Climate Action”** is central to the sustainable development of PICTs. The increasing intensity of extreme weather and hydrological events caused by climate change, and their impacts through cyclones, floods, droughts, winds, waves, storm surges, and coastal inundation, continue to cause major economic loss and damage to PICTs. Higher ocean and land temperatures add pressure on fragile island ecosystems, including through changes in the seasonality and duration of rainfall, coastal erosion and saline intrusion; and rising sea levels threaten the existence of entire low-lying atoll island nations, such as Kiribati, Tuvalu and Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI).⁵⁴ Climate change is already adversely affecting agriculture, fisheries, coastal zones, water resources, health, ecosystems and thus the very foundations of the lives and livelihoods of people in PICTs. Climate change related mobility, comprising voluntary migration and displacement, is likely to increase both internally and across borders.

To adapt to the impacts of climate change, some governments are supporting “planned relocation” or the movement of climate change affected communities, notably in Fiji. Furthermore, efforts are underway in the region to enhance regional collaboration for the protection and empowerment of vulnerable

Figure 9: Waste generation, Pacific urban population



⁵⁰ PIFS (2018). First Quadrennial Pacific Sustainable Development Report 2018 (prepared by Pacific Islands Forum member countries with support of Council of Regional Organizations in the Pacific and UN Agencies in the Pacific)

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² APWC (accessed 24/11/20) <https://apwc.com.au/our-story/apwc-profile/>

⁵³ ADB (2014). Solid Waste Management in the Pacific. <https://think-asia.org/bitstream/handle/11540/411/solid-waste-management-appropriate-technologies.pdf>

⁵⁴ IBRD/The World Bank (2016). Climate change and Disaster Management. Pacific Possible Background Paper No.6. <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/655081503691935252/pdf/119111-WP-PUBLIC-p154324-ppClimatechangebackgroundfinal.pdf>

communities in the context of climate change and disasters through the development of relevant regional frameworks.⁵⁵ In this context, regional bodies, such as the Tropical Cyclone Committee for the South Pacific and South-East Indian Ocean,⁵⁶ the Pacific Islands Meteorological Council and National Meteorological and Hydrological Services, the Oceania Regional Seismic Network⁵⁷ and the Pacific Island Countries and Territories Regional Working Group on Tsunami Warning and Mitigation under the Pacific Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System⁵⁸; and initiatives such as the Coastal Inundation Project⁵⁹, Severe Weather Forecasting Project⁶⁰, Flash Flood Guidance System⁶¹, Community Based Early Warning System, Impact Based Forecasts and Warning Service⁶², are increasingly required to support disaster risk reduction and climate change services.⁶³ As regional collaboration in climate monitoring, early warning systems and geospatial technology is being strengthened,⁶⁴ more investments will be required to overcome the expansive geographical spread of the Pacific region and the limitations and high costs of communication systems.⁶⁵ With regards to measuring progress on SDG 13 related indicators, additional investments in climate change and variability related human resources, infrastructure, data, services, and statistics are required.

Although emissions of carbon dioxide per capita have been reduced from more than 13 tons per capita in 2005 to currently 11.1 tons per capita per year, Pacific countries emissions are still more than double the average of the Asia-Pacific region.⁶⁶ While this is mainly due to high levels of emissions from developed economies in the Pacific, PICTs are investing in boosting renewable energy production. For example, Samoa has just commissioned its first 750 kilowatt biomass gasification plant in an \$11.3 million investment that was hailed as a major step on the country's journey to renewable energy transition,⁶⁷ Tonga is adding a 5MW battery system to one of its main power stations to store renewable energy from wind and solar,⁶⁸ and Fiji has just signed an agreement to build a 15MW solar power plant - the biggest in the Pacific Islands - which is expected to transition 14,000 Fijian households to solar energy and dramatically reduce Fiji's reliance on imported fossil fuels.⁶⁹

⁵⁵ IOM (2020). Pacific Governments Begin Regional Policy Dialogue on Climate Change, Migration and Human Security <https://www.iom.int/news/pacific-governments-begin-regional-policy-dialogue-climate-change-migration-and-human-security> (accessed 18/10/20)

⁵⁶ <https://public.wmo.int/en/programmes/tropical-cyclone-programme>

⁵⁷ <http://www.orsnet.org/?lang=EN>

⁵⁸ http://www.ioc-tsunami.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=446&Itemid=401&lang=en

⁵⁹ Coastal Inundation Forecast Demonstration Project (CIFDP) | SPC Geoscience, Energy and Maritime Division

⁶⁰ Severe Weather Forecasting Demonstration Project Expands to Eastern Caribbean | World Meteorological Organization (wmo.int)

⁶¹ Fiji to Implement Flash Flood Guidance System | World Meteorological Organization (wmo.int)

⁶² Impact-based Forecasting and Warning: Weather Ready Nations | World Meteorological Organization (wmo.int)

⁶³ PMDP (accessed 25/11/20). <https://www.pacificmet.net/pmmm>

⁶⁴ see following sources (accessed 25/11/20): 1. Climate monitoring: <https://www.pacificmet.net/pmmm/>

2. Pacific Geospatial and Surveying Council <https://pgsc.gem.spc.int/>

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ UNESCAP (2020). Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2020

⁶⁷ Samoa Observer (accessed 24/11/20).

<https://www.samoaoobserver.ws/category/samoa/74408#:~:text=Construction%20for%20the%20Biomass%20Gasification,Power%20Systems%20in%20Samoa%20project>

⁶⁸ SPTO (accessed 24/11/20). <https://corporate.southpacificislands.travel/tonga-uses-big-batteries-to-reach-ambitious-renewable-energy-goal/>

⁶⁹ Renew Economy (accessed 24/11/20). <https://reneweconomy.com.au/fiji-set-to-build-biggest-solar-project-in-pacific-islands-37084/>

Furthermore, jobs have already been, and will continue to be, impacted by climate change. The need to achieve climate-resilient and low-carbon economies while also minimizing hardships for workers and their communities, also known as a just transition, is essential to advancing climate action. The Climate Action for Jobs Initiative offers a roadmap towards achieving climate change mitigation and adaptation goals, while enhancing job creation and economic diversification, and ensuring a transition that is fair and inclusive.⁷⁰

In view of the vital importance of the ocean and marine life to the Pacific peoples, PICT governments have been instrumental in establishing **SDG 14 “Life Below Water”** as a global stand-alone goal. Accordingly, the Framework for Pacific Regionalism identifies the Pacific peoples as “the custodians of the world’s largest, most peaceful and abundant ocean ...”. The Pacific Ocean contains and supports the most extensive and diverse coral reefs in the world, the largest tuna fishery, and some of the largest populations of globally threatened species such as whales and dolphins, sea turtles, dugongs, sharks and stingrays.⁷¹ The Western and Central Pacific Ocean provided the global market with 3.5 million tonnes of sustainably caught tuna in 2018, which made up more than 44 percent of global supply.⁷² In alignment with Pacific Regionalism, the first United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development regional consultation held in Noumea, New Caledonia in July 2019 prepared the region for the upcoming Decade and identified regional scientific goals and sustainable development requirements of the vast Pacific Ocean.⁷³

The implementation of the 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage⁷⁴ in FSM and Niue contributed to the sustainability of coastal societies, and to the protection of their cultural identity. Moreover, research and safeguarding activities within the framework of this Convention contributes to improved conservation of coastal and marine areas for future generations, and provides potential economic benefits through sustainable tourism.

In view of the fundamental importance of SDG 14 for the Pacific region and its peoples, monitoring and reporting against regional SDG 14 indicators and related national development targets - which focus on integrated and sustainable ocean management and conservation, adaptation, mitigation and biodiversity activities - is at the forefront of Pacific Regional Institutions and PICTs. That said, data on SDG 14 targets are still relatively scarce, with limited availability of baselines and progress information. In terms of SDG target 14.4 – ending overfishing, the region has a good record with regard to the region’s largest fishery (tropical tuna). This makes the Pacific region a positive exception when compared to other ocean areas across the globe. Some progress towards achieving SDG target 14.5 could be observed, with approximately 8 percent of the combined PICTs Exclusive Economic Zone of 27,45 million km² under protection in 2017, the target being 10 percent by 2020.⁷⁵ At the same time, there are still 10 countries in the Pacific with less than one percent of their territorial water protected.⁷⁶ This is linked to a lack of awareness of the economic value of marine protected areas which have often been set out

⁷⁰ <https://www.climateaction4jobs.org/>

⁷¹ Pacific Data Hub (accessed 10/18/20). <https://pacificdata.org/content/17-goals-transform-pacific>

⁷² FAO. 2020. *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2020. Sustainability in action*. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/ca9229en>

⁷³ <https://www.oceandecade.org/news/21/Pacific-Community-Ocean-Science-fundamental-for-Sustainable-Development>

⁷⁴ <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/underwater-cultural-heritage/2001-convention/official-text/>

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ UNESCAP (2020). Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2020.

inappropriately and are therefore unable to conserve biodiversity and ecosystem services over the medium and long term.⁷⁷

There is a need to increase the Marine Protected Areas to protect biodiversity, and to guarantee the sustainability of natural resources. Palau made a decisive investment with the enactment of the National Marine Sanctuary Act in 2015, with gradual implementation until this year 2020. By establishing a no-catch area in 80 percent of its waters, this MPA became the sixth largest in the world. This has proved to be effective in terms of revenue from tourism, as well as for ecosystem restoration. At the same time, the existing sector-centred approach and national management jurisdictions have largely failed to protect biodiversity in the high seas. The current governance arrangements tend to ignore multisector needs and have limited transboundary coordination and face challenges in managing human activities for a global common.

Ongoing efforts to improve management of the marine and coastal biodiversity of mountainous volcanic islands (e.g. Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu) and flat islands and atolls (e.g. Kiribati and Tonga) should help achieve targets under the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 within the scope of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. With regards to **SDG 15 “Life On Land”**, many PICTs retain sizable sections of forested area. Moreover, the Pacific region has reversed the declining trend of total forest areas since 2010 (although this seems mainly due to an increase in forest area in Australia).⁷⁸

That said, habitat loss continues to be an issue and is caused by unsustainable logging and forest conversion for plantations and agriculture; improper waste management; clearance of mangrove areas; foreshore reclamation; coral harvesting; dredging; sand mining and coastal development; poorly managed mining operations; and the impact of natural disasters and extreme events.⁷⁹ Sea-level rise due to climate change has impacted on some communities and forced them to relocate to new areas, while it is predicted that some low-lying countries may end up being completely inundated with water in the future.⁸⁰ Invasive species are another threat to PICTs’ ecosystems and the leading cause of biodiversity loss which can impact food and economic security. The successful nomination of the region’s first two Biosphere Reserves⁸¹ – Utwe in the FSM and Ngaremeduu in Palau – in 2005 helped set up PacMAB, a network of Man and Biosphere Reserves in the Pacific. This promising start led to the notable nomination of And Atoll in FSM as the third Biosphere Reserve in the Pacific in 2007. A regionally coordinated response is in place for the management of invasive species in the Pacific.⁸² Based on the Framework for Nature Conservation and Protected Areas in the Pacific (2017-2020) which guides conservation efforts in the region, ecosystem-based approaches are being integrated into national and sector plans, with potential benefits including enhanced livelihood opportunities and food security; increased biodiversity conservation; and improved carbon sequestration and sustainable water management.⁸³

⁷⁷ GIZ (accessed 20/11/20). Marine and Coastal Biodiversity Management in Pacific Island Countries <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/18155.html>

⁷⁸ UNESCAP (2020). Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2020.

⁷⁹ PIFS (2018). First Quadrennial Pacific Sustainable Development Report 2018 (prepared by Pacific Islands Forum member countries with support of Council of Regional Organizations in the Pacific and UN Agencies in the Pacific)

⁸⁰ The Brookings Institution (2011) On the Front Line of Climate Change and Displacement: Learning from and with Pacific Island Countries. Accessed at: https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/09_idp_climate_change.pdf

⁸¹ More about World Network of Biosphere Reserves: <https://en.unesco.org/biosphere>

⁸² Pacific Data Hub (accessed 10/18/20). <https://pacificdata.org/content/17-goals-transform-pacific>

⁸³ Ibid.

3.1.2 People-centered analysis

Climate change threatens the effective enjoyment of a range of human rights, including the rights to life, water and sanitation, food, health, housing, self-determination, culture and development. States have an obligation under international human rights law to prevent the foreseeable adverse effects of climate change and ensure that those affected by it, particularly those in vulnerable situations, have access to effective remedies and means of adaptation to live a life with dignity. The high vulnerability of PICTs to the effects of climate change and natural disasters is exacerbated for the poorest and most marginalized populations, including in Kiribati, Vanuatu and FSM, who live in small communities on remote outer-islands, and who rely on subsistence-farming and fishing for their livelihoods. An exception is Nauru where the natural environment has been severely affected by phosphate mining, and land for any agricultural production is scarce.⁸⁴ These populations have limited access to education and health services, in part due to the remoteness of their communities, and they lack savings and insurance to cope with the impacts of natural hazards and climate change. Women, as well as people living with a disability, the elderly and children, suffer more from climate extremes than men, based on their greater dependence on natural resources for their livelihood and subsistence, and their vulnerability to gender-based violence in the aftermath of disasters.⁸⁵ Further, the vulnerability of women with disabilities to the impacts of climate change is often exacerbated due to already present gender inequalities and multiple and compounding forms of discrimination.⁸⁶

As land becomes scarcer, poorer populations and rural-urban migrants are forced to live on low value land, often close to flood prone waterways and in higher-risk coastal areas, making them more likely to be affected by adverse natural events. In addition to lack of savings and insurance, poor people often have no choice but to live in hazard prone areas to satisfy their immediate basic needs. Many live in informal settlements with homes self-built from whatever materials are available including corrugated iron and wood that are generally non-durable and highly sensitive to flooding, storms and cyclones, along with additional health hazards. For example, in Port Vila, Vanuatu, informal settlements account for 70 percent of the improvised, makeshift or traditional housing stock⁸⁷. Most of these were destroyed by Cyclone Pam in 2015, while during Cyclone Harold in 2020, between 80 and 90 percent of homes on Espiritu Santo were destroyed⁸⁸⁸⁹. Even people above the poverty line and vulnerable populations including children, women and the elderly, can be pushed into transient poverty when a disaster hits as their livelihoods and homes are destroyed.

In an assessment on the effect of natural disasters on the health and safety of women and girls in the FSM⁹⁰, over 80 percent of survey respondents reported losing their homes during or after a disaster. The

⁸⁴ CCA Meta Analysis 2016

⁸⁵ IBRD/The World Bank (2016). Climate change and Disaster Management. Pacific Possible Background Paper No.6. <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/655081503691935252/pdf/119111-WP-PUBLIC-p154324-ppClimatechangebackgroundfinal.pdf>

⁸⁶ UNESCO and Pacific Disability Forum (2019). Understanding the vulnerabilities of persons with disabilities in climate change situations

⁸⁷ Reliefweb (2020). Recommendations for Actions for Resilience and Sustainability, Port Vila.

<https://reliefweb.int/report/vanuatu/recommendations-actions-resilience-and-sustainability-port-villa>

⁸⁸ Reliefweb (2020). Issue Brief: A new vulnerability: COVID-19 and tropical cyclone Harold create the perfect storm in the Pacific. <https://reliefweb.int/report/vanuatu/issue-brief-new-vulnerability-covid-19-and-tropical-cyclone-harold-create-perfect>

⁸⁹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/vanuatu/vanuatu-displacement-tracking-report-tropical-cyclone-harold-june-2020>

⁹⁰ IOM (2018) Assessing the effects of natural disasters on the health and safety of women and girls in the FSM

loss of a home can disproportionately affect women and girls, as this is where women and girls report spending most of their time. Increasing frequency and severity of disasters shortens the time for recovery and re-building of livelihoods thus trapping poor and vulnerable populations in a cycle of poverty.⁹¹

Comprehensive and accurate assessments of the multiple and growing threats to the biodiversity, infrastructure and populations of PICTs, and of the environmental, social and economic vulnerabilities in each country are critical to understanding the multidimensional risks to achieving environment and climate change-related SDGs. Apart from causing major economic losses,⁹² the risk of natural disasters can strongly affect people's well-being in terms of health, environmental sustainability, gender equality, employment and labour market situation, food security and nutrition, livelihoods and access to education. With many poor communities in rural areas already facing significant restrictions to quality education, the destruction of school infrastructure or re-purposing of school buildings for emergency accommodation after a disaster can further compound difficulties in access to education.⁹³ Data on disaster displacement⁹⁴ is not collected consistently throughout the region, but available estimates show that approximately 540,000 people were displaced in the context of sudden-onset disasters between 2008 and 2018.⁹⁵

The urbanized islands in the three atoll states of Tuvalu, Marshall Islands, and Kiribati - Funafuti, Majuro, and Tarawa - serve as examples where substantial post-independence rural-urban migration has resulted in extremely high urban population densities (over 30,000 people per square kilometer in the atoll of Ebeye, Marshall Islands) and intense pressure on scarce resources including land, firewood, sand, and gravel.⁹⁶ Already the most vulnerable to sea level rise and king tides on account of their low elevation, the modification of shorelines by reclamation, sand and gravel mining for construction and increased runoff has exacerbated issues of flooding and coastal erosion. Approximately 45 percent of Funafuti households live in coastal or narrow areas affected by coastal erosion, increased king tides and storm surges each year, facing greater hardship, exposure and vulnerability to disasters compared with the rural outer islands⁹⁷. Tarawa is also regularly flooded, with drinking water and soils becoming increasingly saline. The Government of Kiribati has proposed building up part of the atoll through dredging from the lagoon as one potential solution⁹⁸.

Given the extreme vulnerability of PICTs to natural disasters and climate change, disaster risk reduction and adaptation measures to reduce exposure and vulnerability lie at the heart of poverty reduction and shared prosperity for PICTs. Similar to the effects of natural disasters, the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Pacific - even in PICTs that had not yet registered COVID-19 cases - underscores the importance of measures which enable recovering better, including skills training, digital transformation, resilient infrastructure and crisis preparedness, implementation of health protocols, social protection and business continuity. The impact of natural disasters taking place this year, such as

⁹¹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/vanuatu/vanuatu-displacement-tracking-report-tropical-cyclone-harold-june-2020>

⁹² For example, in February 2016 Cyclone Winston caused almost 1 billion US\$ in damage and loss to Fiji (World Bank PDNA Fiji, 2016)

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ This includes mainly disasters arising out of natural hazards rather than man-made disasters.

⁹⁵ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, *Global Internal Displacement Database (2008)*.

https://ec.europa.eu/knowledge4policy/dataset/ds00041_en

⁹⁶ Connell, John (2015). *Vulnerable Islands: Climate Change, Tectonic Change, and Changing Livelihoods in the Western Pacific*. *The Contemporary Pacific*. 27. 1-36. 10.1353/cp.2015.0014.

⁹⁷ CESinfo Working Paper No. 6128 (2016). *Household Vulnerability on the Frontline of Climate Change: The Pacific Atoll Nation of Tuvalu*. https://www.cesifo.org/DocDL/cesifo1_wp6128.pdf

⁹⁸ Kiribati 20-Year Vision 2016-2036

tropical cyclone Harold, has been compounded by COVID-19 which had already weakened the economies of affected PICTs and complicated recovery efforts.

A large share of the Pacific's workforce is employed in sectors most vulnerable to climate change. Three of the sectors most vulnerable to climate change – agriculture, tourism and fisheries – are important employment generators in the Pacific. In addition, workers themselves are vulnerable to climate change, including workers in the informal economy, young people and women.⁹⁹

Women and children are disproportionately more vulnerable to the impacts of natural disasters and climate change. Overall, women have less economic, political and legal clout and are hence less able to cope with the adverse effects of a changing climate.¹⁰⁰ It is also confirmed that, globally, children are disproportionately impacted by natural disasters, with estimates indicating that - within a ten-year period (2008-2018) - up to 175 million children had been negatively affected by weather-related disasters connected to climate change.¹⁰¹ Children are disproportionately affected by changes in their environment, due to their unique metabolism, physiology and developmental needs. Changes in temperature, air and water quality and nutrition are likely to have more severe and long-term impacts on children's health, development and well-being. Young children, because of their less developed physiology and immune systems, will experience most intensely the effects of climate change-related stresses. During childhood, alterations to the social and physical environment can have far-reaching implications for children's long-term physical and mental health and overall quality of life.¹⁰² This global picture also applies to PICTs.

Although women's critical role as primary caregivers to vulnerable groups requires them to engage in disaster risk planning as well as informing vulnerable populations on how to support themselves in case of an emergency, they are largely excluded from decision making with regards to disaster preparedness and have lower levels of literacy and access to information on natural hazards and climate risks. In an assessment¹⁰³ on the effect of natural disasters on the health and safety of women and girls in the FSM, nearly a quarter of women respondents indicated that natural disasters affected their relationships with either non-immediate family or other community members. In addition, 52 percent of girls surveyed reported negative changes to the adult relationships around them, and 30 percent reported that disasters affected how adults treated them. The majority of respondents believed that the lack of money, food and water was a main driver behind increased stress and tensions. Female participants also indicated that they experienced high levels of emotional or verbal abuse immediately following a disaster. Over 20 percent of women reported that their intimate partners exerted increased control over their daily activities, as well as an increase in shouting and yelling. The most prevalent forms of physical abuse were shaking, slapping, pulling hair, punching or hitting. Many women shared not only the fears they felt during and after disasters, but also the long-term emotional impacts they saw in their children.

Moreover, a lack of food and water after a disaster can exacerbate vulnerabilities of women and children. This can include disproportionate impacts on women and girls who are typically responsible for water

⁹⁹ ILO (2017) Improving labour market outcomes in the Pacific: Policy Challenges and Priorities

¹⁰⁰ UNDP (2011). Asia-Pacific Human Development Report 2011

¹⁰¹ Kousky, C., (2016). Impacts of natural disasters on children. The Future of Children.

<https://www.childrenandnature.org/research/Children-are-disproportionately-impacted-by-natural-disasters/>

¹⁰² <https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/35/13>

¹⁰³ IOM (2018) Assessing the effect of natural disasters on the health and safety of women and girls in the FSM

collection, including some reports of children missing school due to either spending more time looking for water for the family or schools shutting down because of a lack of water¹⁰⁴.

A lack of clean water during times of disasters also negatively affects hygiene and sanitation practices while posing challenges to menstrual hygiene management, further threatening the health and dignity of women and girls. Over one third of women and girls (aged 12 – 18) interviewed by IOM reported added challenges to menstrual health management during disasters. These challenges included difficulties in bathing during their menstruation period, as well as inadequate supplies of menstruation materials (such as sanitary napkins)¹⁰⁵.

In addition, lower employment rates and lack of financial resources of women in many PICTs make them particularly vulnerable in terms of prevention and recovery from disaster-induced shocks.¹⁰⁶ In PICTs, women's productive roles are often linked to natural resources, particularly through subsistence farming. This means that rising sea levels, flooding and increased salt-water intrusion directly impact women's sustainable livelihood strategies, food security and family well-being. Though men are generally the primary income earners in most households, in the event of a disaster a few women recalled that their role in contributing towards the livelihood of their families significantly changed. Families had to find alternative sources of food and income. In addition to the potential impacts on life and livelihoods, natural disasters, including extreme weather events, further increase already high levels of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in PICTs.¹⁰⁷

Effective measures to adapt to climate change and disaster risks need to recognize the cultural, geographic and socio-economic characteristics and differences between individual PICTs, including the existing and potential gender roles and responsibilities in managing and minimizing disaster risks. With a focus on opportunities to emphasize the agency, rather than the vulnerability of women, practical actions to support gender equality can be readily integrated in early warning and recovery initiatives.¹⁰⁸ Work in disaster preparedness in markets across Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Fiji has provided a good model as to how women can play an integral role in managing and mitigating disaster risks.

Community and nature-based approaches to climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction, which draw on traditional knowledge and indigenous coping mechanisms, have been successful in advancing National Adaptation Plans. They support achievement of SDGs 11 and 13 at the local level with the direct involvement of vulnerable communities, civil society, private sector, local and national government in identifying risks and planning resilience actions. As examples, the Honiara City Council and Solomon Islands Government are using these approaches, with a particular focus on informal settlements in the Honiara Urban Resilience and Climate Action Plan,¹⁰⁹ in addition to Vanuatu's 2018 National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-Induced Displacement,¹¹⁰ and city and community vulnerability

¹⁰⁴ IOM (2018) Assessing the effect of natural disasters on the health and safety of women and girls

¹⁰⁵ Ibid

¹⁰⁶ CARE (2020). Rapid Gender Analysis COVID-19 Pacific Region (26 March 2020)

<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Pacific%20RGA%20FINAL%20APPROVED%2026March2020.pdf>

¹⁰⁷ IBRD/The World Bank (2016). Climate change and Disaster Management. Pacific Possible Background Paper No.6.

<http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/655081503691935252/pdf/119111-WP-PUBLIC-p154324-ppClimatechangebackgroundfinal.pdf>

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Trundle, A. & McEvoy, D. (2017) Honiara Urban Resilience and Climate Action Plan, UN-Habitat, Fukuoka, Japan.

https://www.fukuoka.unhabitat.org/programmes/ccci/pdf/HURCAP_final_Endorsed.pdf

¹¹⁰ https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/press_release/file/iom-vanuatu-policy-climate-change-disaster-induced-displacement-2018.pdf

assessments and action plans in Fiji. Traditional constructions used in the Pacific, such as so called nakamals, or meeting places, which can provide refuge during cyclones in Vanuatu ,¹¹¹ are another example of how traditional knowledge and skills directly contribute to disaster risk reduction.

With the likely increase of negative climate change effects on the lives and livelihoods of Pacific peoples, migration, including **labor migration**,¹¹² can be a vital household's strategy for survival and diversification of household income. While climate change is not a primary driver (though possibly an underlying driver) of migration in some countries, continuing climate change impacts will plausibly influence increased voluntary migration. Faced with growing difficulties in finding sufficient work opportunities for women and men on their respective islands, migration offers an adaptation measure that can provide other sources of income under changing environmental conditions.¹¹³ Migration as a coping strategy is now threatened by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic which has wide-ranging negative effects on Pacific migrants and their families. Given the border closures with PICTs, it is important to include seasonal and temporary workers who are not able to depart their home countries, as well as those who cannot return from their destination countries, in COVID-19 assistance measures ranging from income support to health services and vocational retraining programmes.¹¹⁴ State actions and decisions related to migration should involve the informed participation of affected persons, including migrants. Decision making should be transparent and empower affected persons through meaningful, informed and effective participation. Due diligence in decision-making or the adoption of new policies or legislation must include consultation with migrants and other affected persons. For decisions or actions that impact indigenous peoples' rights, States must obtain their free, prior and informed consent in accordance with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.¹¹⁵

Climate shocks are expected to continue to affect national and local food production, with disruptions undermining food security and nutrition goals in the long term. This challenge is compounded by an erosion of traditional food systems and preference for imported foods high in salt, sugar and fat. Climate shock driven crop losses drive part of the decline in traditional and diverse diets to a continued dependency on imported foods and beverages. These shocks also affect long-term planning, as already limited capacity is stretched to deal with natural hazards, impairing the efforts needed for improving nutrition status and development outcomes. Climate shocks can rapidly increase acute malnutrition (wasting), micronutrient deficiencies and prevalence of infectious diseases in the short term, with frequency and intensity of shocks expected to increase, all forms of malnutrition, including overweight and obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs).¹¹⁶

Other approaches to address the growing exposure and vulnerability of Pacific households and communities to the effects of climate change and to mitigate disaster risks include Climate Disaster Risk Financing (CDRF) strategies and insurance schemes. These mechanisms can provide reliable relief and

¹¹¹ Safeguarding Indigenous Architecture in Vanuatu <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248144>

¹¹² More details on the issue of labor migration can be found in chapter 3.3

¹¹³ GIZ (2016). Gender and Migration in the Context of Climate Change. <https://ourworld.unu.edu/en/gender-and-migration-in-the-context-of-climate-change>

¹¹⁴ IOM (2020). Rapid Assessment of the Socioeconomic Impacts of COVID-19 on Labour Mobility in the Pacific Region <https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iom-rapid-assessment-report.pdf>

¹¹⁵ https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/ClimateChange/Key_Messages_HR_CC_Migration.pdf

¹¹⁶ FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2018. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2018. Building climate resilience for food security and nutrition. Rome, FAO.

financial assistance to affected beneficiaries following a disaster.¹¹⁷ While some PICTs have Disaster Risk Management plans, none of them have an integrated CDRF strategy. Given that insurance policies covering cyclones, earthquakes and excess rainfall are very common in the Caribbean, they could be a viable solution in PICTs who have similar risk profiles.¹¹⁸ Additional mechanisms, such as the Heritage Emergency Fund used in FSM and Vanuatu,¹¹⁹ have helped protect culture in emergencies following natural disasters, with the aim to contribute to the resilience of communities and the reduction of disaster risks.

3.2 Gender Equality

When Pacific Leaders endorsed the **Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration** in 2012, they responded to a lack of progress towards gender equality in the region. Women’s representation in PICT parliaments was the lowest in the world, prevalence of violence against women was very high, and women’s economic opportunities lagged significantly behind.¹²⁰ As a measure of these challenges, the 2013 Pacific Regional MDGs Tracking Report noted that only three out of 22 PIF member countries were on track to achieving MDG 3 on promoting gender equality and empowering women.

To address these and other challenges, the PLGED focuses on six core areas: ending violence against women; embracing women’s participation in all levels of decision-making; promoting gender-responsive legislation, policies and programmes; economic empowerment; improving reproductive health services for adult and young women; and improving education and training opportunities for girls and women. The **Pacific Platform for Action for Gender Equality and Women’s Human Rights 2018–2030** (PPA 2018–2030)¹²¹ complements the PLGED by integrating the vision and principles of the 2030 Agenda. It is based on a review of 20 years of implementation of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action in the Pacific region which concluded that “in most PICTs, political will, resources and capacities for achieving gender equality have been insufficient to achieve substantive gains”.¹²² The lack of political will is partly attributed to a lack of understanding of gender equality and its implications for achieving sustainable development goals,¹²³ and the interplay of traditional and custom practices and religious devotion which can be, in some circumstances, contradictory to international human rights standards and rights-based approaches.¹²⁴ Based on these findings, the PPA 2018–2030 seeks to “accelerate the implementation of gender commitments at all levels in order to achieve gender equality and the promotion and protection of the human rights of all women and girls, in all their diversity”.¹²⁵

¹¹⁷ IPCC(2018). Managing the Risks of Extreme Events And Disasters To Advance Climate Change Adaptation. https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/03/SREX_Full_Report-1.pdf

¹¹⁸ CCRIF (2020). The Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility. <https://www.ccrif.org/>

¹¹⁹ Heritage Emergency Fund <https://en.unesco.org/themes/protecting-our-heritage-and-fostering-creativity/emergencyfund2>

¹²⁰ PIFS (2016). Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration Trend Assessment Report 2012–2016 <https://www.aidsdatahub.org/sites/default/files/resource/pacific-leaders-gender-equality-declaration-2016.pdf>

¹²¹ SPC (2017). Pacific Platform for Action for Gender Equality and Women’s Human Rights 2018–2030 <https://www.spc.int/sites/default/files/wordpresscontent/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/PPA-2018-Part-I-EN2.pdf>

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ SPC (2016). Human Rights in the Pacific: A situational analysis <https://www.spc.int/sites/default/files/resources/2018-05/Human-right-Pacific.pdf>

¹²⁵ Ibid.

3.2.1 Assessment of SDG progress

Progress to date in implementing the above regional-level commitments towards the realization of SDG 5 “achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls”, has been uneven. Most PICTs now have government institutions in charge of women’s affairs/gender equality. They also have developed, or are about to finalize, gender equality policies, and have increasingly integrated the gender perspective in national development and sector plans. National gender policies prioritize issues related to gender mainstreaming and institutional strengthening, including compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)¹²⁶, ending violence against women, shared decision making and economic empowerment.¹²⁷ At the same time, laws still exist in the Pacific that treat women and girls differently and restrict their opportunities and rights in areas such as employment, social protection, sexual harassment in the workplace, decision making, land ownership, social, health and family status, education, and in constitutional protection.¹²⁸ Although departments of women’s affairs/gender equality are now in place, they do not have the funding or staff capacities to work across the whole of government on integrating gender perspectives. On average, funding for national women’s offices is less than one percent of national budgets.¹²⁹ And while collection and analysis of data on gender gaps is improving, there is still limited use of the data to inform policies and programming.¹³⁰

The SDG dashboard for the Pacific confirms that PICTs have made **some progress on SDG 5 as well as related SDGs** including on education and health (see chapter 3.4 for more details). Growing public awareness of the need to address gender inequalities has also contributed to progress in increasing women’s participation in formal employment and national policy making. At the same time, persistent gender inequality manifests itself clearly in the very high prevalence rates of violence against women (more than 60 percent in Melanesia, and more than 40 percent in Polynesia and Micronesia, for lifetime violence, with the exception of Tonga where a more recent study in 2019 reported lifetime violence at 37 percent.¹³¹

Achieving sexual and reproductive health targets and fulfilling related human rights represent major challenges.¹³² More than half of PICTs have unmet family planning needs above 50 percent, indicating that a majority of women lack control over their fertility¹³³. In Nauru and Marshall Islands, 27-28 percent of girls are married or in a union before the age of 18, followed by Vanuatu at 24 percent, Solomon Islands at 21 percent, and Kiribati at 18 percent. Childbearing begins early for these girls; in Vanuatu, 38 percent of women aged 19 have already given birth or are pregnant. Young motherhood can curtail advanced education and work opportunities and the financial independence those can bring. When there is a large age gap between a young woman and her partner, as in Vanuatu where 32 percent of married adolescents

¹²⁶ All PICTs have ratified CEDAW, except Niue, Palau and Tonga (see also chapter 3.6)

¹²⁷ SPC (2017). Pacific Platform for Action for Gender Equality and Women’s Human Rights 2018–2030 <https://www.spc.int/sites/default/files/wordpresscontent/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/PPA-2018-Part-I-EN2.pdf>

¹²⁸ PIFS (2018). First Quadrennial Pacific Sustainable Development Report 2018 (prepared by Pacific Islands Forum Member Countries with support of Council of Regional Organizations in the Pacific and UN Agencies in the Pacific)

¹²⁹ Pacific Data Hub (accessed 05/11/20). <https://pacificdata.org/content/17-goals-transform-pacific>

¹³⁰ SPC (2017). Pacific Platform for Action for Gender Equality and Women’s Human Rights 2018–2030 <https://www.spc.int/sites/default/files/wordpresscontent/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/PPA-2018-Part-I-EN2.pdf>

¹³¹ Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey (2019), Fact Sheet - Tonga MICS 2019

¹³² Pacific Data Hub (accessed 05/11/20). <https://pacificdata.org/content/17-goals-transform-pacific>

¹³³ Pacific Data Hub (accessed 26/11/2020).

have spouses that are 10 or more years older, she is likely to have less decision-making power in the home and therefore less ability to advocate for her own rights.¹³⁴

That said, there has been increased investment in the elimination of gender-based violence across the Pacific, which has served as a mobilizing force for Governments to redouble their commitments, while also strengthening institutional, service, and prevention mechanisms, contributing to data and supporting education and awareness at the community level.¹³⁵ While abuse and mistreatment in health care settings are to be confronted, sexual and reproductive health services offer a unique entry point to begin to address violence against women.¹³⁶

A closer look at the education sector shows that most Pacific countries are close to achieving gender parity in primary enrolment. Girls in secondary enrolment outnumber boys in some PICTs, and girls' performance in learning assessments tends to be higher in many contexts, calling for a more nuanced and comprehensive look at issues of gender in education. That said, low investment in inclusive education and disability-inclusive school infrastructure remain a barrier to education for women and girls with disabilities.¹³⁷

With regards to **decision-making and leadership** at the level of formal and national governments, women are significantly under-represented in the Pacific. Whereas there are a few examples of women in leadership positions, including as Heads of Government and Speakers of Parliament, women make up only 34 percent of senior management positions in national governments and hold only 6.9 percent of parliamentary seats, compared to the global average of 23.3 percent (as at January 2017).¹³⁸ In Vanuatu, the 2020 general elections saw zero women elected to parliament, as in 2016.¹³⁹ Additionally, National Disaster Management Offices in the Pacific are entirely headed by men, and other structures such as Provincial Disaster Committees, Clusters and other response mechanisms are heavily male dominated.¹⁴⁰

Pacific women's active participation in **decision making and leadership at the household and community level** is also very low. As communities in PICTs are mostly led by male Chiefs, Pacific women typically have limited influence in decision making about expenditure and resource use. At the community level, this is partially attributed to traditional governance structures and norms, and the modern distortion of these systems, which exclude all women with the exception of high ranking women, and disproportionately exclude women with disabilities and diverse sexual orientation and gender identities.¹⁴¹ Even in Pacific communities where women hold traditional titles and where matrilineal ownership of resources such as land exists, community decision making tends to be dominated by male traditional leaders.¹⁴² Fewer

¹³⁴ Vanuatu Demographic Health Survey, 2013.

¹³⁵ The Spotlight Initiative to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls (2020) <https://www.spotlightinitiative.org/where-we-work?region=pacific>

¹³⁶ Reproductive Health Matters: An international journal on sexual and reproductive health and rights, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1016/j.rhm.2016.07.001?needAccess=true>

¹³⁷ SPC (2017). Pacific Platform for Action for Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights 2018–2030 <https://www.spc.int/sites/default/files/wordpresscontent/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/PPA-2018-Part-I-EN2.pdf>

¹³⁸ CARE (2020). Rapid Gender Analysis COVID-19 Pacific Region (26 March 2020) <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Pacific%20RGA%20FINAL%20APPROVED%2026March2020.pdf>

¹³⁹ Pacific Women in Politics (2020) <https://www.pacwip.org/country-profiles/vanuatu/>

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ PIFS (2008). Land and Women: The Matrilineal Factor <https://rmicourts.org/wp-content/uploads/PIFS-Land-and-Women.pdf>

¹⁴² Ibid.

opportunities for women to participate and contribute to governance processes at local levels results in decisions that do not adequately address their needs and priorities.

Promoting **gender equality in cultural life** - based on a commitment to cultural rights and cultural diversity, and guided by the international human rights framework and SDG 5 - is of high importance as cultural participation contributes to civic engagement. Moreover, field experience and research demonstrate how gender relations come into play in the transmission of cultural knowledge and skills, the protection and safeguarding of heritage, and the emergence and strengthening of vibrant cultural and creative sectors¹⁴³.

The fundamental lack of women participation in decision-making and leadership also applies to **preparedness, relief and recovery approaches** in the Pacific, resulting in a lack of understanding and responsiveness to women's needs, and increasing their vulnerability to disasters and crises such as COVID-19.¹⁴⁴ Although most frontline healthcare workers in the response to COVID-19 are women, placing them in prime positions to identify COVID-19 trends at the local level, they continue to form only small minorities in national and global health leadership.¹⁴⁵

There are many challenges to **women's economic empowerment** across the Pacific, including lower levels of formal employment; less access to resources (financial, land and technology) and less decision making over their income.

Women who are in control of their own income contribute to increased spending on food and education. In turn, this results in improved outcomes for children's education, health and nutrition, and leads to greater and sustained poverty reduction.¹⁴⁶ For the Pacific region, a 2018 study confirms a growing proportion of women in Pacific export businesses, with 32 percent identified as business owners or CEOs, 41 percent as executives and 49 percent as employees.¹⁴⁷ In Solomon Islands, the women are responsible for about 90 percent of business activity at the Honiara Central Market as both bulk buyers and retailers. In Samoa, 80 percent of the private sector comprises micro businesses, of which women are estimated to head over 40 percent.¹⁴⁸ Research also shows that if women had the same access to credit, markets and technology as men, their share of returns, particularly in the informal sector, would significantly increase.¹⁴⁹

That said, there are numerous remaining challenges for women's formal employment across the Pacific. Men still outnumber women in paid employment (outside the agricultural sector) by approximately two to one. In Melanesia, women occupy only a third of jobs within the formal economy, and men typically earn 20 to 50 percent more than women.¹⁵⁰ Countries with the highest proportion of women employed in the non-agricultural sector include Cook Islands (47.3 percent), Kiribati (47.4 percent) and Tonga (47.9

¹⁴³ Brochure UNESCO Culture SDGs <http://www.unesco.org/culture/flipbook/culture-2030/en/Brochure-UNESCO-Culture-SDGs-EN2.pdf>

¹⁴⁴ CARE (2020). Rapid Gender Analysis COVID-19 Pacific Region (26 March 2020) <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Pacific%20RGA%20FINAL%20APPROVED%2026March2020.pdf>

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ World Bank (2011). World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development. Washington.

¹⁴⁷ Pacific Trade Invest Australia (2018). Pacific Islands Export Survey 2018

https://www.pacifictradeinvest.com/media/1296/full-report-pti-australia-pacific-islands-export-survey-2018_web2.pdf

¹⁴⁸ S. Hedditch & C. Manuel, C (2010). Gender and Investment Climate Reform Assessment, Pacific Regional Executive Summary, International Finance Cooperation

¹⁴⁹ OECD (2012). Women's Economic Empowerment: The OECD DAC Network on Gender Equality

¹⁵⁰ AusAID (2012). Women's Economic Empowerment in the Pacific: Gender Situation Analysis, Australian Agency for International Development, Canberra.

percent).¹⁵¹ The 2012 Women’s Economic Opportunity Index ranks the Solomon Islands close to the bottom as 124 out of 128 countries. The highest ranked Pacific Island Country – Fiji – is ranked 81 which is still below the global average.¹⁵²

Gender gaps persist and women face discrimination in the Pacific labour market, where women are less likely to participate, more likely to take up vulnerable jobs and more likely to be poorly protected.¹⁵³

Women are over-represented in the informal sector, comprising on average 85 percent of all market vendors across Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Fiji. This work is characterized by long hours, often insecure, vulnerable and difficult working conditions; exposure to high levels of economic volatility; lack of social and legal protections, absence of professional development or other opportunities to increase skills and knowledge, and the absence of voice in decision-making around policies and legislation. While significant gains were made to support women in this sector through the Markets for Change project much of these gains were wiped out by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic exacerbated existing vulnerabilities with over 80 percent of vendors in Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Fiji experiencing a significant loss in income (over 50 percent). This coupled with a lack of social protection, access to cash transfers and absence of provisions such as sick leave, has led to a precarious situation for these workers, which will take years to recover from.

Although the informal economy in the Pacific is often undervalued, its contribution in some PICTs is as high as 50 percent of the average GDP, providing self-employment and livelihoods to more than half the working population. The contribution that marketplaces make across the Pacific is critical. They are the primary source of income for many women (particularly rural women); an important social and community institution; the cornerstone of domestic food security and an essential service, as illustrated by the COVID-19 pandemic; an all-important safety net in times of exogenous shocks, and an important domestic economic driver. In Solomon Islands, for example, the annual turnover at the Honiara Central Market is estimated to be between US\$10-16 million, with women responsible for about 80-90 percent of this marketing activity. It is critical that investments in this sector are prioritized to promote socioeconomic recovery and safeguard the future of these workers.

Overall, economically active women tend to have a much higher workload than men as they also perform the bulk of unpaid care work, work at home, and fulfilment of other community obligations. In Tonga, women work over 50 percent longer than men on non-economic activities each week, and in Fiji, during 2015–2016, women working for wages or salaries spent about 24 hours a week on household work, while men spent 10 hours.¹⁵⁴ Access to subsidized and affordable childcare across the Pacific is limited, with many workers relying on informal family care arrangements where possible. Lack of access to subsidized and affordable care remains a barrier to employment and workforce for many women.

In addition to insecure and vulnerable work, women’s **access to mainstream commercial finance** in the Pacific is low, due in part to onerous security requirements. Alternative lenders such as micro-finance or

¹⁵¹ Asian Development Bank (2016). [Gender Statistics: The Pacific and Timor Leste](#).

¹⁵² The Economist Intelligence Unit (accessed 07/11/20).

https://www.eiu.com/public/topical_report.aspx?campaignid=weoindex2012

¹⁵³ ILO (2017) Improving labour market outcomes in the Pacific: Policy Challenges and Priorities; and ILO (2020) Pacific labour market review 2020: Pre-COVID-19 baseline labour market information for post-disaster recovery

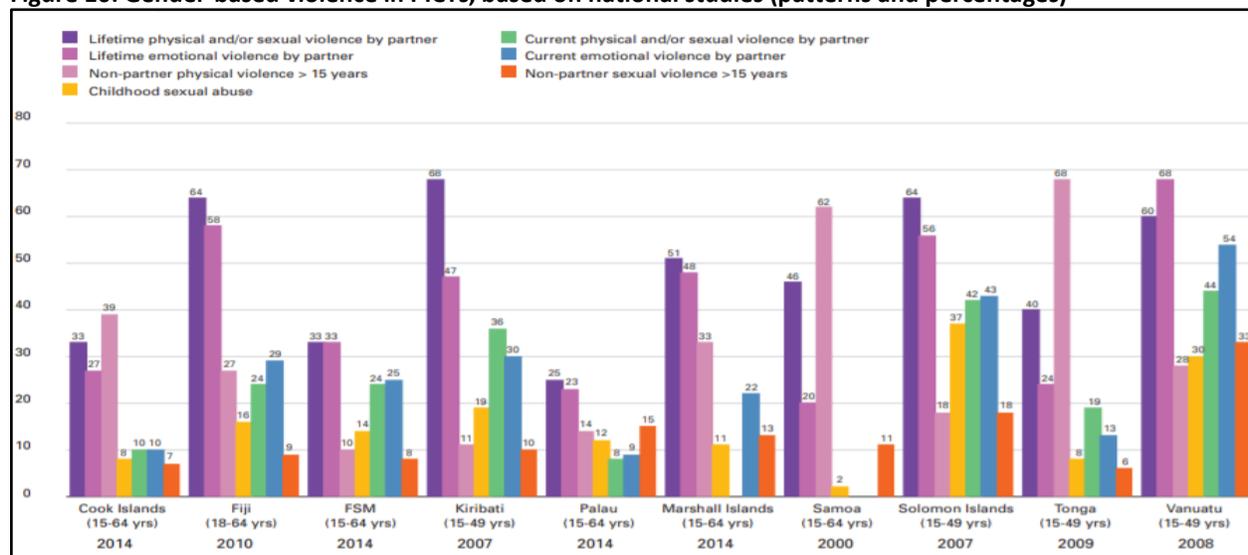
¹⁵⁴ SPC (2017). Women’s Economic Empowerment in the Pacific: Regional Overview (August 2017).

money lenders charge prohibitively high interest rates, up to 30 percent, further exacerbating the vulnerability faced by women.

The prevalence of **gender-based violence** in Pacific Island countries is one of the highest in the world. Lifetime prevalence rates for physical and sexual violence by partner and non-partner among Pacific Island women are estimated between 60 to 80 percent,¹⁵⁵ with the exception of Tonga where a more recent study in 2019 reported lifetime violence at 37 percent.¹⁵⁶ Women and girls with disabilities are two to three times more likely to be victims of physical and sexual abuse than women with no disabilities and they experience different forms of violence from women without disabilities such as the denial of food or water, and forced sterilization and medical treatment.¹⁵⁷

Experiences have demonstrated that increased food insecurity as a result of natural disasters and other crises places women - who typically procure and cook food for their families - at heightened risk of domestic violence due to heightened tensions in the household.¹⁵⁸ Experiences during the COVID-19 crisis in other countries have shown an increase in gender-based domestic violence if people are forced to self-isolate at home,¹⁵⁹ especially in informal settlements and overcrowded housing with extended families sharing the same household. Figure 10 shows the percentages of main categories of gender-based violence in Pacific Island countries, based on national studies:

Figure 10: Gender-based violence in PICTs, based on national studies (patterns and percentages)¹⁶⁰



UNFPA analysis of published national statistics

¹⁵⁵ UNFPA (2014). Population and Development Profiles: Pacific Island Countries (April 2014)

[https://pacific.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/web_140414_UNFPAPopulationandDevelopmentProfiles-PacificSub-RegionExtendedv1LRv2_0.pdf](https://pacific.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/web_140414_UNFPA%20PopulationandDevelopmentProfiles-PacificSub-RegionExtendedv1LRv2_0.pdf)

¹⁵⁶ Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey (2019), Fact Sheet - Tonga MICS 2019

¹⁵⁷ UNFPA (2013). A Deeper Silence: The Unheard Experiences of Women with Disabilities – Sexual and Reproductive Health and Violence against Women in Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Tonga

¹⁵⁸ IASC (2015). Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action

¹⁵⁹ Wanqing Z. (accessed 09/11/20). Domestic Violence Cases surge during COVID-19 epidemic

<https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1005253/domestic-violence-cases-surge-during-covid-19-epidemic>

¹⁶⁰ UNFPA (2019). State of the Pacific's RMNCAH Workforce Report 2019

It is also important to note the high rates of controlling behavior by men of their female partners in some PICTs, which is a denial of women's rights to freedom of movement and bodily autonomy and can impinge on a number of other rights. In Fiji, 59 percent of women have experienced at least one type of controlling behavior by partners, such as requiring her to ask his permission to seek health care (39 percent), insisting on knowing her location at all times (57 percent), or becoming angry if she speaks to another man (33 percent)¹⁶¹. In Kiribati and Marshall Islands, 90 percent and 80 percent respectively, of women have been subject to partners' controlling behaviors.¹⁶² Controlling behavior is strongly associated with perpetration of physical and sexual violence. Women experiencing violence are also more likely to have been prevented from using contraception by partners.¹⁶³

Humanitarian emergencies and subsequent displacement of women and children renders them more vulnerable to gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse. The Pacific's high vulnerability to natural disasters and the impacts of climate change mean that frequent humanitarian emergencies can lead to disruption of development programming focused on gender equality. Consequently, strategic planning of gender equality initiatives and resilience building for women and girls should reflect the Pacific's placement within the humanitarian-development-peace nexus to ensure sustainability and consistency of action despite changing contexts.

Controlling behaviors can restrict women's access to their social and family networks and to the services available for survivors of domestic violence. In the Pacific, **access to justice and support services for victims of violence** vary from country to country, mainly because the implementation of existing legislation, in particular the functioning of justice and police systems are lacking.¹⁶⁴ Counselling services for survivors of gender-based violence are available in all Pacific countries, though the quality and access varies because of a lack of funding and supervision as well as difficult access for remote locations.¹⁶⁵ Overall, the rise in poverty, unemployment levels and other effects on the labor market caused by the COVID-19 pandemic might increase the risks of sexual exploitation and violence for women and girls as they are forced to exchange sexual services for essential goods, a practice which is not uncommon in the Pacific even in non-crisis times.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ Fiji Women's Crisis Center (2013). *Somebody's Life, Everybody's Business! National Research on Women's Health and Life Experiences in Fiji (2010/2011): A survey exploring the prevalence, incidence and attitudes to intimate partner violence in Fiji.*

¹⁶² SPC (2010). *Kiribati Family Health and Support Study: A Study on violence against women and children Republic of the Marshall Islands Ministry of Internal Affairs and Women United Together Marshall Islands (2014). National Study on Family Health and Safety.*

¹⁶³ Fiji Women's Crisis Center (2013). *Somebody's Life, Everybody's Business! National Research on Women's Health and Life Experiences in Fiji (2010/2011): A survey exploring the prevalence, incidence and attitudes to intimate partner violence in Fiji.*

¹⁶⁴ Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (2017). *Ending Violence Against Women Roadmap Synthesis Report (March 2017)*

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ CARE International (2020). *Rapid Gender Analysis COVID-19 Pacific Region (26 March 2020)*

<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Pacific%20RGA%20FINAL%20APPROVED%2026March2020.pdf>

High population growth, rapid urbanization, natural disasters, limited sources of cash income and low awareness about nutritional requirements represent substantial risks to achieving **SDG 2 “Zero Hunger”** in the region.¹⁷² For most of the Pacific Islands, fishing is a critical source of income and a major source of food, especially in rural communities on outer and maritime islands where other sources of protein are limited. The numbers of fishers reported in 2015-2016 were on a rise while average fish consumption among PICTs was expected to be two or three times higher than the global average of fish consumption per capita in 2016.

Despite declining agricultural production per capita in many PICTs,¹⁷³ 70 percent of the region’s population continue to rely on subsistence agriculture and fishing as their main source of food and income. Irrigation is limited and agricultural production depends almost entirely on reliable rainfall patterns. The negative effects of climate change on fisheries through rising ocean acidification, and on subsistence farming through erratic weather patterns and extreme weather events, threaten the food security of many rural and urban communities and increase PICTs’ dependence on imported foods. The climate change impacts are likely to complicate sustainable management of fisheries, particularly offshore fisheries, such as the shifting pattern of mobility and habitat connection of marine species. One example is the expected move of the Pacific Ocean skipjack and yellowfin to the East under the Representative Concentration Pathway 8.5 future climate scenario⁸⁴, which is likely to have an impact on overall government revenue.

The limited availability and affordability of nutritious food - locally produced and imported - contribute to evolving diets, undernourishment and malnutrition. With the COVID-19 pandemic further disrupting food supply, a transformation of Pacific Island food systems will be critical to achieving SDG 2 and ensuring food security and nutrition in the region. This includes traditional foodways and local farming, pastoral, fishing, hunting and food preservation systems that are based on knowledge and practices transmitted from generation to generation and form part of intangible cultural heritage that is safeguarded and promoted under the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.¹⁷⁴

Prior to the pandemic, there was considerable variability between and within PICTs in the degree to which they consumed adequate nutritious food. The Pacific microstates, which are the most food insecure, produce only small volumes of traditional staples and very little fruit and vegetables. Their populations depended on large per capita volumes of imported food and have limited export earning capacity to purchase this food. In the larger Melanesian countries and the mid-sized Polynesian countries, much bigger per capita volumes of nutritious food are produced and there is far greater income earning capacity to pay for the necessary food imports. However, even within these larger countries with substantial arable land resources, there are sizable segments of the population living in urban and peri urban areas that are food insecure. Overall, in the Pacific islands, with the exception of the microstates, there was generally sufficient nutritious locally grown food available. However, often adequate quantities of this locally produced food were not consumed. This is due to a combination of factors, including: inadequate household income; and, a preference for imported food which is often more convenient and cheaper.

The pandemic in the Pacific islands, with the exceptionally low incidence of the virus itself, is unlikely to have a direct negative impact on the availability of nutritious locally produced food. However, there are some indirect negative impacts on the availability of locally grown food. These arise from such things as increased food theft, and the marketing constraints arising from less resources being available for the

¹⁷² WFP and SPC (2018). Regional Food Security Atlas of the Pacific

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>

maintenance of rural roads. Offsetting these indirect negative impacts is the apparent increasing interest in home gardening by people living in urban and peri-urban areas. In addition, there has been a flow of some people back to their rural villages and an overall increase in the availability of labor to work in agriculture.

The introduction of computer assisted telephone interviews to support mobile vulnerability analysis and mapping has filled some gaps in food security analysis. Data collection and analysis in [Fiji](#)¹⁷⁵, [Samoa](#)¹⁷⁶, [Tonga](#)¹⁷⁷, Vanuatu and Kiribati, with possible expansion to Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, and the Republic of Marshall Islands provide up-to-date monthly results on key food security indicators. Estimates from August and September 2020 show that the percentage of food insecure households - which is based on measures of food consumption, economic vulnerability and livelihood-based coping strategies - reached about 7 percent in Fiji and Samoa, and 1 percent in Tonga. The added pressures of the COVID-19 crisis on Pacific households have increased negative livelihood-based coping strategies which will require close monitoring, as some behaviors and strategies may have long-term impacts on household recovery.

Although many PICTs have informal, traditional support systems, these offer only partial protection against poverty. Due to changing livelihoods and lifestyles, including a rapid rise in urban populations, traditional social safety nets, including strong family ties, are slowly weakening. While most Pacific Governments have some form of contributory and non-contributory **social protection programmes** (including fee waivers in education and health, social insurance and/or pension schemes), the majority of PICTs spend less than a fifth of their total government expenditures on social protection.¹⁷⁸

Recent household-level survey data on migration and remittances in Fiji and Tonga, demonstrate that **remittances** can perform a similar function informally, contributing significantly to development objectives. Remittances also have a positive effect on poverty alleviation and wealth creation, especially in small countries where domestic development opportunities are limited.¹⁷⁹ Though the World Bank forecasted remittances to decrease during the pandemic, remittance flows have increased in Fiji, in part thanks to mobile wallet applications and the increase in mobile transfer operators. Internet costs and fees, as well as the lack of banking services, remain a challenge to more open flows of remittances during the pandemic.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁵ WFP Pacific - Fiji COVID-19 Food Security and Livelihood Monitoring Dashboard:

https://analytics.wfp.org/t/Public/views/FijiCOVID-19mVAMTimeSeries/HomePage?%3AshowAppBanner=false&%3Adisplay_count=n&%3AshowVizHome=n&%3Aorigin=viz_share_link&%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y&%3Aembed=y.

¹⁷⁶ WFP Pacific – Samoa COVID-19 Food Security and Livelihood Monitoring Dashboard:

https://analytics.wfp.org/t/Public/views/SamoaR1Viz/HomePage?iframeSizedToWindow=true&%3Aembed=y&%3AshowAppBanner=false&%3Adisplay_count=no&%3AshowVizHome=no&%3Aorigin=viz_share_link

¹⁷⁷ WFP Pacific – Tonga COVID-19 Food Security and Livelihood Monitoring Dashboard:

https://analytics.wfp.org/t/Public/views/TongaCOVID-19mVAMR1/HomePage?iframeSizedToWindow=true&%3Aembed=y&%3AshowAppBanner=false&%3Adisplay_count=no&%3AshowVizHome=no&%3Aorigin=viz_share_link

¹⁷⁸ UNICEF (2017). Strategy Note for the 2018-2022 Pacific Multi Country Programme.

¹⁷⁹ Richard P. C. Brown, John Connell,, Eliana V. Jimenez-Soto (2013). Migrants' Remittances, Poverty and Social Protection in the South Pacific: Fiji and Tonga <https://gsdrc.org/document-library/migrants-remittances-poverty-and-social-protection-in-the-south-pacific-fiji-and-tonga/>

¹⁸⁰ Tahlea Aualiitia, Australian Broadcasting Corporation (2020). COVID-19 leads to huge growth in digital money transfers to the Pacific but concerns remain over high fees. Retrieved: <https://www.abc.net.au/radio-australia/programs/pacificbeat/covid-significant-growth-in-pacific-digital-remittances/12731412>

Further, as social protection expenditure in the Pacific tends to be tied to formal employment, current social protection systems favour the non-poor over the poor¹⁸¹. In all countries except Fiji, per capita social protection expenditure for the poor was lower than the non-poor, indicating a need to expand non-contributory social protection programs to reach those most vulnerable.¹⁸²

The impact of COVID-19 on Pacific Island economies will stem primarily from a decline in tourism, which is the region's primary industry, with an average contribution to GDP of around 30 percent. The impact will be felt throughout countries including supply chains, government finances, household income and business and consumer confidence. For example, the Fijian economy is expected to contract by 21.7 percent in 2020 mainly due to poor tourism activity and its knock-on effects on the rest of the economy, the most severe contraction in the island nation's history. As the **COVID-19 pandemic further accentuates existing inequalities** in many PICTs, the people who suffer the most are those already neglected such as middle class and informal sector workers, the majority of whom are women, youths, underpaid, overworked, unable to work from home and deprived of social protection benefits and sick leave.¹⁸³ The poor and the vulnerable are least likely to have the savings to survive lockdowns or any economic downturn. Under these circumstances, scaling up targeted social protection and safety-net programs, as well as fast-tracking immediate financial support towards those most at risk of falling into poverty due to COVID-19 becomes essential.¹⁸⁴

Many social protection schemes, including maternity, unemployment, sickness and disability benefits are only available to workers in the formal economy which is largely limited to public employment.¹⁸⁵ In contrast, the percentage of **informal employment** amongst the working age population stands at 60 percent for Fiji, 68 percent for Samoa and 85 percent for Solomon Islands.¹⁸⁶ Levels of informal employment are even higher for women, with twice as many men in formal employment across PICTs, and three times more men in Melanesia.¹⁸⁷

Market vendors, mostly women workers, were particularly hard hit by the COVID-19 crisis. Most vendors surveyed across Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Fiji experienced a severe income loss due to the crisis. Over 80 percent of vendors surveyed experienced an income reduction, with 70 percent indicating their income had declined by half or more during this period. There were a number of factors that contributed to this, including: an increased supply of produce due to newly unemployed people turning to vending; seed distribution by governments stimulating domestic cultivation of food gardens; tourism and export related produce being sold cheaply on the domestic market and a downturn in the domestic economy, with less household purchasing power. Around half the vendors surveyed experienced reduced or interrupted work hours during this period due to restrictions and social distancing measures, further restricting their earning potential.

Market vendors were left extremely vulnerable during this period. Due to their informality, government cash transfers largely did not reach them, with over 90 percent indicating they had not received government payments; most had no pension fund contributions or access to credit and 99 percent of

¹⁸¹ Asian Development Bank (2019). The Social Protection Indicator for the Pacific: Assessing Progress

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ UN Pacific (2020). SEIA Fiji (September 2020).

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ ILO (2017). Improving labour market outcomes in the Pacific: Policy challenges and priorities

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ PIFS (2018). First Quadrennial Pacific Sustainable Development Report 2018 (prepared by Pacific Islands Forum member countries with support of Council of Regional Organizations in the Pacific and UN Agencies in the Pacific)

those surveyed indicated they did not have private health insurance. The Markets for Change project provided support to vendors to subsidize their business costs so they could continue operating but significant support is still needed.

The combination of a rapidly expanding young workforce and stagnant job creation in the formal sector poses a growing risk for PICTs to achieving decent and productive employment for all, in line with **SDG 8 “Decent Work and Economic Growth”**. This risk is compounded by the continuing trend of rural-urban migration across PICTs. As former rural dwellers add to already high demand for decent work, housing and social services in urban centers, the likelihood of unemployment and precarious work in the informal sector increases even further. The risks of losing employment have increased by the impact of COVID-19. Many informal sector workers are circular migrants who retain their rural-urban linkages through small-scale agriculture and local produce, as well as manufacturing and handicrafts that form part of the cultural and creative industries. They rely on good access to well-functioning urban markets to sell their produce for cash to urban consumers. This provides more than just a source of income for vendors, with a strong multiplier effect on other support work including transportation and processing, reselling, and the wider development of rural areas through **value chains** and **urban-rural remittances**. For example, the Honiara Central Market is estimated to turn over USD10-16 million annually (equivalent to over USD28,000 per day to households and the local economy)¹⁸⁸. As land becomes scarcer within cities, the reliance on urban markets for fresh produce from peri-urban and rural areas is likely to grow, which could benefit food security and household income generation if ecosystem productivity and rural-urban transport are well managed.

Persistent labor market challenges have been pushing the region’s young and growing population to migrate in high numbers. The number of international **migrants from PICTs** has almost doubled over the last 25 years. Today, almost 460,000 Pacific Islanders live overseas, mainly in three countries: New Zealand, Australia, and the United States. At the same time, only about 2 percent of Pacific Island migrants moved to other PICTs.¹⁸⁹ An estimated 52 percent of overseas Pacific Islanders are women or girls.¹⁹⁰ Data collected under the Pacific Climate Change Migration programme in Nauru, Tuvalu and Kiribati showed that employment (37 percent), followed by education (26 percent) and climate change (18 percent), were the main motivations for migration.¹⁹¹ Although there is a prevalence of low-skilled migrants among some PICT sending countries, the threat of “brain drain” is a valid concern. According to a World Bank study, emigration rates from some PICTs were among the highest in the world, with Palau at 80 percent, and Samoa and Tonga both above 73 percent. In all PICTs, the emigration rate for highly qualified migrants exceeded the overall emigration rate for the total population.¹⁹²

Human trafficking and migrant smuggling are growing concerns in the Pacific region. At the same time, there is low awareness and understanding of human trafficking and exploitation among the PICTs, and many PICTs have not ratified the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.¹⁹³ PICTs are source, transit and destination points for human trafficking, both for the

¹⁸⁸ Keen, M. and Ride, A. (2018). Markets Matter: ANU-UN Women Project on Honiara’s Informal Markets in Solomon Islands. http://dpa.bellschool.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/2018-04/ib2018_9_keen_and_ride.pdf

¹⁸⁹ ILO (2017). Improving labour market outcomes in the Pacific: Policy challenges and priorities

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ UNESCAP (accessed 26/10/20). <https://www.unescap.org/resources/climate-change-and-migration-pacific-links-attitudes-and-future-scenarios-nauru-tuvalu-and>

¹⁹² World Bank (2017). Docquier et al., 2009.

¹⁹³ Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Nauru and Palau have ratified the Protocol Against Trafficking in Persons, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/CTOC/signatures.html>

purposes of sexual exploitation and labour. Law enforcement agencies report that migrant smuggling networks have become entrenched in Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu, with locals collaborating with foreign nationals in committing the offence. Migrant smuggling is frequently facilitated through immigration fraud with PICTs acting as transit points for migrants attempting to reach Australia, New Zealand or the United States.¹⁹⁴

Remittances average about 10 percent of GDP across PICTs and exceed 40 percent in Tonga and about 15 percent in Samoa and the Marshall Islands. Although COVID-19 has a strong negative impact on remittances, it is expected that the end of the COVID-19 crisis will lead to a rebound.¹⁹⁵ Section 2.3.2 takes a closer look at some of the implications of large-scale migration and remittances.

The COVID-19 pandemic is now demonstrating the crucial importance of decent work and well-functioning social protection systems, including for the informal sector, as a “shock absorber” against rising inequalities and poverty. In this sense, “building back better” in the aftermath of the pandemic requires not only short-term relief but well targeted shock responsive social protection measures. According to a Socio-Economic Impact Assessment for COVID-19 conducted in fifteen Pacific SIDS,¹⁹⁶ local informal creative industries¹⁹⁷ mostly operating as micro home-based enterprises have been particularly affected by the contraction of the tourism sector as a result of the pandemic. Many of those in this sub-sector do not have organized unions that could advocate for governmental financial assistance packages.

SDG indicators for the Pacific also measure several targets of **SDG 9 “Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure”**. Whereas the industrial sector and manufacturing could be a key promoter of economic development, it is facing the same above-mentioned challenges of a weak labor market, as well as the comparative disadvantages of relatively small and geographically distant PICT economies. In most Pacific countries, value added manufacturing represents only a small share of GDP.¹⁹⁸

The apparel sector historically provided significant formal employment opportunities to women in PICs, such as Fiji (where women comprise 79 percent of workers employed). Although employment has declined from 18000 jobs to around 7,000, there is an opportunity to reinvigorate this sector through investments in infrastructure, incentives and training. The global impact of COVID-19 and a renewed focus on human rights (and sanctions) in the sector has seen major apparel retailers rapidly diversifying their supply chains, place a premium on sustainability and human rights certifications and look to produce closer to home so they can reduce lead times. Given the Pacific proximity to retailers in Australia this is a competitive advantage and opportunity.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁴ UNODC (2020)

¹⁹⁵ IMF (2020). Pacific Islands Threatened by COVID-19. <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2020/05/27/na-05272020-pacific-islands-threatened-by-covid-19#:~:text=Already%20among%20the%20most%20remote,and%20a%20reduction%20in%20remittances.>

¹⁹⁶ The social cohesion pillar of the SEIA was assessed by UNESCO in the 14 SIDS covered by Fiji and Samoa Multi-country Offices, as well as Papua New Guinea.

¹⁹⁷ More on creative and culture sector is available at: Creative Economy Report (2013) <https://en.unesco.org/creativity/publication/creative-economy-report-2013>

¹⁹⁸ Pacific Data Hub (accessed 24/10/20). <https://pacificdata.org/content/17-goals-transform-pacific>

¹⁹⁹ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/37358838_Fiji%27s_Garment_Industry_An_Economic_Analysis
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/37358838_Fiji%27s_Garment_Industry_An_Economic_Analysis and
<https://fijisun.com.fj/2020/04/03/covid-19-garment-factories-feel-impact/>

With regards to **innovation**, the Pacific region has opportunities to diversify its production in the agricultural, marine, and raw material sectors.²⁰⁰ In addition, the rich biodiversity characterizing all PICTs should be explored further, including for the development of new medicines using endemic plants.²⁰¹ The Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies could also have a transformative impact on the creative economy sector in PICTs, which would in turn spur skills development and entrepreneurship. Advances in production and distribution will foster the digital-creative sector and facilitate access of SIDS in the global markets.

Despite numerous opportunities for innovation and research, social dialogue between the private sector, workers and many PICTs governments is still relatively weak and mostly informal. A stronger focus to organize official and recurring events between governments and the business community to discuss these opportunities is needed to boost innovation.²⁰² That said, based on increased connectivity of PICTs, there is growing consensus on the importance of **ICT as a key driver of innovation** and private sector development. In the public sector, most PICTs are already experiencing a digital transition. Digitalizing government's bureaucracy and providing e-education, when feasible, could be extremely effective in the geographical context of Pacific countries and greatly improve the provision of public services, especially for marginalized populations on the outer islands.²⁰³

Investments in infrastructure such as deep-sea cables across PICs and advances in technology offer the opportunity to capitalize on the Global Outsourcing Services industry. While Fiji has established a small industry, there are opportunities for growth in this sector across several PICs, such as Tonga and Samoa. Modelling from the World Bank suggests that in Fiji alone the sector could contribute 3.3% to GDP with appropriate investments, with similar projections suggested for Tonga and Samoa. Evidence from Mauritius shows that 18,000+ jobs were created from the GOS sector, mostly employing women and youth.²⁰⁴

At the same time, information and communications technology can mitigate the challenges of distance and isolation and individual use of mobile phone technology is increasingly widespread, although with significant differences between PICTs. SDG 9, indicator 9.C.1 (Figure 12) shows that some PICTs still lag significantly behind in mobile phone service coverage, including Kiribati, Marshall Islands and Tuvalu.²⁰⁵ Internet penetration (percent of people with access to and knowledge of how to use the internet) ranges from 11.9 percent in the Solomon Islands to 91.2 percent in Niue, with most SIDS under 60 percent²⁰⁶. Although data is limited, women's use of mass media and internet is lower than men's in some PICTs, including Tonga.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁰ UNIDO (2016). Innovation in the Pacific: An Assessment (Working Paper 18, 2016). The report mentions the following examples of promising products, including breadfruit flour, avocado margarine, sea cucumber (bêche-de-mer), fruit wines, kava, taro chips, noni juice, and cassava beer.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/22963/Information0an00jobs0in0the0Pacific.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

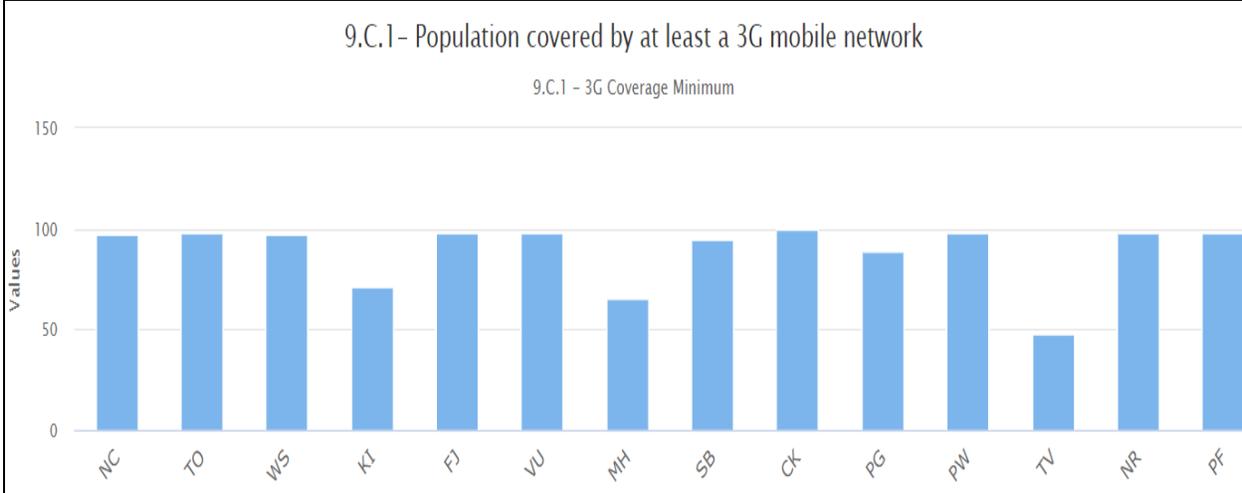
²⁰⁵ Pacific Data Hub (accessed 24/10/20). <https://pacificdata.org/content/17-goals-transform-pacific>

²⁰⁶ Internet World Stats (accessed 26/11/2020). <https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats6.htm>

²⁰⁷ Tonga MICS (2019).

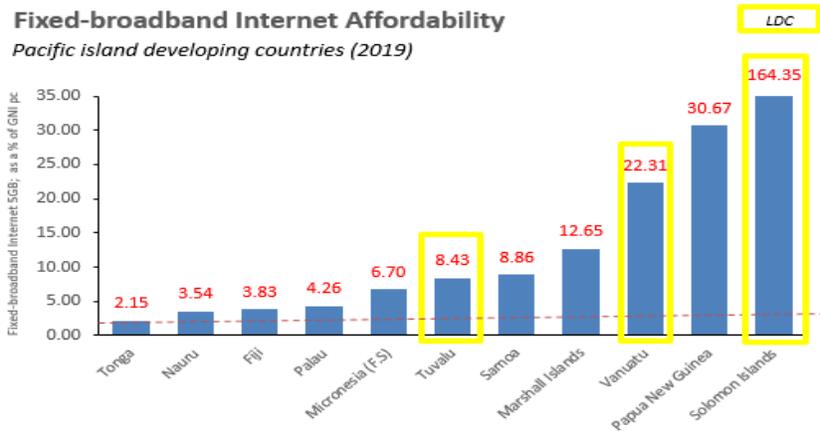
Moreover, there have been attempts by some governments in the region to restrict the use of social media to limit criticism of public officials or unfavorable coverage of events, including in Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa and the Solomon Islands.

Figure 12: Indicator 9.C.1: Proportion of population covered by a mobile network, by technology

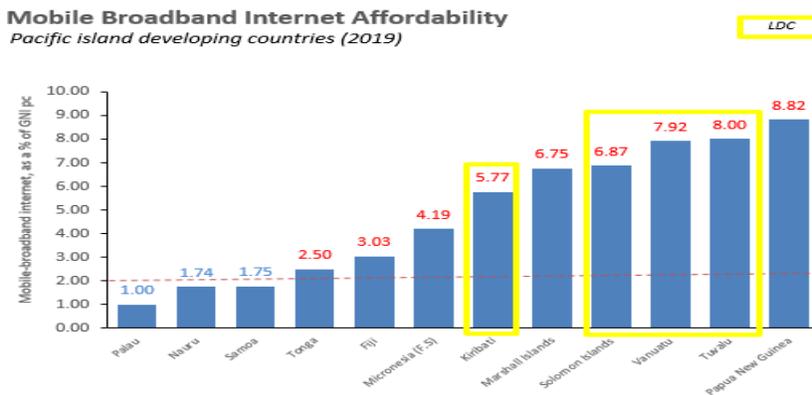


Affordability of access to broadband connectivity continues to be a challenge. Based on ITU statistics, fixed-broadband subscriptions in PICTs are considered unaffordable (less than 2 percent of monthly expenses on broadband connectivity as percentage of GNI per capita is considered unaffordable by UN Broadband Commission). For mobile-broadband subscriptions, only three countries (Palau, Nauru and Samoa) are considered affordable (see Figure 13). Pacific Least developed countries (LDCs) generally have higher monthly expenses as a percentage of GNI per capita on broadband connectivity compared to other Pacific island countries. Investing on appropriate broadband connectivity infrastructure (such as submarine fiber optic cables), establishing neutral Internet exchange points to improve Internet speed and latency, and strengthening domestic regulatory environment credibility are critical for improving affordable access.

Figure 13: Affordability of broadband access in Pacific island developing countries



Source: ITU World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators 2020 database (July 2020 Edition).
Note: data for Solomon Islands is for 2018, Nauru is for 2016 and Tuvalu 2015. Values above 2% show Internet is unaffordable according to the UN Broadband Commission.



Source: ITU World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators 2020 database (July 2020 Edition).
Note: data for Tuvalu is for 2015. Values above 2% show Internet is unaffordable according to the UN Broadband Commission.

Data and methodologies are still lacking for most targets and indicators to measure PICTs’ progress towards achieving **SDG 10 “Reduced Inequalities”**. Nevertheless, analyses in recent years confirm that, overall, the region’s population is facing increased inequalities which affect, in particular, the most vulnerable including persons living with disabilities, women²⁰⁸, youth, children, the elderly and those living in remote areas.

Typically, national averages on GDP per capita or poverty tend to mask inequalities within each country. In the context of PICTs, **geographic inequalities** make the achievement of critical SDGs particularly challenging. A recent study in the Solomon Islands illustrates that providing “universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water” (SDG target 6.1) lags far behind for households in rural areas and remote provinces which depend on using rainwater and surface water as their primary source.²⁰⁹ There are also inter-national inequalities. Out of all PICTs, the Solomon Islands have among the lowest

²⁰⁸ A more detailed analysis of gender equality in PICTs is included in 2.2 Gender Equality

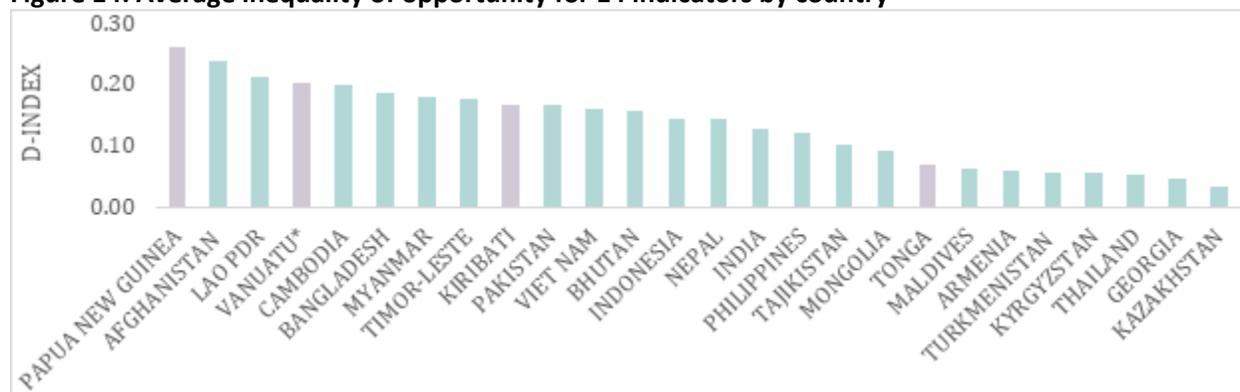
²⁰⁹ ScienceDirect (accessed 25/10/2020). Geographical inequalities in drinking water in the Solomon Islands (2019) <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0048969719352337>

access to basic drinking water services: 92 percent of urban and 55 percent of rural households. Of all SIDS, PICTs are least serviced.²¹⁰ The example and critical issue of drinking water inequality serves to highlight the need to explicitly recognize, address and include different dimensions of inequality - rural-urban, provincial, center-periphery and inter-national - in pro-equity policy and programming efforts by PICTs and stakeholders to reduce inequalities as per the 2030 Agenda.

The Gini coefficient²¹¹ which is used to measure inequality is above 0.35 in every country except Vanuatu, Tokelau and Tuvalu. Samoa (0.56), RMI (0.54), Nauru (0.52) and FSM (0.50) are falling in the category of countries with a high Gini index value (defined as 0.50 and above). Palau with a Gini index value of 0.49 comes close.²¹² According to the Household Income and Expenditure Survey, in many PICTs the richest 40 percent of households have a disproportionate share of wealth. There is also a wide gap between household wealth of the poorest 40 percent and the richest 20 percent, indicating high rates of inequality.²¹³ The detrimental economic impacts of COVID-19 threaten to exacerbate poverty and inequality, particularly gender inequality, in PICTs and compromise the region’s ability to sustain progress towards the SDGs. Unless economic and social inequalities are addressed, the region will not deliver on the promise of leaving no one behind.

Inequality exists also in terms of access to opportunities. Inequality of opportunity undermines the realization of human rights and constitutes a barrier for social mobility. Pacific Island countries vary a lot in the level of inequality in the distribution of opportunities among various population groups. On average, Amongst the 14 PICTs, Vanuatu has the highest levels of inequality in 14 opportunities and barriers, while Tonga is among the region’s better performing countries (Figure 14).²¹⁴

Figure 14: Average inequality of opportunity for 14 indicators by country



Note: The dissimilarity index (D-Index) measures how different groups - such as women or rural residents - fare in terms of access to a certain opportunity, or how different groups disproportionately experience a certain barrier. The D-Index ranges from 0 to 1, where 0 indicates no inequality. The analysis has been adapted so that the D-Index of a barrier (e.g. violence against women) still has the same interpretation as that of an opportunity: the lower the D-index the lower the inequality.

Among the 14 different indicators which are all linked to the SDGs, inequality is highest in the use of clean fuels and access to electricity, particularly in Kiribati and Vanuatu. Inequality in completion of higher

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ The Gini coefficient is a number between zero and 1, where total equality is equal to zero and total inequality (one person has everything) is equal to 1

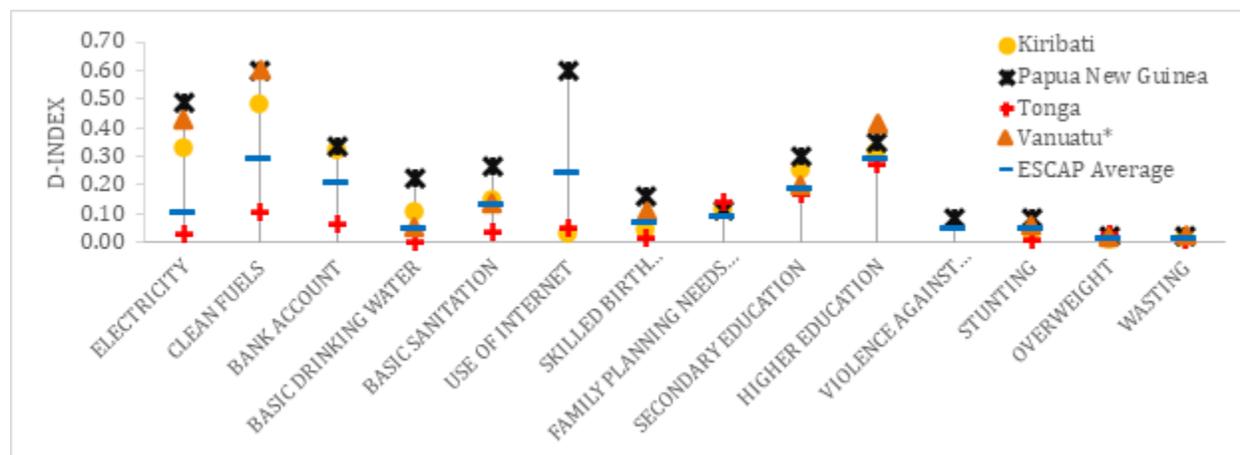
²¹² UNICEF (2017). Situation Analysis of Children in the Pacific Island Countries (December 2017)

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Source: ESCAP analysis based on the latest MICS and DHS from Papua New Guinea (2018), Kiribati (2019), Tonga (2019) and Vanuatu (2006).

education is high in all Pacific countries studied (Figure 15).²¹⁵ It is worth noting that the level of inequality is not an indicator of the level of access to a certain opportunity, but rather an indication of whether certain population groups with shared circumstances and characteristics are excluded.

Figure 15: Inequality by opportunities and barriers, selected Pacific countries



Note: The dissimilarity index (D-Index) measures how different groups - such as women or rural residents - fare in terms of access to a certain opportunity, or how different groups disproportionately experience a certain barrier. The D-Index ranges from 0 to 1, where 0 indicates no inequality. The analysis has been adapted so that the D-Index of a barrier (e.g. violence against women) still has the same interpretation as that of an opportunity: the lower the D-index the lower the inequality.

PICTs have made considerable progress in providing access to clean energy and achieving **SDG 7 “Affordable and Clean Energy”**. The overall level of electricity access in the UNPS subregion is high at 85.6 percent, even though it remains the lowest in the Asia-Pacific region. Moreover, the capacity to generate renewable energy has more than doubled since 2000, mostly driven by hydropower and solar energy.²¹⁶ Energy security has long been a central concern for PICTs. With a limited supply of domestic fossil fuels, they have historically depended on imported fuels like diesel for their electricity production and transportation. In combination with the region’s remoteness and size, this situation results in high energy prices, limited access to electricity and a disproportionate contribution to climate change.²¹⁷ While improvements are being made in the region’s utilization of renewable energy and provision of access to electricity, PICTs face even greater challenges in the provision of access to clean fuels and technologies for cooking. The latest data shows that 9.84 million people still lacked access in 2018, an increase of 0.46 million from 2015.²¹⁸

Given the considerable potential of PICTs to expand access to renewable energy which is cheaper, more reliable and better for the climate, Pacific Energy Ministers in 2017 launched the Pacific Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency. In addition to increased access to electricity, investments in renewables should help in strengthening local value chains and businesses contributing to sustainable energy transition in the region.²¹⁹

²¹⁵ Source: ESCAP analysis based on the latest MICS and DHS from Papua New Guinea (2018), Kiribati (2019), Tonga (2019) and Vanuatu (2006).

²¹⁶ UNESCAP (2020)

²¹⁷ UNIDO (accessed 24/10/2020). Pacific island countries work together for a sustainable energy future (07 September, 2018) <https://www.unido.org/stories/pacific-island-countries-work-together-sustainable-energy-future#story-start>

²¹⁸ ESCAP (accessed 10/11/20). *Asia Pacific Energy Portal*. <https://asiapacificenergy.org>

²¹⁹ Ibid. 28.

3.3.2 People-centered analysis

While extreme poverty remains relatively low, an estimated one in four Pacific islanders are living below their country's basic-needs poverty line which refers to basic food and non-food needs.²²⁰ Children, youth, elderly, women and people living with disabilities, as well as rural populations – many of whom live on remote outer islands - are disproportionately vulnerable to poverty and hardship. Even before COVID-19, around 40 percent of children were at risk of falling below the poverty line.²²¹ **Poverty amongst women and young people** is linked to **high levels of unemployment** amongst these population groups. Unemployment among youth aged 15-24 is averaging 23 percent in the Pacific region compared to the global average of 13 percent.²²² Countries like Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Nauru and Tuvalu have youth unemployment rates that exceed 50 percent, with even higher rates for young women.²²³

Young people's employment prospects in the Pacific are severely challenged by COVID-19 pandemic. Youth will be hit harder than adults in the immediate crisis and bear higher longer-term economic and social costs. Before the pandemic, young people were already facing challenges in the labor market. The crisis negatively impacts the prospects for youth through three channels. Young people are experiencing (1) job disruptions from reduced working hours and layoffs, (2) disruptions in education and training as they try to complete studies, and (3) difficulties transitioning from school to work and moving between jobs.²²⁴

In 7 out of 11 PICTs, more urban populations fall below the basic-needs poverty line than rural.²²⁵ Limited access to land for subsistence or cash-based farming, rising youth unemployment, and continued migration between rural and urban areas, is creating a growing urban poor population unable to meet basic needs without sufficient access to cash income, with a significant proportion of income spent on food. This **growing urbanization of poverty** is concentrated in informal and squatter settlements, which make up an estimated 800,000 to 1 million Pacific urban residents²²⁶. Many of these are located on the peri-urban fringes of cities termed "urban villages" that retain their ties to rural places of birth, family, and kin²²⁷. **Kinship networks and community structures** (known as *veiwekani* in Fiji, *fa'a Samoa* in Samoa, or *wantok* in Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands) continue to be an important traditional form of social protection and safety net in times of hardship through reciprocal benefits, the sharing of food and other resources. These have been utilized by many households during COVID-19 to manage the impact of job losses and reduced incomes²²⁸.

As discussed under 2.3.1 above, **labor migration and remittances** are a valuable part of Pacific Island economies, boosting household earnings and enabling investments in other key areas. In Tonga, for example, remittances have fueled investments in education, helping to increase school attendance. An

²²⁰ Pacific Data Hub (accessed 20/10/20). <https://pacificdata.org/content/17-goals-transform-pacific>

²²¹ UNICEF (accessed 23/10/20). <https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/what-we-do/social-inclusion>

²²² PIFS (2018). First Quadrennial Pacific Sustainable Development Report 2018 (prepared by Pacific Islands Forum member countries with support of Council of Regional Organizations in the Pacific and UN Agencies in the Pacific)

²²³ ILO (2017). Improving labour market outcomes in the Pacific: Policy challenges and priorities

²²⁴ ILO and ADB (2020) Tackling the COVID-19 youth employment crisis in Asia and the Pacific

²²⁵ ADB (2016). The Emergence of Pacific Urban Villages: Urbanization trends in the Pacific Islands.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ UN-Habitat (2020). Rapid Assessment of COVID-19 in Informal Settlements in Fiji. UN-Habitat (2020). Rapid Assessment of COVID-19 in Informal Settlements in the Solomon Islands.

impact study conducted in May 2020 under the Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme of New Zealand noted that it provides workers and their families with a regular, reliable source of income for daily needs as well as for educational participation; evidence also shows that the income from seasonal work enables in some contexts the development of new businesses; injection of aid and recovery during disasters; increase their skills that may be transferable to their homes and allows for income that may be spread across the community.²²⁹

However, the outflow of skilled and educated workers could lead to “brain drain” or shortages of these skills at home.²³⁰ This could have a negative effect on education and public health outcomes, especially for the most vulnerable populations.²³¹ Integration of PICT migrants into host countries’ labor markets is particularly difficult for women and youth from nations in the Pacific. More than one third of migrant women of working age are inactive, and 22.4 percent of young Pacific Islanders remain unemployed.²³²

Discrimination against **persons with disabilities** who range from 1.4 percent of the population for Fiji to 11.7 percent for RMI is still widespread and stands in the way of achieving SDG 10 “Reduced Inequalities”.²³³ It is particularly severe in fields such as education, employment, housing, transport, cultural life and access to public places and services. Less than 1 in 10 children with disabilities has access to any form of education,²³⁴ and many children with disabilities do not receive secondary education after completing primary school.²³⁵ The inequality persists in employment. For example, in Palau the employment rate of persons with disabilities stands at 19.5 percent, whereas the employment rate for the overall population is 76.1 percent.²³⁶ While Tonga and Samoa reported a higher employment rate of persons with disabilities vis-à-vis the general population, it is unclear if the nature and quality of employment are comparable as many persons with disabilities are hired in segregated sheltered workshops.²³⁷ Persons with disabilities are also frequently excluded from awareness on reproductive and sexual health, as well as disaster-related interventions.²³⁸ They also face increased risk of violence and sexual abuse.

Furthermore, while universal-design-based accessibility is a precondition to ensuring disability-inclusive development, accessibility standards might not be consistent, and/or consistently implemented across the Pacific²³⁹. In Micronesia (Federal States of), for example, only 25 percent of emergency shelters are

²²⁹ <https://www.immigration.govt.nz/documents/statistics/rse-impact-study-pacific-stream-report.pdf>

²³⁰ 48 percent of PICT migrants in “professional” fields in Australia are listed as “life science and health professionals” or “teaching professionals”. In New Zealand, 46 percent of similarly categorized PICT migrants are working in education or health.

²³¹ ILO (2017). Improving labour market outcomes in the Pacific: Policy challenges and priorities

²³² Ibid.

²³³ UNESCAP (2020).

²³⁴ UNDP (2014). The State of Human Development in the Pacific: A Report on Vulnerability and Exclusion in Time of Rapid Change.

²³⁵ ESCAP (2017). Building Disability-inclusive Societies in Asia and the Pacific: Assessing Progress of the Incheon Strategy. <https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/publications/SDD%20BDIS%20report%20A4%20v14-5-E.pdf>.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ ESCAP (2020, forthcoming). Employment of persons with disabilities in Asia and the Pacific: Trends and Outlook.

²³⁸ UNDP (2014). The State of Human Development in the Pacific: A Report on Vulnerability and Exclusion in Time of Rapid Change.

²³⁹ ESCAP (2017). Building Disability-inclusive Societies in Asia and the Pacific: Assessing Progress of the Incheon Strategy. <https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/publications/SDD%20BDIS%20report%20A4%20v14-5-E.pdf>.

accessible.²⁴⁰ Together, these exclusions have serious health, socio-economic and human rights implications (see also 3.6).

3.4 Equitable Basic Services

With a focus on equitable access to quality health and education services, WASH and nutrition, SDGs 3, 4,6 and 11 are central to this chapter, as well as the nutrition-related targets of SDG 2. Given the direct correlation of these themes and SDGs with the Pacific UNCT's COVID-19 Multisectoral Response Plan and the Socio-Economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 for Fiji, especially its Pillars 1 and 2 which aim to protect the health system and basic services, chapter 3.4 should be read together with these documents focusing on the short-term needs in response to the pandemic.

3.4.1 Assessment of SDG progress

Some progress has been made to achieve **SDG 3 "Ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages"**, with a clear positive trend since 2000 in reducing child, neonatal and maternal mortality. Some PICTs have more than halved the maternal mortality rate within this period, such as Samoa (88 to 43 deaths per 100,000 live births) and Solomon Islands (245 to 104), with many others close to achieving this milestone. Both the under-five and infant mortality rates across the Pacific region are also dropping at a good rate since 2000 (32 to 20 under-five deaths per 1,000 live births and 24 to 16 infant deaths).²⁴¹

In line with the "Healthy Islands" vision adopted by Pacific health ministers in 1995, the principles of universal health coverage are deeply embedded in health systems across the Pacific.²⁴² Accelerating the political commitments of Pacific Health Ministers articulated in the Yanuca Island Declaration on Healthy Islands²⁴³, and the Political Declaration of the High-level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage²⁴⁴, will go a long way to provide equitable access to health services, irrespective of socio-economic and legal status, health condition, disease, religion, gender, age or any other factors, with a special emphasis on the poor, vulnerable, and marginalized segments of the population.

That said, recent evidence suggests that, although health systems in PICTs largely remain affordable, it is becoming increasingly challenging to ensure access to **good quality essential services**.²⁴⁵ The Pacific region scores the lowest of all world regions on the Universal Health Coverage index (SDG 3.8.1)²⁴⁶. Key challenges related to primary health care (PHC) include 1) delivering integrated PHC services, 2) increasing the share of resources allocated to PHC, and 3) improving managerial, administrative, and supervisory capacities so that resources can be used for PHC.²⁴⁷ While these challenges continue to be addressed

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ UNESCAP (2020)

²⁴² Katherine Gilbert, Kunhee Park, Corinne Capuano, Taniela Sunia Soakai & Beth Slatyer (2019). Achieving UHC in the Pacific, a Closer Look at Implementation: Summary of a Report for Pacific Health Ministers, Health Systems & Reform, 5:1, 83-90, DOI: 10.1080/23288604.2018.1537874

²⁴³ 2015 Yanuca Island Declaration, Eleventh Pacific Health Ministers Meeting

²⁴⁴ UN General Assembly Sept 2019; *Political Declaration of the High-level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage "Universal health coverage: moving together to build a healthier world"*

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ UN Women COVID-19 and Gender Monitor, <https://data.unwomen.org/resources/covid-19-and-gender-monitor> (accessed 25/1/20)

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

through country-specific reforms, concerted political effort is needed to ensure these reforms are effective in improving access to good quality PHC for citizens in all PICTs.²⁴⁸ The response to COVID-19 is likely to have diverted resources, including staff and funding, away from other existing health priorities and so may have exacerbated existing difficulties in access to health systems.

Three-quarters of PICTs already have maternal mortality ratios below the 2030 target, and half of them have achieved the under-five mortality rate target of fewer than 25 deaths per 1000 live births.²⁴⁹ That said, most low and middle-income PICTs still experience a significant burden of preventable maternal and newborn morbidity and mortality.²⁵⁰ This is linked closely to considerable challenges in ensuring the **quality of care for mothers and babies**. With skilled birth attendance rates over 80 percent across most Pacific Island countries - with the exception of Papua New Guinea at 40 percent – the Pacific is an example of how relatively high healthcare provider coverage does not necessarily result in better maternal and newborn health.²⁵¹ Quality care is now considered a fundamental requirement for achieving SDG 3 and related goals such as SDG 5.²⁵² Adolescent childbearing is another factor that comes to bear on maternal outcomes: child marriages rates are 18-28 percent in Marshall Islands, Vanuatu, Nauru, Solomon Islands, and Kiribati, with adolescent fertility rates comparably high.²⁵³ Many PICTs are characterized by over-strained and under-resourced health systems, health workforce shortages, high aid dependency, infrastructure limitations (including lack of transport among low-income groups and overcrowded facilities) and challenging geographic conditions.^{254 255} These are all barriers to achieving quality health care across the Pacific. Gaps exist in available reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health services, including low antenatal care attendance and high unmet family planning needs.²⁵⁶ Recent studies recommend a **“whole of health system” approach** to embrace comprehensive, effective and sustainable ways to improve health care quality in the Pacific region.²⁵⁷ To effectively strengthen quality maternal and newborn care, these efforts must not only include a focus on the points of health care delivery but encompass learnings from women and their communities, sustaining education programs and improvements in health system leadership.²⁵⁸

Access to essential medicines is critical to achieving universal health coverage and is also recognized as a key building block of a strong health system. Medicines and health products are important for addressing health problems and improving quality of lives. They form an indispensable component of health systems in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of disease and in alleviating disability and functional deficiency. Critical stakeholders have over the years recognized the need to improve the pharmaceutical and health product management practices in PICTs, noting that numerous challenges still hinder proper access to healthcare. Health programs cannot succeed unless the supply chain delivers a reliable,

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Pacific Data Hub (accessed 10/11/20). <https://pacificdata.org/content/17-goals-transform-pacific>

²⁵⁰ The Lancet (2020). Improving the quality of maternal and newborn care in the Pacific region: A scoping review [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanwpc/article/PIIS2666-6065\(20\)30028-6/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanwpc/article/PIIS2666-6065(20)30028-6/fulltext)

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² WHO (2016). Standards for improving quality of maternal and newborn care in health facilities https://www.who.int/maternal_child_adolescent/documents/improving-maternal-newborn-care-quality/en/

²⁵³ Pacific Data Hub (accessed 26/11/2020); UN Women COVID-19 and Gender Monitor (accessed 26/11/2020)

²⁵⁴ UNEP (2015). Emerging issues for small island developing states: results of the UNEP/UN DESA foresight process.

²⁵⁵ UNICEF (2017). Situation analysis of children in the Pacific Island Countries.

²⁵⁶ The Lancet (2020). Improving the quality of maternal and newborn care in the Pacific region: A scoping review [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanwpc/article/PIIS2666-6065\(20\)30028-6/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanwpc/article/PIIS2666-6065(20)30028-6/fulltext)

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

continuous supply of health commodities to its customers. A properly functioning supply chain is a critical part of ensuring commodity security—when every person can obtain and use quality essential health supplies (see also Figure 16).

Figure 16: Supply Chain Common Findings & Recommendations across Countries²⁵⁹

1. Strategic Planning & Performance Management	Findings: Most PICT countries do not have supply chain strategic or master plans and have insufficient monitoring of supply chain indicators to track progress and achievements especially for remote location SDPs.
	Recommendations: Create better linkages of data from LMIS and HMIS using DHIS2 or Tupaia and strengthen routine supervision of SDPs and warehouses to provide valuable data for supply chain monitoring.
2. Logistics Management Information Systems	Findings: Poor or no recording and reporting of consumption data by health facility staff and inconsistent use of stock cards leads to poor visibility of supply chain data.
	Recommendations: Consumption data at the SDP level is the best indicator of actual commodity requirements. Consumption records should be used by SDPs daily and aggregate consumption data reported to higher levels routinely. Electronic LMIS (mSupply) needs to be able to capture this data from all SDPs, including remote locations.
3. Human Resource	Findings: Some countries, particularly remote locations, face ongoing challenges with maintaining sufficient numbers of qualified personnel
	Recommendations: Human resource assessments conducted and strategies for addressing shortages need to be developed
4. Forecasting & Supply Planning	Findings: Insufficient collaboration between Programs, Central Medical Stores and NGOs, limited data triangulation and adjusting for poor quality, stock outs, or low reporting rates.
	Recommendations: Development of annual forecasting process that brings together all stakeholders and building capacity in multi method forecasting techniques.
5. Product Selection & Procurement	Findings: Multi-year contracts/ rate contracts are not in use. Some countries rely completely on UNFPA in-kind donations for RH products
	Recommendations: Sustainability of commodity supplies and process to wean off in-kind donation by 2022
6. Warehousing & Inventory Management	Findings: Expired health products continue to take up valuable storage space and disposal of health products is an environmental hazard.

²⁵⁹ UNFPA (May 2019) Regional PICTs Supply Chain Management Workshop Report and UNFPA (2020) Health Facility Readiness Assessment Report Fiji, Kiribati, Tonga, Samoa, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu

	Recommendations: Plans for de-junking, development of waste management guidelines and review of inventory management system.
7. Transportation	Findings: Transportation to serve outer islands rely on costly outsourced transportation.
	Recommendations: Innovations in transportations, and public private partnerships with local distribution companies.

The Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) includes a clear commitment to ensure that women and men have access to the widest possible range of safe and effective family planning methods to exercise free and informed choice, while recognizing that appropriate methods for couples and individuals vary according to their age, parity, family-size preference and other factors (United Nations, 1995, para 7.23). SDG target 3.7 calls on countries “to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes. Globally, the proportion of women who have their need for family planning satisfied by modern methods (SDG indicator 3.7.1) is 76 percent in 2019.

Worldwide Demographic Health Surveys²⁶⁰ in 2015 indicated that 64 percent of married or in-union women of reproductive age were using some form of contraception. However, contraceptive use was much lower in least developed countries (40 percent), and was particularly low in Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia (39 percent). As at 2019²⁶¹, globally, 62 percent of married women or in union of reproductive age are using a method of family planning and 56 percent use a modern method. As of 2019 globally, among the 1.9 billion women of reproductive age (15-49 years) both married/in union as well as unmarried, 1.1 billion have a need for family planning, that is, they are either current users of contraceptives—842 million (44 percent) use modern methods of contraception and 80 million (4.5 percent) use traditional methods—or have an unmet need for family planning—190 million women (10 percent) want to avoid pregnancy and do not use any contraceptive method. As of 2019, 48.5 percent of women of reproductive age globally are using a method of contraception whereas this is only 28 percent in low income countries and 30.9 percent in least developed countries.

The **Pacific region has the highest level of unmet needs for family planning in the world** at 25 percent, exceeding that of Sub Saharan Africa at 23 percent. The remoteness of many of the outer Islands and atolls in PICTs poses an on-going challenge to provide universal access to sexual and reproductive health services. For most PICTs, the latest Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) data are from between 2009 and 2014. In Kiribati, one of the PICTs with a recent population-based survey²⁶², the observations indicate that the percentage of women age 15-49 years currently married or in union who are using a modern contraceptive method is 27.3 percent compared to 20.3 percent of all women age 15-49 years who are using a modern contraceptive method. 53.6 percent

²⁶⁰ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2015). Trends in Contraceptive Use Worldwide 2015 (ST/ESA/SER.A/349)

²⁶¹ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). Contraceptive Use by Method 2019: Data Booklet (ST/ESA/SER.A/435).

²⁶² Kiribati National Statistics Office. 2019. Kiribati Social Development Indicator Survey 2018-19, Survey Findings Report. South Tarawa, Kiribati: National Statistics Office.

of women age 15–49 years currently married or in union have their need for family planning satisfied with modern contraceptive methods.

Neonatal mortality accounts for between one quarter and one half of all child deaths in Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, FSM and Marshall Islands. Up to 40 percent of newborn deaths in the Pacific are attributable to complications related to low birth weight. PICTs are facing an overlapping ‘**triple burden of malnutrition**’ (undernutrition; micronutrient deficiencies; and overweight/obesity). Five PICTs have high or very high rates of stunting, and all PICTs have high rates of maternal and childhood anaemia and very high rates of overweight and obesity among women.²⁶³

The impact of **climate change poses health risks** for the region. Poor health (including mental health) and death as a result of extreme weather events and climate-sensitive diseases such as malaria, dengue, cholera, filariasis, leptospirosis, schistosomiasis, and ciguatera fish poisoning, are on the rise.²⁶⁴ At the 11th Pacific Health Ministers Meeting held in Fiji in 2015, health leaders emphasized the important links between health, environment, and climate change. In May 2018, the **Pacific Islands Action Plan on Climate Change and Health** was launched to ensure that, by 2030, health systems in all PICTs will be resilient to climate variability and change.²⁶⁵

The rapid increase in **non-communicable diseases (NCDs)**, with their associated premature mortality risk and rising health care costs, is a central health issue in the Pacific region.²⁶⁶ The rise of NCDs in the Pacific – as elsewhere – has been driven primarily by four major risk factors: tobacco use, unhealthy diets, physical inactivity, and the harmful use of alcohol.²⁶⁷

NCDs including cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancer, and chronic respiratory diseases, represent the single largest cause of premature and preventable mortality (before age 60 years), accounting for around 70–75 percent of all deaths in the Pacific Islands.²⁶⁸ The top 10 countries with the highest rates of diabetes in the world are in the Pacific Islands; 52.45 percent of adult males in Tonga are estimated to be obese; in Kiribati, Federated State of Micronesia, Tonga and Samoa adult female obesity is estimated to be 50 percent or more.²⁶⁹ Given that multiple factors inside and beyond the health sector are driving the rise in NCDs, a **multi-sectoral approach** is essential to combat NCDs encompassing i.a. education, increased investments in local and organic agriculture, and strengthening of regional and local food production.²⁷⁰

Health worker availability and density remains below WHO guidelines in most PICTs.²⁷¹ In addition, even where overall health worker availability is high at the national level, it is challenging to ensure that the right skills are readily accessible when required by small populations in outlying islands.²⁷² A recent study focusing on RMNCAH services highlighted that effective coverage across the Pacific region not only

²⁶³ UNICEF (2019). Country Office Annual Report 2019 (Pacific Island Multi-Country Programme)

²⁶⁴ WHO (accessed 10/11/20). Protecting the health of Pacific islanders from climate change and environmental hazards <https://www.who.int/westernpacific/activities/protecting-the-islanders-from-climate-change-and-environmental-hazards>

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Pacific Data Hub (accessed 10/11/20). <https://pacificdata.org/content/17-goals-transform-pacific>

²⁶⁷ WHO (accessed 10/11/20). Addressing noncommunicable diseases in the Pacific islands <https://www.who.int/westernpacific/activities/addressing-ncds-in-the-pacific>

²⁶⁸ World Bank (2014). Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) Roadmap Report

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Pacific Data Hub (accessed 10/11/20). <https://pacificdata.org/content/17-goals-transform-pacific>

²⁷² UNFPA (2019). State of the Pacific's RMNCAH Workforce Report 2019

depends on availability, but also on accessibility and acceptability, and on the quality of both, services and health workers. On the latter, the study shows that, while most countries in the region have good availability of nurses, they are suffering from a pervasive shortage of qualified RMNCAH specialists, including doctors and midwives.²⁷³ Large-scale **migration of health workers** to Australia and New Zealand contributes significantly to these shortages. Whereas in 2006, 455 doctors and 1158 nurses and midwives born in the Pacific were working in Australia, by 2016 these numbers had increased to 607 doctors and 2954 nurses and midwives.²⁷⁴ The number of healthcare workers from some Pacific Island countries who migrated to Australia exceeds the total number of local healthcare workers in these countries.²⁷⁵

With regards to **SDG 4 “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”**, enrolment in basic education is relatively high in the Pacific, and most countries are on track to achieve universal primary education.²⁷⁶ Some PICTs are progressing well with regards to early childhood education. Pre-primary net enrolment increased between 2018 and 2019 in most PICTs where data is available (from 53 to 57 percent in FSM; 90 to 97 percent in Tuvalu; and 78 to 87 percent in Vanuatu). Access to quality early childhood education expanded in 2020 with the introduction of Pre-Primary Year (PPY) in all government schools in Solomon Islands as part of basic education and the development of new ECE curricula in Tonga and Kiribati.²⁷⁷

Despite the high enrolment rates in primary school, PICTs are struggling to achieve decent education outcomes, including in the areas of literacy and numeracy, early childhood education, post-secondary education, and training.²⁷⁸ With regards to early childhood education, recent studies have shown that PICT households do not provide sufficient support or see their role in providing cognitive stimulus. While most children have good oral skills, they have very limited exposure to books or printed words.²⁷⁹ Additionally, the frequently cramped and overcrowded conditions of those living in informal settlements with poor access to electricity and a reliable internet supply means it is hard for children to perform home learning, compounded by the closure of schools for many months during COVID-19 State of Emergency measures. The additional burdens of domestic tasks and subsistence activities such as farming and fishing meant that many children, especially girls, had less time to continue their studies at home, along with less support from parents and carers who continued working to provide household income²⁸⁰. This will have significant long-term consequences for the achievement of education outcomes if children are unable to complete the curriculum.

The 2018 Pacific Island Literacy and Numeracy Assessment shows that 53 percent of students in Year 4 met or exceeded expected literacy standards – up from 43 percent in 2015; an 63 percent of Year 6 students met or exceeded literacy standards – up from under 50 percent in 2015.²⁸¹ That said, PICT governments are well aware of the main education challenges facing the region. In response, 15 PICTs and 6 development partners have joined in a comprehensive 10-year **Pacific Regional Education**

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ DevPolicyBlog, Bray M. (accessed 12/11/20). Could the Step-Up deepen healthcare worker brain drain in the Pacific? (July 5, 2019) <https://devpolicy.org/could-the-step-up-deepen-healthcare-worker-brain-drain-in-the-pacific-20190705/>

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Pacific Data Hub (accessed 10/11/20). <https://pacificdata.org/content/17-goals-transform-pacific>

²⁷⁷ UNICEF (2019). Country Office Annual Report 2019 (Pacific Island Multi-Country Programme)

²⁷⁸ Pacific Data Hub (accessed 10/11/20). <https://pacificdata.org/content/17-goals-transform-pacific>

²⁷⁹ DevPolicyBlog, Jarvie W. (accessed 12/11/20). Literacy in the Pacific: in danger of being sidelined? (February 14, 2020) <https://devpolicy.org/literacy-in-the-pacific-in-danger-of-being-sidelined-20200214/>

²⁸⁰ UN-Habitat (2020). Rapid Assessment of COVID-19 in Informal Settlements in Fiji.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

Framework. A Regional Inclusive Education Taskforce was also formed in 2020 and a Regional Inclusive Education Review for the Pacific initiated.

12 PICTs had unplanned school closures due to COVID-19. While most closures were short, it is anticipated that they may be required again if COVID-19 is detected in communities (local transmission). This situation has led PICTs and partners to continue to plan, build capacity and strengthen school systems to enable distance learning, and to strengthen safe school operations with the development and implementation of context-specific guidelines and communication materials on safe schools and COVID-19 prevention and control. One result is that PICTs are exploring in more depth the use of remote and distance learning modalities, not only in the case of school closures due to COVID-19 but also in preparation for future emergencies which may lead to school closures, including natural disasters and future disease outbreaks. Such modalities could also improve quality education for students in remote areas of the Pacific, but it is important to be mindful of the additional pressures faced at home. PICTs have significantly increased their involvement with the Global Partnership for Education, with 7 countries officially joining the organisation. PICTs have been able to secure funding to support the development and implementation of strategic plans and support their responses to COVID-19.

In recent years, increased attention has been given to quality and relevant Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and higher education for better participation in the world of work. With the unprecedented impact of COVID-19 causing disruption at all levels of education, greater investments in ICT and digital skills, and in the design of the educational system to ensure learning continuity have become urgent. With prolonged border closures affecting the mobility of teachers and learners across borders as promoted by the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education (also known as the Tokyo Convention),²⁸² countries are compelled to use and invest in capacities and skills that are domestically available, including through ICT for teaching and learning. New partnerships with the private sector can support teaching and learning by providing affordable data and facilities for high-tech, low tech and no tech modalities. On 27 August 2020, Fiji became the first Small Island Development State to ratify the Tokyo Convention, thus achieving a milestone and setting a precedent for PICTs in ensuring international standards of quality and accreditation of its higher education across borders.²⁸³

Water and sanitation coverage in the Pacific is low, and accessibility varies widely across, and between PICTs. This context makes it very challenging to achieve **SDG 6 “Ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation”** across the Pacific region. The combined coverage levels of basic water and basic sanitation are lower than in any other region in the world.²⁸⁴ Small size, fragility, natural vulnerability and limited resources all contribute to WASH challenges in PICTs. Whereas 90 percent of the total population in the Pacific have access to an improved drinking water source, rates are significantly lower in rural areas,²⁸⁵ and within urban areas access remains uneven. Those in informal settlements are often under-served and do not count towards formal urban statistics due to unclear boundaries, poor financial feasibility or formal tenure being a precondition for access. Water shortages and cuts are common due to insufficient capacity to meet growing demand, for example in Kiribati where piped water

²⁸² http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=48975&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

²⁸³ <https://bangkok.unesco.org/content/fiji-ratifies-tokyo-convention-recognition>

²⁸⁴ Pacific Data Hub (accessed 10/11/20). <https://pacificdata.org/content/17-goals-transform-pacific>

²⁸⁵ UNICEF Pacific Islands (accessed 14/11/20). Water, sanitation and hygiene programme <https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/what-we-do/water-sanitation-hygiene#:~:text=A%20third%20of%20children%20in,significantly%20lower%20in%20rural%20areas.>

is only available for 2 hours a day²⁸⁶. In addition, poorly maintained or damaged pipeline infrastructure and the contamination of wells and groundwater sources by sewerage can lead to diarrhoeal diseases. Access to improved sanitation is uneven in the Pacific region with Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu hosting 81 percent of the population without access.²⁸⁷ Many informal settlements rely on septic tanks or pit latrines shared with other households and can be difficult to access, especially for women. Increased job losses and reduced household income due to COVID-19 are likely to negatively affect access to basic services such as piped water and improved sanitation. If households are unable to pay water bills, they risk disconnection once temporary suspensions are lifted, while reduced government budgets may delay advancements towards universal access.

A third of children in the Pacific do not have access to adequate sanitation, and one in ten do not have access to safe drinking water. The use of different types of unimproved toilets creates conditions of contaminating drinking water sources and food. As a result, water and sanitation-related diseases are amongst the leading causes of death for children under five across the Pacific.²⁸⁸ In addition, children and their families are most vulnerable to the WASH-related impacts of climate change.²⁸⁹ A recent progress update on WASH in schools²⁹⁰ focuses on how countries and schools should ensure a safe environment for children as schools reopen during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the major findings for East Asia and Pacific are that:

- 3 out of 10 households in East Asia and Pacific do not have a dedicated place for washing hands with soap and water on premises
- More than half of the schools in East Asia and the Pacific do not have hand-washing facilities with soap and water available to students
- More than 6 out of 10 health care facilities in East Asia and Pacific have functional handwashing facilities with soap and water or hand sanitizer

The impact of poor water and sanitation falls disproportionately on women who predominantly carry out water and sanitation related tasks such as cleaning, cooking, washing, and caring for children and the sick. Generally, women in the Pacific report significant difficulties with access to sanitation including exposure to violence whilst accessing them.²⁹¹

An already challenging WASH context presents important risks with regards to COVID-19, given that good WASH practices play a critical role in blocking transmission, particularly through hand hygiene.²⁹² While public health messaging for COVID-19 has focused on good hygiene practices such as washing hands, the lack of adequate sanitation infrastructure and access challenges hamper consistent implementation, especially in rural areas (communities, schools and health care facilities) and informal settlements across PICTs.²⁹³

²⁸⁶ WHO (2016). Sanitation, drinking-water and health in Pacific island countries: 2015 update and future outlook. <https://iris.wpro.who.int/handle/10665.1/13130>

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ CARE International (2020). Rapid Gender Analysis COVID-19 Pacific Region (26 March 2020)

<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Pacific%20RGA%20FINAL%20APPROVED%2026March2020.pdf>

²⁹⁰ <https://washdata.org/how-we-work/about-imp>

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² ADB Blog (accessed 13/11/20). Water, sanitation and hygiene key to Pacific's ongoing COVID strategy <https://blogs.adb.org/blog/water-sanitation-and-hygiene-key-to-pacific-s-ongoing-covid-strategy>

²⁹³ Ibid.

Overall, the **impact of COVID-19 will increase poverty** over the coming years, with negative impacts on various socio-economic outcomes for Pacific Island populations.²⁹⁴ To mitigate the multiple risks and impacts associated with a rise in income poverty levels, it will be critical to ensure continued access to basic services and social protection, especially for the most vulnerable populations.²⁹⁵

3.5 Governance and Community Engagement

Key elements of this chapter are linked to targets of **SDG 16 “Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions”**. SDG 16 is important to PICTs which are highly diverse in political status, population, development, migration prospects, and potential for instability. Linked to this diverse context, regional stability is facing numerous emerging and growing threats which, in turn, can have negative long-term effects on economic growth and sustainable development.

Whereas the Pacific region is generally known for relatively high levels of social resilience and low levels of armed violent conflicts, interpersonal violence, particularly against women, is widespread. Although the Solomon Islands stand out as the only PICT that has experienced violent conflict, there have been accounts of political unrest in Tonga, Vanuatu and Fiji²⁹⁶ and ensuring the prevention of the emergence of conflict or relapse is critical for sustaining peace in the region. Potential threats to peace and security of PICTs include corruption, population growth, urbanization, migration, displacement and migration, climate fragility risks, water resource issues, agricultural production decline, youth unemployment, political instability, unstable governance, rising socio-economic inequalities and exclusion, poor resource management and land disputes. These challenges are exacerbated by the growing negative effects of climate change on the environment and customary livelihoods, as well as shifts in the international order, increasing transnational organized crime and cyberattacks.²⁹⁷ These issues are reflected in the expanded concept of security adopted by regional leaders through the **2018 Boe Declaration on Regional Security**, with climate change being recognized as the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of Pacific peoples²⁹⁸

The Boe Declaration Action plan outlines the priorities and framework for this expanded definition of security through six strategic areas: climate security, human security and humanitarian assistance, environmental and resource security, transnational crime, cyber-enabled crime and cybersecurity and creating an enabling environment for implementation including an appropriate coordination mechanism.²⁹⁹

SDG 16 and relevant targets are closely reflected in the concept of **good governance**³⁰⁰ as a prerequisite for creating and sustaining peaceful and inclusive societies. Pacific leaders have long recognized the

²⁹⁴ UN Pacific (2020). SEIA Fiji (September 2020).

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Ackman, M., Hammond, D., Cooney, C., & Liu, L. (2018). Pacific Peace Index, 2018 (Report number 59, Institute for Economics & Peace, Sydney)

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ PIFS (2018). Boe Declaration on Regional Security, 2018 <https://www.forumsec.org/2018/09/05/boe-declaration-on-regional-security/>

²⁹⁹ PIFS (2019). Boe Declaration Action Plan, 2019 <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/BOE-document-Action-Plan.pdf>

³⁰⁰ According to UNESCAP’s definition, good governance has eight major characteristics. It is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective, efficient, equitable, inclusive, and follows the rule of law. It assures that

central importance of good governance for the Pacific region. The **Framework for Pacific Regionalism** which Pacific leaders adopted in July 2014, includes “good governance, the full observance of democratic values, the rule of law, the defense and promotion of all human rights, gender equality, and commitment to just societies” as a core value. It also lists “strengthened governance, legal, financial, and administrative systems” as one of its four principal objectives, alongside sustainable development, economic growth and security.³⁰¹ That said, the **Pacific Plan** which preceded the Framework for Pacific Regionalism covering the period 2005-2014, already included the same four objectives as its fundamental pillars, with an expansion of the sustainable development pillar in 2009 to reflect the importance of climate change, and improving livelihoods and well-being. The goals of good governance are identified as “improved transparency, accountability, equity and efficiency in the management and use of resources in the Pacific”.³⁰² The **2020 Teieniwa Vision: Pacific Unity Against Corruption** further recognizes “that all of our progress and aspirations for a peaceful, harmonious and prosperous Pacific cannot be realised unless we address corruption”.

Combating corruption in all its forms requires a response that is holistic, multi-disciplinary, co-ordinated and goes beyond the traditional public-private sector divide. All PICs have become States parties to the **United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC)**, the only legally binding, global anti-corruption instrument. With the support of the UNODC-UNDP Pacific Regional Anti-Corruption Project, UNCAC has facilitated Pacific State parties to adopt measures to prevent and fight corruption, such as the development of National Anti-Corruption Strategies, capacity-building of national integrity institutions and corruption prevention engagement of governments with non-State actors, including civil society, the private sector, youth groups and the media. While this is a long-term investment, establishing transparent, accountable and inclusive national integrity institutions will bring the Pacific closer to achieving UNCAC and SDG 16, as well as facilitate the broader implementation of the other SDGs. Doing so in an inclusive and transparent manner is likely to ensure buy-in from stakeholders, including non-State actors, and enable governments to draw in the wider community to support their national anti-corruption efforts.

In relation to SDG 16, the Pacific region is also facing increasing challenges on **drug trafficking and transnational organized crime**, including illegal fishing and cybercrime. For example, PICTs are now exploited as transshipment points for methamphetamine trafficked from East and Southeast Asia and North America to Australia and New Zealand. PICTs are also increasingly targeted as destinations markets for illicit manufacture of methamphetamine (e.g. Fiji and French Polynesia). This is a worrying anticipated trend, as there have been many instances of growing illicit drug markets in countries, located along major drug trafficking routes. At the same time, countries in the region do not have the capacities and systems to collect data and provide proper national responses to address these challenges.

Through the implementation of the 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, the 12 PICTs³⁰³ that have ratified the Convention, acknowledge and conserve the diversity of cultural and natural heritage, ensure fair access to it and the equitable sharing of the benefits deriving from its use. This enhances the sense of place and belonging, mutual respect for others and social cohesion.

corruption is minimized, and that the views and voices of minorities and the most vulnerable are considered in decision-making. It is also responsive to the present and future needs of society. (UNESCAP. What is Good Governance? - accessed 28/10/20). <https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/good-governance.pdf>

³⁰¹ PIFS (2014). Framework for Pacific Regionalism (July 2014)

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ The 12 PICTs that are State Parties to the 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage are the Cook Islands, FSM, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Niue, Palau, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu.

3.5.1 Assessment of SDG Progress

Based on these comprehensive frameworks for regional integration and coordination in the Pacific, PICTs have been actively promoting good governance over many years. Although different approaches were followed across Pacific countries, region-wide studies identified a range of common institutions, policies and measures which PICTs have taken to strengthen good governance and, in particular, to prevent corruption.³⁰⁴

Despite the explicit region-wide political commitment and many initiatives across PICTs, the **record of governance achievements over the last 15 years remains mixed**. Amidst signs of progress, examples of poor governance persist with regards to parliaments, executive governments and key institutions such as auditor general and ombudsman offices.³⁰⁵ Some of these shortcomings can be linked to examples of corruption and political instability. They also have likely contributed to weak economic growth across Pacific Island countries. In line with a positive long-term trend for the East Asia and Pacific region, global measures such as the World Bank Governance Indicators³⁰⁶ and the Global Corruption Barometer³⁰⁷ show improvements in many governance dimensions for most PICTs. At the same time, some countries, including Federated States of Micronesia, Palau and Vanuatu show declining performances with regards to political stability, rule of law, and, in part, control of corruption.

Moreover, the majority of governments have implemented states of emergency measures in response to COVID-19 despite the low number or lack of community transmission cases of COVID-19. According to international human rights standards, the imposition of a state of emergency must meet a number of criteria, including: adoption through law which is public available and accessible; justified as being necessary to pursue a legitimate public health goal; respect for the principle of proportionality when imposing penalties for violating emergency measures; specification of the duration and imposed for the shortest period possible to achieve the public health goal; and refraining from the use of emergency powers to regulate day-to-day life.³⁰⁸

In the 2018 global fragility assessment of the World Bank which examined nine PICTs, five of them were rated as fragile, due to having governance scores of less than 3.2 (i.e. poor governance). These included Marshall Islands (2.74), Federated States of Micronesia (2.82), Tuvalu (2.96), Kiribati (2.97), and Solomon Islands (3.08). In comparison, only three Asian countries have governance scores of less than 3.2: Timor-Leste, Afghanistan and Myanmar.³⁰⁹

While many contributing factors can be found to explain the poor governance ratings of some PICTs and the mixed performance across key domains of good governance in the Pacific, it is important to

³⁰⁴ Babacan (2014). Good Governance and Development in the Pacific (The Journal of Pacific Studies, Volume 34, 2014)

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ The Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) project reports aggregate and individual governance indicators for over 200 countries and territories over the period 1996–2019, for six dimensions of governance: Voice and Accountability; Political Stability and Absence of Violence; Government Effectiveness; Regulatory Quality; Rule of Law; and Control of Corruption. <https://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/>

³⁰⁷ The Global Corruption Barometer includes a series of worldwide and regional public opinion surveys - conducted by Transparency International - to capture the direct personal experiences of citizens on corruption in their daily lives. <https://www.transparency.org/en/what-we-do>

³⁰⁸ OHCHR Guidance on Emergency Response and COVID-19, https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Events/EmergencyMeasures_COVID19.pdf.

³⁰⁹ Stephen Howes (2019). Poor Governance in the Pacific: The forgotten Issue (Development Policy Centre, August 15, 2019) <https://devpolicy.org/poor-governance-in-the-pacific-a-forgotten-issue-20190816/>

understand the governance systems of the Pacific Islands in their **cultural and historic context**. Although each PICT has its own specific governance systems, needs and challenges, for some of them the “modern” state represents a relatively new form of political organization. Overall, the occidental governance systems and structures left behind by colonial powers did not take account or integrate local cultural concepts and leadership, or adjust to customary political systems and structures.³¹⁰ Since independence, the Pacific leaders’ call to better integrate and merge traditional cultural values and norms with formal governance has not been sufficiently implemented. Reasons for lack of integration of the so called “Pacific Way” have been traced back to insufficient political will and leadership, the absence of conceptual tools on how to integrate culture in economic and political measures, and a lack of clarity on the tangible benefits of integrating traditional practices, values and norms into formal governance systems and structures to the extent that they promote and protect international human rights principles, including non-discrimination, equality and accountability.³¹¹ In view of limited institutional capacities and a challenging context across PICTs to provide services to all citizens, better use of customary structures and mechanisms which are in line with international human rights principles could be further explored (see also below under “Accountable and Responsive Institutions”).

Diverse cultural practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, or skills represent the PICTs intangible cultural heritage. This form of heritage which forms an integral part of the Pacific way of life is transmitted by communities, groups and individuals who actively exercise its ongoing stewardship. Thereby it is contributing to sustainable development by promoting well-being, dignity and creativity for peaceful and inclusive societies. The safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage is defined through the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.³¹² The Socio-Economic Impact Assessment for COVID-19 confirmed that social and cultural participation and inclusion are essential to Pacific well-being and form the backbone of kinship relations.

Accountable and Responsive Institutions

A central issue which affects the accountability and responsiveness of Pacific regional and national institutions is the **paucity of data** which constrains evidence-based planning, monitoring, reporting and evaluation. Apart from weak statistical capacities and limited financing, this challenge is also rooted in the Pacific region’s unique geographic and demographic context. The total population of PICTs is dispersed across several thousand islands which increases the costs and logistical challenges associated with data collection and compounds the statistical burden for these countries.³¹³ The diversity of languages found in the Pacific further adds to the complexity and costs of data collection.³¹⁴ There are also challenges at national and subnational levels on appreciation of planning, monitoring and utilization data/evidence from evaluations for decision making, target setting and planning for the SDGs.

In view of these challenges, projections are that it will take considerable time and resources to build adequate statistical capacities across the entire SDG framework and that data will not be available for years on some indicators.³¹⁵ It will therefore be essential to continue reporting on data gaps to sustain

³¹⁰ Firth (2018). *Instability in the Pacific Islands: A status report*

³¹¹ Babacan (2014). *Good Governance and Development in the Pacific* (The Journal of Pacific Studies, Volume 34, 2014)

³¹² The 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage has 13 State Parties from the Pacific, namely; the Cook Islands, FSM, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu

³¹³ Ackman, M., Hammond, D., Cooney, C., & Liu, L. (2018). *Pacific Peace Index, 2018* (Report number 59, Institute for Economics & Peace, Sydney)

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

political commitment, as well as international awareness and support, and to supplement quantitative data with qualitative assessments, while building statistical capacity within the region including addressing the institutional changes required of the national statistical system.

The lack of women’s representation in Pacific regional and national institutions is a major weakness for institutional accountability and responsiveness. PICTs have the lowest proportion of women in national parliaments in the world – with Tonga, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands, FSM and Vanuatu all having less than 10 percent women in Parliament as at 1 January 2020, compared to a global average of 24.9 percent.³¹⁶ This lack of representation of women is repeated across all national and regional governance institutions, including in the judiciary, the police, and senior management and heads of ministries in the public service.

Capacity building and support for data collection and utilization for programming, including Results-Based Management training for governments and non-government partners, will be necessary, as well as concerted efforts of all development partners in supporting national statistical systems to address gaps which include legislative reform, harnessing of emerging data sources and technology, and new skill set requirements for statistical offices, with emphasis on leadership, management and communication skills.³¹⁷

The mixed governance record of PICTs is linked to weaknesses in their **institutional capacities** which can constitute a major impediment to ensuring long-term sustainable development. Strong and legitimate institutions are not only fundamental to achieving SDG 16 which, in turn, directly supports all other SDGs, but to respond effectively to existing and emerging environmental and socio-economic threats which, if left unaddressed, can destabilize PICTs and the Pacific region. For example, the lack of strong, coordinated, and well-equipped institutions and political will at the national and regional levels towards urban issues has contributed to the unplanned urban growth seen in many Pacific towns and cities. Although PICTs often have limited public sector capacities, **customary community authority** and **social relations at local level** remain strong and must be examined carefully when planning interventions to promote good governance.³¹⁸ In this context, strengthening the capacities of PICTs for public service delivery must take into account both state institutions and informal governance structures and the interplay between the two, noting the need to avoid systems of patronage and favouritism, with active participation and organization of civil society.³¹⁹ In that sense, one answer to the longstanding debate around merging indigenous and introduced governance norms might lie in piloting innovative approaches with local communities “on the ground”. Successful **urban governance** offers one such approach by bringing together both modern and traditional (customary) systems of governance, civil society, the church and nongovernment organizations that have overlapped and mixed over time to suit different needs and contexts.³²⁰

³¹⁶ Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN Women, Women in Politics: 2020, <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/infographics/2020-03/women-in-politics-2020>

³¹⁷ Paris 21 (2019). Statistical Capacity Development Outlook 2019.

PARIS21 has developed the Statistical Capacity Monitor, a global platform of indicators on statistical capacity, to support countries, development partners and service providers to understand where the capacity needs are and to tailor capacity development programmes in statistics. This requires knowing to what extent national statistical offices and line ministries in PICTs have the tools and mechanisms to meet and keep up with new demands for data

³¹⁸ M. Anne Brown (2006). Development and Security in the Pacific Island Region (International Peace Academy, September 2006)

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ ADB (2016). The Emergence of Pacific Urban Villages: Urbanization trends in the Pacific Islands.

One way forward to strengthen institutional capacities and government effectiveness in the Pacific region is through increased **use of ICT** and investment in **digital or e-governance**. Since Fiji was linked - as the first PICT - to the global network of submarine communications cables in 2000, all major islands in the region have been connected through one or more domestic and international fibre-optic cables.³²¹ A recent study confirms that the following critical ICT infrastructure is in place in Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu: Government broadband networks that connect departments, schools and hospitals; central government data centers; and digitized public registries. In addition, the introduction of digital national identities is being considered.³²² All Pacific Island countries have introduced ICT strategy and policy documents, and have reviewed, or are currently reviewing, legislation related to data-sharing, cybersecurity and universal access. Also, all PICTs have an online presence that is steadily professionalizing, and government (information) services are increasingly provided online, along with tourism information, fisheries data, geological data and meteorological forecasts.³²³ Despite this progress in harnessing the potential of digital or e-governance, many PICTs continue to be more interested in ICT hardware and connectivity than in defining integrated whole-of-government strategies which can serve to make a step change in the quality and access to public services across the Pacific region, especially for populations living in remote rural areas and on outer islands.³²⁴

Together with the great potential of investments in ICT and digital transformation in the Pacific region, it is important to note that cybercrime offences are on the rise, including ATM skimming (cashing out), cyber bullying, cryptocurrency related crimes, online child sexual abuse and exploitation, sextortion, etc..³²⁵ With very few exceptions, many PICTs lack specific cybercrime legislation and have no overall national cybersecurity strategies. Their law enforcement also lacks specialized cybercrime investigation units and digital forensics capabilities. There is a strong need for PICTs to develop national cybersecurity strategy and cybercrime legislations. Governments in the region need to better understand the current and emerging cyber threats and trends as well as a strategic roadmap to address cyber threats. Moreover, both the public and private sectors need support on raising awareness, helping them to understand cyber threats and highlighting the measures that everyone can take to be safe online.

In promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for all, SDG 16 specifically aims to substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all its forms. The 2016 Asia Pacific Group on Money Laundering survey found that “corruption and bribery appear to be widespread across the Pacific”.³²⁶ Fiji, Palau, Samoa and Vanuatu are listed in the European Union of non-cooperative jurisdictions for tax purposes, which is a tool used in the European Union for tackling tax fraud, tax avoidance and money-laundering (the list includes also American Samoa and Guam). Considering the pervasive impact corruption can have on the economy, social services, the rule of law and other areas of sustainable development and peace, and the low level of successful prosecutions of corruption and financial crime across the Pacific region³²⁷, the first Pacific Regional Anti-Corruption Conference was held in Kiribati on 4-5 February 2020, with participation of nine

³²¹ ASPI (2020). ICT for Development in the Pacific Islands https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/ad-aspi/2020-02/ICT%20for%20development%20in%20the%20Pacific%20islands.pdf?x_oS.r8OVVfTlxxgNHI58k_VL45KC83H

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Graham Hassall (2018). Special Issue on public sector enhancement in Pacific Island states, Asia Pacific Journal of Public Administration (published online: 18 December 2018)

³²⁵ UNODC (2020)

³²⁶ PILON (2020). Framework for Prosecuting Corruption in the Pacific: Experiences, challenges and lessons learnt. (updated March 2020). <https://pilonsec.org/digital-library/corruption-resources/>

³²⁷ Ibid.

Pacific Island Forum Leaders and representatives. This has marked an important milestone and led to the **Teieniwa Vision: Pacific Unity Against Corruption**.³²⁸

Under the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, PICTs' high dependence on imports can accentuate the risk of shortages of medical supplies, food and other necessary goods. This may lead to inflated prices and cases of unethical profiteering, as well as parallel and black markets.³²⁹ It is therefore crucial to further strengthen anti-corruption efforts in the Pacific region, including through ensuring an active role of civil society organizations and the media in monitoring the spending of resources and in ensuring that corruption remains in the spotlight during this crisis, notably soon in the allocation and distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine.³³⁰

In the Pacific region, **civil society organizations (CSOs)** represent a critical constituency and development partner for advancing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Earlier assessments identified more than 1,000 CSOs covering a wide range of issues aligned with the global development agenda including disabilities, youth, gender, trade, health, environment, governance and culture.³³¹ As such, CSOs in the Pacific region not only serve as important agents for positive change, but also as essential voices and representatives of the most vulnerable groups who can hold governments accountable for delivering on their promises and plans. This includes the human rights obligations of public institutions to deliver on their role as "duty bearers" with regards to basic services and upholding the rule of law. The reality, however, is that this potential is constrained by the numerous challenges CSOs are facing. Their legitimacy is frequently questioned by governments, with many governments viewing them with skepticism and distrust.³³² Dialogue between CSOs and governments is often ad-hoc, unsupported by legal or institutional frameworks, although this is not the case with regards to employers' and business membership organizations, and workers organizations. In addition, many CSOs face serious capacity challenges including unstable funding sources due to donor-driven project funding, and inability to recruit and retain high quality staff.³³³

Access to Justice

In the context of achieving the SDGs in the Pacific region, especially SDG 5 and SDG 16, access to justice³³⁴ has been identified "as among the most pressing priorities for poverty eradication and addressing inequality and exclusion."³³⁵ PICTs face specific challenges to provide access to justice to their inhabitants including remoteness, connectivity issues, and scarcely populated villages scattered across islands. These geographic challenges are further compounded by issues related to gender, youth and ethnicity, as well as limited financial means to travel, especially amongst vulnerable population groups.³³⁶ Whereas these

³²⁸ UNODC and UNDP (2020). UN-PRAC Newsletter January - June 2020

³²⁹ UNDP (2020). Advisory Note: COVID-19 and Corruption in the Pacific - May 2020

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ UNDP (2009). A Capacity Assessment of CSOs in the Pacific: Six Country Profiles

http://www.undp.org/content/dam/rbap/docs/Research%20&%20Publications/democratic_governance/UNDP_PC_DG_A_Capacity_Assessment_of_CSOs_in_the_Pacific_Six_Country_Profiles.pdf

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ UNDP defines access to justice as "the ability of people to seek and obtain a remedy through formal or informal institutions of justice, in conformity with human rights standards." (Access to Justice and Rule of Law Mapping in Pacific Island Countries, UNDP, 2019)

³³⁵ Quote from Osnat Lubrani, UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative from 2013-2018, Fiji

<https://www.pacific.undp.org/content/pacific/en/home/library/eg/access-to-justice-fast-facts-june-2017/>

³³⁶ UNDP (2016). Access to Justice Project Fiji (ProDoc)

issues are known, the significant data challenge in the Pacific region extends as well to reliable and up-to-date statistics on indicators of SDG 5 and 16 across PICTs.

While there is no complete overview across PICTs of the volume and nature of the demand for justice, a recent assessment in Fiji has confirmed an increase in the amount of legal problems that require formal resolution.³³⁷ This increase can be linked to the profound transformation that is taking place in many Pacific Island societies, based on mutually reinforcing social, demographic and economic trends which include eroding customary norms and weakening social bonds; rapid population growth and urbanization; increasing internal and external migration; youth unemployment; and a rise in alcohol consumption and drug use.³³⁸ According to the study conducted in Fiji, nearly 60 percent of the justice needs are not addressed, with an even much higher percentage amongst poor people.³³⁹ As noted in Section 3.2, there continues to be low rates of prosecution and difficulty in accessing justice in relation to cases of violence against women.

Some of the more specific challenges limiting the rule of law and access to justice in PICTs include 1) lack of funding for the justice sector and significant differences in the effectiveness of legal aid systems and services between PICTs, 2) lack of access to legal aid in civil matters which would be of high value to the general population, 3) deficiencies in most PICTs with regard to the police force, prosecution services, legal aid systems, judicial services, prison services and human rights institutions, resulting in delayed access to justice for arrested and detained persons, 4) lack of a whole-of-government approach to access and delivery of legal (and social) services in most PICTs, and 5) major deficiencies in the penal system in many PICTs, including prison overcrowding, and poor physical infrastructure and conditions for detainees.³⁴⁰

In view of the above, programming efforts by the UN and other partners in recent years have focused on providing vulnerable groups, women and youth with improved early access to justice, especially in criminal matters, and on innovative approaches to provide legal services to populations in remote/rural areas. Given similarities in the access to justice challenges across many PICTs, it is planned to scale up and adapt successful pilot experiences to the different country contexts and needs across the Pacific region.³⁴¹

Peacebuilding

Despite its relative political stability, potential risks to peace, conflict and security in the Pacific region center around democratic space, as well as justice, rule of law and governance. These risks can be exacerbated by the impact of multiple and compounding disasters and events, including the impact of COVID-19, climate change and natural disasters. To mitigate and respond to these potential drivers of conflict, it is important to create and utilize **early warning and response mechanisms** and Pacific **contextualized peacebuilding opportunities** that foster social cohesion and the promotion and protection of human rights. These include actions and avenues to establish and strengthen platforms and mechanisms for diverse stakeholder and community engagement, promoting social cohesion and peace processes, especially with vulnerable, at-risk and discriminated groups, dialogue and citizen participation for accountability, democratic governance, and rights-based and inclusive development.

³³⁷ UNDP (2019). Justice Needs and Satisfaction in Fiji (October 2019)

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ UNDP (2019). Access to Justice and Rule of Law Mapping in Pacific Island Countries 2019.

³⁴¹ UNDP (2016). Access to Justice Project Fiji (ProDoc)

Access to Information

Access to Information remains an indispensable mechanism to protect freedom of expression, ensure transparency and advance anti-corruption. The 1967 ASEAN Declaration sets adherence to the Principles of the United Nations Charter, including Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, while the 12th Strategic Objective of the 2005 Pacific Plan calls for “improved transparency, accountability, equity and efficiency in the management and use of resources in the Pacific,” especially with regards to information and data. Since the endorsement of the Pacific Plan in 2005, only four PICTs have enacted access to information laws: Cook Islands, Fiji (not yet in force), Palau and Vanuatu.

In Cook Islands, Fiji and Palau, the countries’ access to information legislations have inadequate frameworks for scope of accessibility, requesting procedures and appeal mechanisms. In addition, access to information is not publicly promoted, and a broad regime of exceptions renders implementation of existing legislation ineffective. Further refinements to implement relevant laws are needed to ensure easy access to information. That said, in Vanuatu the right to information law and its application are strong in all respects, thus representing a model for adoption by other countries in the region.

3.6 Human Rights

Over 90 percent of the goals and targets of the SDGs correspond to human rights obligations. As countries make progress on the SDGs, they make progress on their human rights obligations. Indeed, if the 2030 Agenda is to be realized in a way that truly does “leave no one behind”, human rights obligations and commitments to combat structural inequality and discrimination must be applied, implemented and protected by all countries. Similarly, the full enjoyment of all human rights will only be possible with progress on SDGs, including the eradication of poverty in all its forms.

On average, the Pacific region continues to have a **relatively low rate of ratification of international human rights treaties** (see Figure ... below), a regional human rights mechanism is still lacking, all PICTs have overdue reports to the treaty bodies with the exception of Cook Islands and Palau (see Figure...below), and many PICTs have not yet established National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs). That said, recent years have seen clear examples of PICTs’ commitment and active participation in implementing the global human rights agenda. As the first ever Pacific Island country, Fiji has taken a seat on the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2019. It was joined by RMI in 2020. In March 2020, Samoa hosted the 84th Extraordinary Session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, during which the situation of children in Cook Islands, FSM and Tuvalu was reviewed, and a preparatory document adopted for the future review of Kiribati.

In 2017, Tuvalu joined Fiji and Samoa in establishing a NHRI, and at least four other PICTs are contemplating to create NHRIs.³⁴² To meet international standards, NHRIs must comply with the Paris Principles.³⁴³ Currently, Samoa is the only country with a Paris Principles-compliant NHRI, and Fiji needs to apply to the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) for accreditation, having withdrawn its membership in 2010.³⁴⁴

Moreover, in order to effectively engage with all of the UN human rights mechanisms – namely the treaty bodies, the Universal Periodic Review, and the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council – PICTs

³⁴² PIFS and SPC (2020). Human Rights and Gender, Joint Submission to the Australian Parliament (July 17, 2020)

³⁴³ <https://nhri.ohchr.org/EN/AoutUs/Pages/ParisPrinciples.aspx>

³⁴⁴ <https://nhri.ohchr.org/EN/Documents/Status%20Accreditation%20Chart%20%2804%20March%202019.pdf>.

have increasingly recognized the importance of establishing a coordinated structure within government, known as the National Mechanisms for Reporting and Follow-up (NMRF). Following regional workshops on the NMRF in 2017 and 2019, the “Pacific Principles of Practice” on NMRFs were adopted and launched in July 2020.³⁴⁵ To date, NMRFs have been established in FSM, Kiribati, RMI, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu.

Although still below global averages, Figure 15 shows that most PICTs have now ratified core international human rights treaties, particularly the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Many PICTs have conducted significant legal reforms, including to improve respect for the rights of persons with disabilities, and to end torture and ill-treatment of people in detention, while some have started trainings for judges in human rights law, and for police forces in respecting human rights.³⁴⁶ A continued long-term focus on relevant targets of SDG 16 will be required to address the remaining challenges in establishing adequate regional and national human rights capacities of both state institutions (as duty-bearers) and CSOs (as rights-holders or representatives of rights-holders) across PICTs.³⁴⁷ As the only international agreement binding Parties to the integration of culture in their development policies, the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions³⁴⁸ actively works toward promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms. Figure 17 shows the status of signature, accession or ratification of universal human rights treaties across PICTs, excluding Tokelau (italicized font indicates accession), whereas Figure 18 shows the status of overdue reports.

³⁴⁵ https://rrrt.spc.int/sites/default/files/resources/2020-07/Pacific%20Principles%20of%20Practice_0.pdf.

³⁴⁶ OHCHR (accessed 02/11/20). Human Rights in the Pacific: Navigating New Challenges with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Lecture by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, 10 February 2018 <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22649&LangID=E>

³⁴⁷ Ackman, M., Hammond, D., Cooney, C., & Liu, L. (2018). Pacific Peace Index, 2018 (Report number 59, Institute for Economics & Peace, Sydney)

³⁴⁸ Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions <https://en.unesco.org/creativity/convention/texts>

Figure 17: Status of Human Rights Treaties in the Pacific (as of 4 December 2020)³⁴⁹

	ICESCR	ICCPR	CERD	CEDAW	CAT	CRC	CRMW	CRPD	CPPED
COOK ISLANDS				11 Aug 06		6 Jun 97		8 May 09	
FIJI	16 Aug 18	16 Aug 18	11 Jan 73	28 Aug 95	14 Mar 16	13 Aug 93	19 Aug 19	7 Jun 17	19 Aug 19
KIRIBATI				17 Mar 04	22 Jul 19	11 Dec 95		27 Sept 13	
MARSHALL ISLANDS	12 Mar 18	12 Mar 18	11 Apr 19	2 Mar 06	12 Mar 18	4 Oct 93		17 Mar 15	
FED. STATES MICRONESIA				1 Sep 04		5 May 93		7 Dec 16	
NAURU		S 12 Nov 01	S 12-Nov 01	23 Jun 11	28 Sept 12	27 Jul 94		27 June 12	
NIUE						20 Dec 95			
PALAU	S 20 Sep 11	S 20 Sep 11	S 20 Sep 11	S 20 Sep 11	S 20 Sep 11	4 Aug 95	S 20 Sep 11	11 Jun 13	S 20 Sep 11
PAPUA NEW GUINEA	21 Jul 08	21 July 08	27 Jan 82	12 Jan 95		2 Mar 93		28 Sept 13	
SAMOA		15 Feb 08		25 Sep 92	28 Mar 19	29 Nov 94		2 Dec 16	27 Nov 12
SOLOMON ISLANDS	17 Mar 82		17 Mar 82	6 May 02		10 Apr 95		S 23 Sep 08	
TONGA			16 Feb 72			6 Nov 95		S 15 Nov 07	
TUVALU				6 Oct 99		22 Sep 95		18 Dec 13	
VANUATU		21 Nov 08		8 Sep 95	12 Jul 11	7 Jul 93		23 Oct 08	S 6 Feb 07
KEY:									
	Indicates the date of adherence: ratification, accession or succession. (<i>Italicized = Accession</i>)								
S	Indicates the date of signature								
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights								
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights								
CERD	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination								
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women								
CAT	Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment								
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child								
CRMW	Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families								
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities								
CPPED	Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance								

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

	ICE\$CR-OP	ICCPR-OP1	ICCPR-OP2	OP-CEDAW	OP-CRC-AC	OP-CRC-SC	OP-CRC-CP	OP-CAT	OP-CRPD
COOK ISLANDS				27 Nov 07					8 May 09
FIJI					S 16 Sep 05	S 16 Sep 05			S 2 Jun 10
KIRIBATI					10 Sep 15	10 Sep 15			
MARSHALL ISLANDS				5 Mar 10		5 Mar 10	5 Mar 10		
FED. STATES MICRONESIA					26 Oct 15	23 Apr 12			
NAURU		S 12 Nov 01			S 8 Sep 00	S 8 Sep 00		24 Jan 13	
NIUE									
PALAU									11 Jun 13
PAPUA NEW GUINEA									
SAMOA					17 May 16	29 Apr 16	29 Apr 16		
SOLOMON ISLANDS	S 24 Sep 09			6 May 02	S 24 Sep 09	S 24 Sep 09			S 24 Sep 09
TONGA									
TUVALU									
VANUATU				17 May 07	26 Sep 07	17 May 07			
KEY:									
	Indicates the date of adherence: ratification, accession or succession. (<i>italicized</i> = Accession)								
S	Indicates the date of signature								
ICE\$CR OP	Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights								
ICCPR-OP1	Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights								
ICCPR-OP2	Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty								
OP-CEDAW	Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women								
OP-CRC-AC	Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict								
OP-CRC-SC	Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography								
OP-CRC-CP	Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure								
OP-CAT	Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment								
OP-CRPD	Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities								

Figure 18: Status of overdue reports to treaty bodies in the Pacific (as at 4 December 2020)

Country	Overdue reports
Cook Islands	None
FSM	CRPD (Jan 2019)
Fiji	ICCPR (Nov 2016), ICESCR (Nov 2020), CERD (Feb 2016), CAT (Apr 2017), CRMW (Nov 2020), CRPD (July 2019)
Kiribati	CAT (Aug 2020)
Marshall Islands	ICCPR (June 2019), ICESCR (June 2019), CERD (May 2020), CAT (Apr 2019)
Nauru	CAT (Oct 2013), CRPD (July 2014)
Palau	None
PNG	ICCPR (Oct 2019), ICESCR (June 2010), CEDAW (July 2014), CERD (1985), CRC (Sep 2008), CRPD (Oct 2015)
Samoa	ICCPR (May 2009), CED (Dec 2014), CRPD (Jan 2019)
Solomon Islands	ICESCR (Jun 2005), CEDAW (Nov 2018), CERD (1985)
Tonga	CERD (Mar 2001)
Tuvalu	CEDAW (Mar 2019)
Vanuatu	ICCPR (Feb 2010), CAT (Aug 2012), CEDAW (Mar 2020)

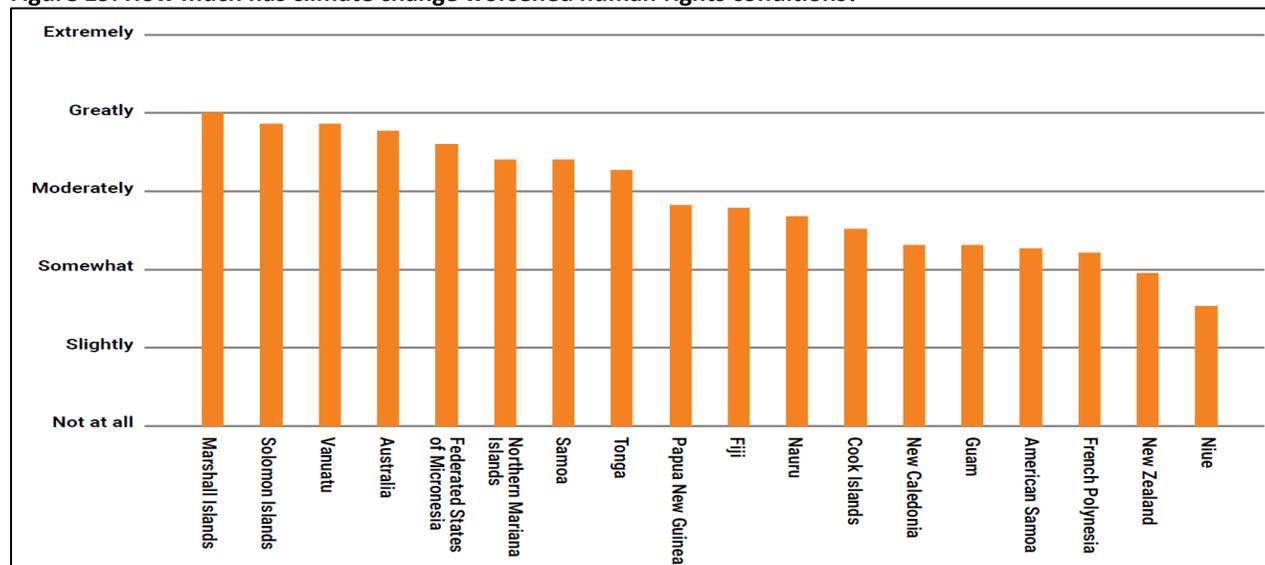
While the rate of reporting against treaty obligations has increased and PICTs continue to participate in the Universal Periodic Review process, significant challenges remain in implementing recommendations from the Human Rights Council, treaty bodies and special procedures.³⁵⁰ In particular, it is recommended to establish National Mechanisms for Reporting and Follow-up, not only for the purposes of submitting reports to the UN human rights mechanisms, but also to ensure follow-up to the recommendations emanating from the mechanisms. To this end, technical assistance can be provided to governments in the region to establish a National Recommendations Tracking Database. In November 2017, Samoa became the first county in the region to introduce such a database, known as SADATA, to track the status of implementation of the recommendations from UN human rights mechanisms.

Recent years have seen the use of innovative approaches to better understand and report (includes remote/video teleconference for CRC constructive dialogues) on human rights in the Pacific region. In addition to measuring social, economic, civil and political rights, the Human Rights Survey of the global Human Rights Measurement Initiative (HRMI) has introduced a “Pacific Module” which focuses on societal violence, indigenous and cultural rights, and on the effects of the climate crisis on human rights in the Pacific.³⁵¹ These new approaches and methodologies should help strengthen human rights data, as well as strategies to better promote and protect human rights. As an example, Figure 19 shows that human rights practitioners in PICTs and other Pacific countries are of the view that climate change has – “slightly” to “greatly” - worsened human rights conditions, on a scale from “not at all” to “extremely”.

³⁵⁰ PIFS and SPC (2020). Human Rights and Gender, Joint Submission to the Australian Parliament (July 17, 2020)

³⁵¹ HRMI (2020). Human rights across the Pacific (June 2020). <https://humanrightsmeasurement.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/HRMI-Pacific-Report.pdf>

Figure 19: How much has climate change worsened human rights conditions?



The above chart indicates that the existing and potentially devastating impact of climate change on PICTs already has substantial negative effects on the human rights of Pacific people.³⁵² In this context, it can be expected that international human rights law will be instrumental to solving the climate-related existential challenges of the Pacific region through inclusion of human rights in the UNFCCC negotiations, including the implementation of the 2015 Paris Agreement.³⁵³

Cultural rights and identity of the Pacific islanders and indigenous communities are at risk in the Pacific for a variety of reasons, including sea-level rise, displacement, loss of indigenous languages, impacts of open markets, demographic changes, and loss of traditional knowledge. Cultural preservation of sites, objects, knowledge and practices that define identities in the Pacific require constant restoration and/or safeguarding. While defenses such as seawalls and flood gates are being tried but they might not be effective for long. Given the increasing demographic tilt towards youth in the Pacific, social transformation and ecological resilience need to go hand-in-hand. Culture is a major aspect of people’s sense of well-being in the Pacific that necessitates using a culture and development approach and placing communities, in particular youth, at the center of the development planning process.

Discrimination and violence against women and girls across this region are major human rights and development challenges for the Pacific region (see chapter 3.2 Gender Equality for more details). In several PICTs, women lack equal property rights and their rights to customary land is curtailed. They are much less likely to be able to get adequate paid work, have more limited access to healthcare and education, and are much less likely than men to make their own life choices.³⁵⁴ In addition, women’s representation in decision-making positions in both, the public sector and in business, are exceedingly low. Women and girls are also greatly affected by human trafficking for labor and sexual exploitation, and

³⁵² Boyle, A. (2018). CLIMATE CHANGE, THE PARIS AGREEMENT AND HUMAN RIGHTS. *International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, 67(4), 759-777

³⁵³ OHCHR (accessed 02/11/20). Human Rights in the Pacific: Navigating New Challenges with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Lecture by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, 10 February 2018 <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22649&LangID=E>

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

by extremely high prevalence of domestic violence. Despite legal and policy reforms, women and girls are still facing severely discriminatory social and cultural barriers across the Pacific.³⁵⁵

While Pacific **children** are traditionally valued and grow up in supportive extended family environments, available data show that they are also facing **abuse, neglect and exploitation** in the home, school and community. Rates of violent discipline including physical punishment and psychological aggression range from 83 percent to 92 percent.³⁵⁶ Bullying and physical fights in schools, some of which resulting in severe injuries, affect between 30 percent and up to 83 percent of children.³⁵⁷ Between 30 percent and 45 percent of children are not living with their two parents and between 24 percent and 48 percent of households are raising children who are not their own, children in these situations are at a greater risk of neglect, abuse or exploitation as a result of family separation.³⁵⁸ Child labour ranges between 15 percent and 25 percent.³⁵⁹ Although limited availability of data in relation to commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking of children makes it difficult to assess the extent of the problem, there is evidence of its existence in relation to logging, mining, fishing, seafaring and tourism industries. Available data on reported cases and anecdotal evidence suggest that sexual abuse of children, mostly by relatives and family friends, is an issue of concern.³⁶⁰ Online abuse and access to inappropriate contents on the internet, substance abuse and law-breaking are emerging issues, in particular affecting adolescents.

Drivers of **child protection** concerns include social norms such as the fact that children are not expected to express themselves, violence is regarded as an appropriate form of education, and abuse should not be reported in order to maintain family and community harmony. The high rate of domestic violence across the Pacific is a key factor since children living in affected households are subjected to emotional abuse from witnessing intimate partner violence, and most probably to other forms of abuse as well as neglect by their caregivers. Globalisation, urbanization and permanent or temporary migration to urban areas or abroad result in changes in values and in the breakdown of extended and nuclear families, which increase child protection risks. These risks are further exacerbated in times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, across the Pacific, child protection systems to prevent and respond to these concerns are at an early stage of development or non-existent.

LGBT+ Pacific islanders are particularly affected by human rights violations. Widespread physical and psychological abuse, stigmatization, and reduced access to health care, education and stable employment cause many LGBT+ people not to reach their full potential as fully integrated members of society and contribute to disproportionately high suicide rates amongst LGBT+ youth.³⁶¹ The situation of LGBT+ in

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Kiribati MICS 2018-2019; Samoa MICS 2019-2020; Solomon Islands DHS 2015; Tonga MICS 2019; Vanuatu DHS 2013.

³⁵⁷ Global School-Based Student Health Survey (GSHS), WHO. Cook, Fiji, Niue, Tonga 2010; Kiribati, Nauru, Samoa, Solomon, Vanuatu 2011; Tuvalu 2013; Tonga 2014.

³⁵⁸ DHS: Solomon 2015; Vanuatu 2013 ; Samoa 2014 ; Tonga 2012 ; Nauru 2007; Tuvalu 2007; RMI 2007; MICS : Kiribati 2018-2019

³⁵⁹ DHS: Solomon 2015; Vanuatu 2013 ; MICS : Kiribati 2018-2019 ; Samoa 2019-2020 ; Tonga 2019.

³⁶⁰ "Perceptions of frontline welfare workers on the sexual exploitation of children in the Pacific" ECPAT International June 2019

³⁶¹ OHCHR (2015). INFORMATION SHEET Frequently Asked Questions: Sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex status in the Pacific (UN Free&Equal Campaign, August 2015).

https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/UNFE_PacificCampaignInfoSheet-Aug2015.pdf

detention is particularly acute.³⁶² Many LGBT+ associations find it exceedingly hard to be officially recognized. In Fiji, the only officially registered LGBT+ organization has done so by registering as a company rather than an NGO.³⁶³

The human rights situation of the countries in the region is being reviewed for the third time through the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism of the United Nations Human Rights Council. To date, Tonga (January 2018), Tuvalu (May 2018), Fiji (November 2019), New Zealand (January 2019), Vanuatu (January 2019), Fiji (November 2019), Kiribati (January 2020) and RMI (November 2020) have undergone the third cycle. The remaining five UPRs for PICTs are scheduled for 2021: FSM, Nauru (January 2021), Palau and the Solomon Islands (May 2021) and Samoa (November 2021).

While recommendations addressed to individual Pacific governments arising from the UPR process specifically include those related to gender equality, women's rights and legislative reform to promote and protect the rights of LGBT+ people, national responses still vary.³⁶⁴ Whereas a number of PICTs have recently decriminalized same-sex relationships and introduced new laws to counter discrimination against LGBT+ people in employment and education, Cook Islands, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Tuvalu still criminalize consenting relationships between adults of the same sex – a fundamental human rights violation.³⁶⁵

Both progress and continuing challenges in fulfilling the human rights of LGBT+ Pacific islanders are placed in a cultural context that is characterized by diverse expressions of gender identity and sexual orientation. Historically, these expressions often fulfilled important cultural or ritual functions in various parts of the Pacific. More recently this diversity is being reclaimed and redefined, responding to both traditional and external influences and expectations.³⁶⁶ In line with Pacific cultural roots and to include traditional third gender communities who do not identify with the global LGBT+ label, activists in a number of PICTs have developed their own terminology by referring to the rights of Pacific Islanders of Diverse Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Sex Characteristics (PIDSOGIESC+) to recognize the range of cultures and communities within the region.³⁶⁷

As mentioned in Chapter 3.3, an estimated 17 percent (or about 1.7 million) of people in the Pacific have some form of disability. In recent years Pacific Island countries have strengthened their commitments to address discrimination and barriers faced by **persons with disabilities**. With the exception of Solomon Islands and Tonga who are only signatories, all Pacific countries have now ratified the Convention on the

³⁶² OHCHR (accessed 02/11/20). Human Rights in the Pacific: Navigating New Challenges with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Lecture by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, 10 February 2018) <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22649&LangID=E>

³⁶³ OHCHR (2015). INFORMATION SHEET Frequently Asked Questions: Sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex status in the Pacific (UN Free&Equal Campaign, August 2015). https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/UNFE_PacificCampaignInfoSheet-Aug2015.pdf

³⁶⁴ The Royal Commonwealth Society (2019). Opportunities for Women and LGBTI Rights in the Pacific (September 2019) https://www.pgaction.org/pdf/Opportunities_for_women_and_LGBTI_rights_Pacific.pdf

³⁶⁵ OHCHR (accessed 02/11/20). Human Rights in the Pacific: Navigating New Challenges with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Lecture by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, 10 February 2018) <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22649&LangID=E>

³⁶⁶ University of Hawaii (accessed 04/11/20). Gender Identity and Sexual Identity in the Pacific and Hawai'i: Introduction <https://guides.library.manoa.hawaii.edu/Pacificsexualidentity>

³⁶⁷ The Royal Commonwealth Society (2019). Opportunities for Women and LGBTI Rights in the Pacific (September 2019) https://www.pgaction.org/pdf/Opportunities_for_women_and_LGBTI_rights_Pacific.pdf

Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).³⁶⁸ In addition, PICTs have adopted the 2016-2025 Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (PFRPD).³⁶⁹ That said, most PICTs are still focusing on issue-based interventions instead of adopting a whole-of-government approach to inclusion of persons with disabilities. This prioritization of stand-alone issues is compounded by insufficient domestic resource allocations (below 0.15 percent of GDP in most PICTs) and heavy reliance on ODA to address the needs and challenges of persons with disabilities, and by weak regulations and support services which prevent more transformative, cross-sectoral improvements in the lives of persons with disabilities and their families.³⁷⁰ In addition to direct violations of their human rights, persons with disabilities in the Pacific region suffer from widespread lack of awareness within their communities and “negative attitudes, prejudice, ignorance and apathy of policy-makers”.³⁷¹ As set out in Chapter 3.3, women and girls with disabilities are two to three times more likely to be subjected to physical and sexual abuse than women with no disabilities.

Whereas to date the effects of disability-based discrimination in PICTs could be noted particularly in the areas of education, employment, housing, transport, cultural life and access to public places and services, several PICTs are now focusing on disaggregating census and other national survey data by disability. This will allow to compare the situations of persons with and without disability and to establish disability-sensitive baselines against relevant SDG indicators.³⁷²

Despite some progress at the level of policies and legislation, discrimination against persons with disabilities is deeply rooted in social and cultural norms which have often been institutionalized by law. Therefore, more fundamental changes in the perception and ways to accept and integrate disability in Pacific societies need to be pursued, which will involve both changes in values and increased understanding at all levels of society.³⁷³

With regards to the CRPD, as noted earlier, eleven Pacific Island states have formally ratified the treaty to provide plans of actions to aid and protect persons with disabilities. These efforts are in place to establish a foundation that enables access to health, justice and other social services and enjoyment of social and cultural rights for persons with disabilities. However, for the foundation to be used there is a need to build institutional capacity to generate adequate data on types and severity of disability, gender, age, and social practices that hinder or facilitate inclusion, and physical location of the persons with disabilities to inform development of relevant actions, including incorporation of assistive technologies in service delivery, and budgeting for inclusion.

As mentioned in Section 3.3, the number of people living in informal settlements and overcrowded housing without access to basic services and infrastructure is a growing trend in urban and peri-urban areas across the Pacific. The **Right to Adequate Housing** and associated SDG 11.1 - “By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums” has seen limited progress in most PICTs, including due to a lack of affordable public housing and policies recognizing the

³⁶⁸ Pacific Disability Forum (accessed 05/11/2020). <http://www.pacificdisability.org/About-Us/Disability-in-the-Pacific.aspx>

³⁶⁹ Pacific Disability Forum (2019). SDG-CRPD Monitoring Report 2018
http://www.pacificdisability.org/getattachment/Resources/Research/PACIFIC-DISABILITY-FORUM_SDG_REPORT-2019.pdf.aspx

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ Pacific Disability Forum (accessed 05/11/2020). <http://www.pacificdisability.org/About-Us/Disability-in-the-Pacific.aspx>

³⁷² Pacific Disability Forum (2019). SDG-CRPD Monitoring Report 2018
http://www.pacificdisability.org/getattachment/Resources/Research/PACIFIC-DISABILITY-FORUM_SDG_REPORT-2019.pdf.aspx

³⁷³ UNDP (2014). The State of Human Development in the Pacific: A Report on Vulnerability and Exclusion in Time of Rapid Change.

specific needs of informal settlements and slums. Fiji is one of the few to have developed a National Housing Policy³⁷⁴ that includes provisions for affordable and decent housing for all, including the right to tenure for informal dwellers and an Informal Settlements Upgrading Strategy. Most informal dwellers in the Pacific occupy with the consent of the landowner³⁷⁵ which provides a degree of security from eviction. However, the absence of clear land policies and jurisdictional areas often creates conflict over which authority is responsible for providing services and security of tenure, creating a disincentive to extend essential water and sanitation services, while furthering the exclusion of informal dwellers from decision-making processes, health and disaster response mechanisms.

4. Financial Landscape and Partnerships

4.1 Financial Landscape

A 2017 UNDP report³⁷⁶ confirms progress in the Pacific region towards achieving the vision of the 2030 Agenda has been supported by an increase in financial flows in recent years, including a rise in overseas investment and international development assistance, and growing revenues in the fisheries and tourism sectors, as well as in the extractive industries. Positive trends were noted in external financing from climate finance, multilateral development banks, South-South Cooperation and FDI flows, especially from Asia. These trends offer opportunities to leverage new and additional sources of development finance and are complemented by PICTs' ongoing efforts to strengthen the effectiveness and impact of domestic and external financing flows, through processes such as the Forum Compact on Strengthening Development Coordination in the Pacific, an initiative of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS).

That said, PICTs are still facing numerous challenges in securing the unprecedented domestic and international investments required to achieve the SDGs and related international commitments, and in establishing the capacities and technologies that are required to use available financing effectively. Estimates show that PICTs' financing needs for sustainable, climate-sensitive development are among the highest in the world when measured as a proportion of national GDP. The present and future impacts of climate change, which represent existential risks to some PICTs, are likely to further increase these financing needs.

More specific challenges include 1) a lack of national financing strategies in many PICTs as a key complement to operationalize existing national development strategies and plans; 2) a lack of information and knowledge about many new innovative finance instruments which may be beneficial to the Pacific; 3) insufficient capacities to cope with complex application and reporting procedures for different sources of official bilateral and multilateral finance, especially climate finance; and, 4) the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on vital economic sectors such as tourism which threatens to reverse the positive trend of continued revenue growth in recent years.

³⁷⁴ Republic of Fiji (2011). The National Housing Policy https://www.worldurbancampaign.org/sites/default/files/psup-action-items/fiji_national_housing_policy.pdf

³⁷⁵ For example, Vakavanua in Fiji which is a bilateral arrangement between the informal settlement and village leaders or landowners in return for annual land rental fees.

³⁷⁶ UNDP (2017). Financing the SDGs in the Pacific Islands: Opportunities, Challenges and Ways Forward (September 2017) <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/poverty-reduction/financing-the-sdgs-in-the-pacific-islands--opportunities--challe.html>

A 2017 survey shows that PICTs who have developed national financing strategies strongly focus on increasing ODA and financing for climate change adaptation, as well as attracting more FDI. Other major priorities include deepening South-South Cooperation, more effective domestic resource mobilization and exploring innovative finance options. A number of PICTs have already taken measures to achieve these priorities, including through investing in technical capacities to access vertical funds (e.g. climate funds); developing sector specific plans to attract resources and guide the allocation of domestic and external funds; investing in public financial management systems and strengthening the effectiveness of public expenditures; improving alignment of national development plans with national budgets and foreign aid; and implementing credit guarantee schemes to support local private sector development. The following provides a summary of key trends of development finance in the Pacific:

Official financial flows

Concessional financial flows from official donors are key sources of external finance for most PICTs. The Pacific islands is one of the most aid-dependent regions in the world. Official development assistance (ODA) is higher in the Pacific than in any other region on a per capita basis, and 10 Pacific island countries are among the 25 countries where ODA is highest as a proportion of national income.³⁷⁷ The total amount of Official Development Assistance (ODA) received by PICTs nearly doubled in volume terms between 2000 and 2012, from US\$ 915 million to almost US\$ 2 billion. That said, between 2000 and 2014, ODA - as a percentage of PICTs' GDP - declined from 12.5 percent to 6.3 percent. This partly reflects improvements in the development levels and income status of many countries, as well as increases in other external financial flows, such as foreign direct investment and non-OECD DAC donor finance.

Despite its decreasing relative importance, between 2015 and 2018 PICTs received an average amount of US\$ 2.4 billion of ODA each year, which was equal to about 6.5 percent of the region's GDP, according to OECD data. In 2015, 47 percent of ODA in the Pacific were allocated to the social sectors, whereas 17 percent were allocated to infrastructure investments and 16 percent to the environment. Priorities such as economic competitiveness and export diversification, as well as disaster preparedness and response, have become more prominent in recent years.³⁷⁸

Despite the decreasing proportion of ODA relative to GDP, support from development partners has been in high demand in PICTs, due to the narrow economic bases and limited domestic resource mobilization capabilities of most PICTs which pose considerable challenges to providing the social and economic infrastructure and social services required for sustainable development. Secondly, the countries' exposure to disasters, such as droughts, floods, and cyclones, frequently damages their productive assets, necessitating emergency assistance for disaster relief and reconstruction purposes. The need to respond quickly to natural disasters affecting individual PICTs contributes to considerable fluctuations for some PICTs in the amounts of ODA provided year on year.

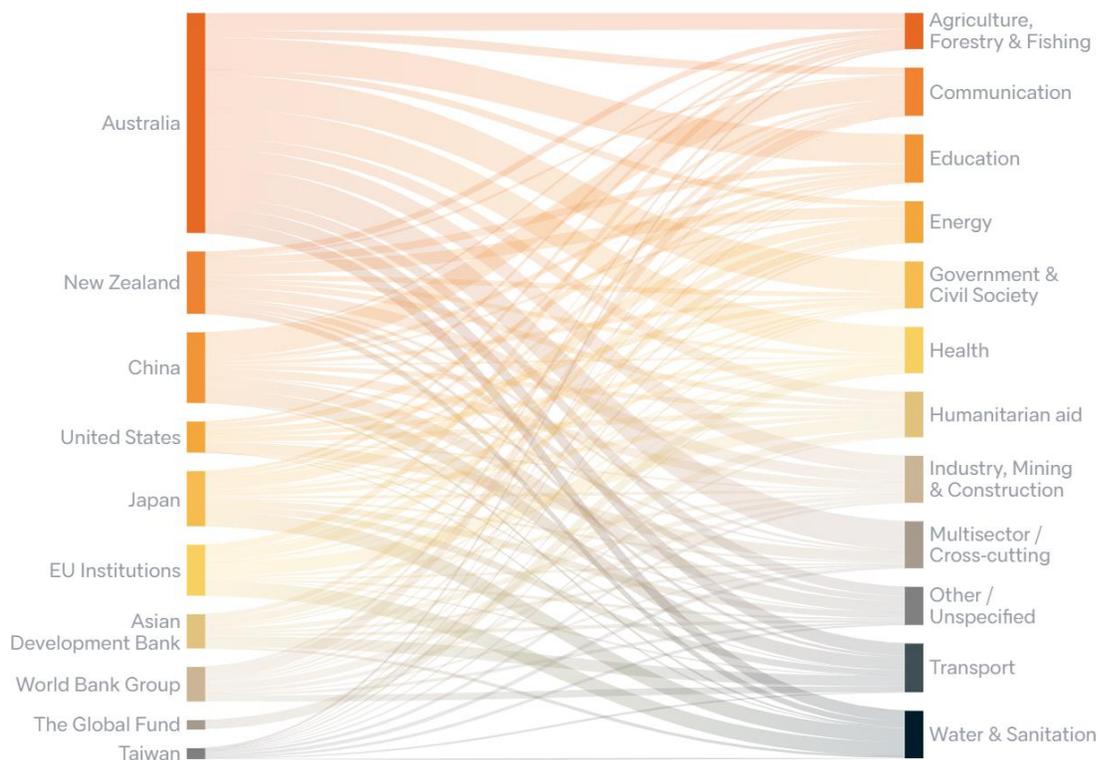
A ranking of ODA from bilateral donors for the period 2011 - 2016 establishes Australia as the leading donor to the Pacific region, with 45 percent of total ODA, followed by New Zealand (9 percent), China (8 percent), the US (8 percent) and Japan (6 percent). As for multilateral donors, the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank account for 5 percent and 4 percent respectively of the ODA distributed to the

³⁷⁷ DevPolicyBlog (accessed 01/12/20). <https://devpolicy.org/foreign-aid-to-the-pacific-an-overview/>

³⁷⁸ UNDP (2017). Financing the SDGs in the Pacific Islands: Opportunities, Challenges and Ways Forward <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/poverty-reduction/financing-the-sdgs-in-the-pacific-islands--opportunities--challe.html>

region.³⁷⁹ Figure 20 shows the sectoral distribution of aid flows from key donor partners which can provide an entry point for analyzing the relationship between donor priorities and comparative strengths, and development challenges facing the region. The cart shows that China, the World Bank and the ADB all spend more than a third of ODA in the transport sector; the European Union almost a quarter in humanitarian aid; and Australia and New Zealand almost a third in governance.³⁸⁰

Figure 20: Distribution of aid flows from donor partners to key sectors



In line with international aid effectiveness principles, the main donor partners have increased their share of on-budget aid. At the same time, a minor portion of overall ODA continues to be delivered via small and uncoordinated projects. For some countries, ‘projectized’ aid is the only aid received which constitutes a heavy administrative burden and affects the sustainability and impact of development interventions.³⁸¹ The increase in total official concessional financial flows from bilateral and multilateral development partners over the last decade is expected to continue, although the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will have to be factored into any short-, medium- and longer-term projections.

In the last decades, China has become the fourth largest donor to the Pacific region. Between 2006 and 2015, China has provided US\$1,78 billion in aid to Pacific Island countries with which it has diplomatic relations. In view of these large aid flows, it will be critical to ensure the capacity of PICTs to absorb and

³⁷⁹ Lowy Institute (accessed 03/12/20). <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpretor/follow-money-how-foreign-aid-spending-tells-pacific-priorities>

³⁸⁰ *ibid.*

³⁸¹ UNDP (2017). Financing the SDGs in the Pacific Islands: Opportunities, Challenges and Ways Forward <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/poverty-reduction/financing-the-sdgs-in-the-pacific-islands--opportunities--challe.html>

use this financing in effective and transformative ways, as well as adequate levels of concessionality to maintain debt sustainability.³⁸²

Public revenue and domestic resource mobilization

Many PICTs have been able to mobilize more domestic resources in recent years.³⁸³ The broader economic base of larger economies including Fiji and the Solomon Islands has allowed them to mobilize independent sources of financing. Fiji has also managed to achieve some successes in export diversification. Fishing revenues have significantly expanded incomes in several PICTs, and the World Bank estimates that fisheries could generate more than US\$ 345 million per year in additional revenue by 2040 and significantly boost incomes in Kiribati, Tuvalu and Micronesia. Revenues from tourism have also expanded incomes and are particularly important in several PICTs such as Fiji, Palau, Samoa and Vanuatu, although the COVID-19 pandemic is having a huge negative impact on this trend. Longer-term perspectives for continued tourism expansion should, however, remain positive and could mobilize an additional US\$ 1.87 billion in revenue and create an additional 127,000 jobs in PICTs by 2040, according to World Bank estimates. Some PICTs are exploring the potential of deep-sea mining as a possible source of sustainable revenue in the future, though caution is urged as to possible negative environmental and social impacts.

At the same time, smaller PICTs have been facing major domestic resource mobilization constraints long before COVID-19 due to their limited independent financing options and a high degree of ODA dependency. Challenges in domestic resource mobilization are compounded by the problem of illicit outflows of capital, as well as high recurrent costs in national expenditures, rather than capital investments. The weak effectiveness of public expenditure, especially in rural areas and outer islands, remains a continued challenge. Boosting the effectiveness and impact of public finance, especially in key sectors such as education, health, infrastructure development and climate change adaptation/mitigation will be critical for SDG achievement in the Pacific.

It is also possible to find revenues that are not based on tax receivable, but on other types of revenues, for the financing of infrastructure projects. Climate-resilient infrastructure can indeed be financed through innovative financing schemes that create economic value in the medium and long-term, such as electric transportation (e.g. tram, railways, electric bus transit systems). Such value can be captured through a green bond issue, which will be repaid over time with the proceeds from the economic value such projects will create. This model, called the “Land Value Capture Model”, leverages on examples set in many Asian cities, such as the MTR Corporation in Hong Kong, whose revenues are, for a large part, coming from retail revenues from the operation of real estate built on top of or adjacent to train stations. A similar model could be developed in the Pacific and provide new ways of financing, without relying on taxes, remittances or overseas ODA receipts, but on value generated locally through added benefits for the local economy.³⁸⁴

By allowing municipalities and local governments to design innovative financing schemes, with the participation of the private sector and appropriate public-private partnerships, and a focus on climate-resilient infrastructure and the issuing of green (or blue) bonds (see following section), they should be

³⁸² Ibid.

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ UNESCAP (2020)

capable of raising financing to create new ports, railway lines, bus networks, etc... while ensuring that local communities are resilient against the impact of climate change.³⁸⁵

Climate and biodiversity financing

Financing for climate change adaptation and mitigation has (positively) increased over recent years. Some PICTs including Fiji and Tuvalu have leveraged large amounts of funding from the Green Climate Fund. Climate finance is complemented by new innovative insurance mechanisms such as the Pacific Catastrophe Risk Assessment and Financing Initiative (PCRAFI) to support countries to manage environmental shocks.

PICTs are strategically well-placed to access more climate resources in the future. However, while climate finance is on the rise, the share of loans in climate finance is also growing, especially for the higher-income Pacific countries. Thus, it will be important to emphasize that this finance should be in the form of grants, not loans.

Sovereign green bonds are an adequate funding instrument to mobilize capital at scale from global and domestic institutional investors, while allowing for the financing of climate resilient infrastructure. The top three sectors funded by green bonds are Renewable Energy, Green buildings and low-carbon transport infrastructure. More green development is required to achieve the objectives of the Paris Agreement, the NDCs and provide the necessary foundation for a more sustainable future. Fiji serves as an example of a PICT which has successfully developed a local bond market, with the issuance of fixed income securities by the Sovereign, as well as other state-backed entities (such as the Fiji Development Bank). Fiji has also successfully placed two green bond issues with domestic and international investors. Blue Bonds, which are designed to fund projects towards the conservation of maritime ecosystems, are also adequate to assist the region in the preservation of its biodiversity.

Domestic and international private financing for development

In addition to public domestic revenues and official external finance, mobilizing large volumes of private finance – from both domestic and external sources – is considered critical to achieve the SDGs in the Pacific.³⁸⁶

Access to **affordable credit** across PICTs is still low, although there have been improvements due to initiatives such as the Pacific Island Financial Inclusion Programme which, in 2017, had reached over 1.5 million unbanked citizens in the Pacific. Guarantee schemes for small and medium enterprises have also enjoyed some successes in increasing access to finance for some target businesses/sectors, including in Samoa. **FDI** is a key source of external private finance and critical for long-term investment in physical capital, job creation, skills and technology transfer. The increase in net FDI from US\$ 258 million in 2000 to US\$ 629.8 million by 2015 is mainly due to Asia, with some growth in inter-Pacific FDI. Most FDI is concentrated in the extractive sectors, with some diversification into construction, services and infrastructure. Risks to FDI lie in its considerable volatility and revenue leakages due to generous tax incentives. Investor reports point to a weak “enabling environment” for FDI in the Pacific, due to several constraints ranging from infrastructure, communications and transportation links, rule of law, access to land, etc.). **Remittances** which average about 10 percent of GDP across PICTs (see also 3.3.1) are also an

³⁸⁵ UNESCAP (2020)

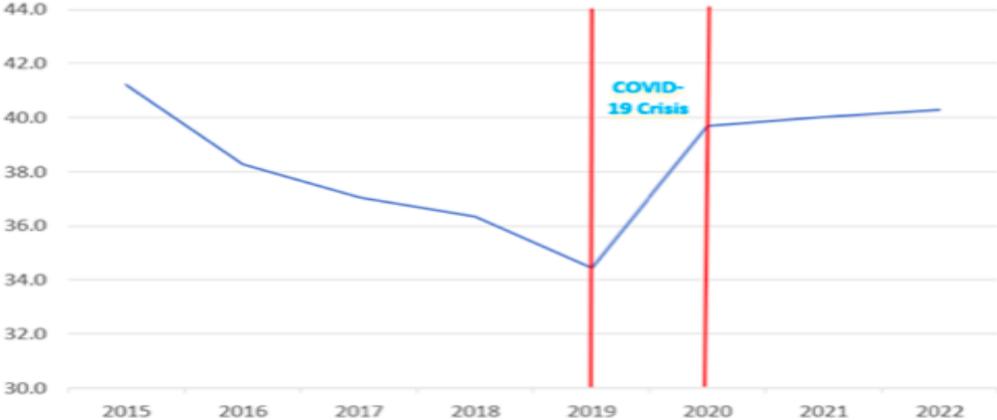
³⁸⁶ UNDP (2017). Financing the SDGs in the Pacific Islands: Opportunities, Challenges and Ways Forward <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/poverty-reduction/financing-the-sdgs-in-the-pacific-islands--opportunities--challe.html>

important source of household income and foreign exchange in some countries (e.g. Tonga). This has prompted some PICTs to take an interest in initiatives that incentivize diaspora communities to invest a proportion of their wealth “back home”. **Private Development Assistance** and **impact investment** are also on the rise in the Pacific, mainly distributed via NGOs, religious organizations and other entities with a focus on the environment, health and disaster relief.

Public debt financing

Debt financing and debt sustainability will be essential to financing the SDGs in the Pacific. While public debt ratios remain fairly low overall and averaged 37 percent of GDP in 2015, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to an increase of public debt ratios (see Figure 21). Even before COVID-19, debt risks remained elevated. Out of 10 Pacific countries, the IMF categorized four as at high risk of debt distress, four at moderate risk and just two at low risk, mainly due to narrow export bases and a large exposure to economic and environmental shocks. The rising share of loans in ODA, especially for higher-income countries, may also increase some PICTs’ debt burdens in the future. While debt management capacities have improved in some PICTs, they remain constrained in the amount of debt they can take on, and the level of concessionality of loan financing will be an important determinant of future debt sustainability.

Figure 21: Pacific Island Countries: Average Public Debt, 2015-2022 (in percent of GDP)



Source: IMF World Economic Outlook Database and IMF staff estimates

To contain the health and socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19, some countries have announced [fiscal packages](#) that include additional health spending, temporary cash transfers for displaced workers, and credit support to small and medium-sized firms and affected sectors, putting additional strain on public debt.

As of September 30, 2020, the joint International Monetary Fund and World Bank debt sustainability analysis³⁸⁷ indicates a high risk of debt distress in Tonga, Tuvalu, Samoa, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia and Kiribati, whereas Vanuatu and Solomon Islands carry moderate risk.

While concessional debt is an important factor that has allowed PICTs, especially the ones without considerable tourism or fishing revenues, to achieve their current income levels and other development

³⁸⁷ Note that the debt sustainability framework for low-income countries is not applicable to Palau and the Cook Islands (the Cook Islands are not part of the International Monetary Fund).

outcomes, it generates dependencies with a risk of substantial cuts to income and public services when interrupted. The rising share of loans in ODA may also lead to increasing debt burdens for higher income PICTs in the future.

New borrowing should be designed to be secured through new forms of collateral, with the participation of the private sector to create new sources of wealth and build climate-resilient infrastructure that can be financed through time with new mechanisms.

Despite improved debt management capacities in some PICTs, they will still be restricted in the amount of debt they can take on. The extent of concessionality of loan financing will be an important motive for future debt sustainability. New forms of financing will be an attractive alternative to the old ways of increasing the debt burden of local governments.

4.2 Partnerships

Partnerships with IFIs

The Asian Development Bank (ADB), International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) operate in select PICTs to assist in the recovery from COVID-19-induced crisis and in the attainment of longer-term sustainable development objectives.

ADB operates in its member states Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu and has approved the membership of Niue in 2019. ADB's Pacific Liaison and Coordination Office based in Sydney, Australia serves as the focal point for programming, processing, and administering assistance to Nauru, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu; its Pacific Sub Regional Office based in Suva, Fiji, serves in the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Niue, Samoa, Tonga, and Tuvalu. ADB operations in the Pacific are guided by the [Pacific Approach 2016-2020](#).

The WB's country specific action plans in the Pacific Islands are guided by a [Regional Partnership Framework](#) for nine Pacific Island countries (Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu) which provides a roadmap for both regional opportunities and country-specific action plans until 2021. The WB's work in [Fiji](#) and [Solomon Islands](#) is guided by individual country strategies, with a new [Country Partnership Framework for Fiji](#) currently being prepared. Emergency operations have already been approved under the [COVID-19 fast-track facility](#) for Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu, aiming to provide emergency financing for supplies, training of medical staff, and strengthening national public health systems. The World Bank is also working with countries to redeploy existing projects to strengthen health systems and better fight the COVID-19 pandemic by reallocating funds and activating Catastrophe Deferred Drawdown Options (CAT-DDOs) which provide emergency funding, e.g. to [Samoa](#) and [Vanuatu](#). A [Development Policy Operation in Solomon Islands](#) helps expanding support businesses, safeguard jobs and build conditions for broad based and sustainable growth.

Fiji, Samoa, PNG, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Tonga, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, Tuvalu and Nauru are IMF members in the Pacific. The IMF in the Pacific operates through its Resident Representative Office in Suva, Fiji. In the context of COVID-19, two PICTs, namely, Samoa, and Solomon Islands, together with PNG, have received SDR 300.2 million (USD 414.3 million) in

total.³⁸⁸ Tonga and Fiji have also requested support under the Rapid Credit Facility and Rapid Financing Instrument. Solomon Islands is the only Pacific Island country that is eligible for the Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust (CCRT)³⁸⁹ and has benefited from the program, with the first tranche of debt service relief approved on April 13, 2020.

These institutions benefit from favorable conditions in each of the countries, where they operate, like for example their “preferred creditor status”. As such, they can take on their balance sheets certain levels of risk, which a traditional lender cannot carry, due to the regulatory constraints or credit considerations. As such, these institutions have a major role to play in acting as a “first loss” investor, helping secure transactions by providing a credit enhancement to other, more traditional types of investors. It is possible to leverage their capital and allow a scaling up of project financing, by inviting private investors alongside these institutions. Such private investors will see favorably the very strict due diligence process that these institutions have, as a matter of conducting their operations, and feel comfortable extending capital in geographies, which traditionally does not fit their investment criteria.

Free Associations with New Zealand and the United States of America

The three PICTs of the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau, are signatories to a series of agreements known as the “**Compacts of Free Association (COFA)**” which establish and govern the relationships of free association³⁹⁰ between the United States and these Pacific Islands. Similarly, the Cook Islands and Niue are associated states to New Zealand. Such agreements provide financial assistance from the US and New Zealand to their associate countries, visa-free travel between the US/New Zealand and associate countries, and access by associate countries to many US and New Zealand domestic programs and other benefits.

The U.S. provides grant funding to the Federated States of Micronesia and Republic of Marshall Islands, to assist in their efforts to promote economic advancement, budgetary self-reliance, and economic self-sufficiency. Currently, compact assistance is provided on a sector grant basis until 2023 in education and health sectors; private sector development, capacity building in the public sector and environment and public Infrastructure. The U.S., the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of Marshall Islands recognized mutual intention to discontinue annual grant assistance beyond fiscal year 2023. In a desire to contribute to the long-term budgetary self-reliance of the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of Marshall Islands, they established a Trust Fund for the People of the Federated States of Micronesia and a Trust Fund for the People of the Marshall Islands, to provide the respective governments with an ongoing source of revenue after fiscal year 2023.

Compact funding is also provided to the Government of Palau through a separate agreement, signed in 2018 with accompanying financial provisions. The financial assistance provisions under the Palau Compact Review will expire on September 30, 2024.³⁹¹

³⁸⁸ Special Drawing Rights, the SDR is an international reserve asset, created by the IMF in 1969 to supplement its member countries’ official reserves. The value of the SDR is based on a basket of five currencies—the U.S. dollar, the euro, the Chinese renminbi, the Japanese yen, and the British pound sterling.

³⁸⁹ <https://www.imf.org/en/About/Factsheets/Sheets/2016/08/01/16/49/Catastrophe-Containment-and-Relief-Trust>

³⁹⁰ The details of such free association are contained in United Nations General Assembly [resolution 1541 \(XV\) Principle VI](#).

³⁹¹ This information is compiled from [US Department of Interior, Office of Insular Affairs](#) web page, accessed on November 24, 2020.

Given their lack of alternative funding sources and that compact grants form a considerable share in government revenues in recipient PICTs, it is clear that income from their country trust funds will be important once US Compact grants end in 2023. The end of the compacts' programs and services agreements in 2024 would also require the Federated States of Micronesia and Republic of Marshall Islands to bear additional costs to provide services currently provided by the U.S. under the agreements³⁹². The US Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that after fiscal year 2023 the funds are "unlikely to provide maximum annual disbursements, may provide no disbursements at all in some years, and are unlikely to sustain the funds' fiscal year 2023 value." According to the same analysis, the risk of disbursements below the maximum and the risk of zero disbursements increase over time for both funds.

Potential solutions will require countries to trade-off a near-term reduction in resources with more-predictable and more-sustainable disbursements in the longer term. Trust fund committees have not prepared distribution policies, although required by the agreements, which could assist the countries in planning for the 2023 transition to trust fund income. The risks could also be contained by mobilizing more contributions from the countries or other sources. Trust fund disbursement policy changes could help address these risks but may require revising the agreements with each country.

Pacific Islands Forum

The Governments of Australia, the Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu, determined to work in partnership with each other and with others beyond the Pacific region to achieve shared goals of economic growth, sustainable development, good governance and security' established the Pacific Islands Forum as early as 1971.³⁹³ The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat engages with member countries, development partners, other stakeholders and the people of the Pacific to identify and inform regional priorities, as well as to develop policy and programs in response to these priorities. The Forum holds an observer status in the UN General Assembly. The Forum Secretariat's Secretary General is the Chair of the CROP, established by the Forum Leaders (Figure 22). CROP functions as a coordination mechanism between the heads of the regional organizations in the Pacific, and as a high-level advisory body, to provide policy advice and may assist in facilitating policy formulation at national, regional and international level. CROP provides a forum to enable CROP heads to collectively review progress with their respective organizations' contributions on the Framework for Pacific Regionalism.

³⁹² <https://www.gao.gov/assets/710/700410.pdf>

³⁹³ It was founded in 1971 as the South Pacific Forum(SPF), and changed its name in 1999 to "Pacific Islands Forum"

Figure 22: Structure of the Council of Regional Organizations in the Pacific (CROP)

Member Countries	CROP Members**	
Cook Islands Fiji Micronesia, Federated States of Kiribati Nauru Niue Palau Marshall Islands, Republic of Samoa Solomon Islands Tokelau* Tonga Tuvalu Vanuatu	Pacific Islands Forum (PIF)	fostering cooperation between governments, collaboration with international agencies and by representing member interests
	Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA)	sustainably managing fishery resources that fall within the PICTs' 200 mile Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs)
	Pacific Aviation Safety Office (PASO)	compliance to the International Civil Aviation Organization guidelines, including lessening environmental impact
	Pacific Islands Development Program	advancing collective efforts to achieve and sustain equitable social and economic development
	Pacific Power Association	improve the quality of power in the region through a cooperative effort among the private sector and donors
	The Pacific Community (SPC)	the principal scientific and technical organisation in the Pacific region
	Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme	protecting and managing the Pacific Islands' environment and natural resources
Australia French Polynesia	South Pacific Tourism Organization	improve air and sea access to islands, develop capacity of Government and private sector for sustainable tourism
New Caledonia New Zealand Papua New Guinea	University of the South Pacific	provide the highest possible quality of education and research while addressing the needs of the Pacific region

**Tokelau is an associate member, ** the Secretary-General to PIF acts as permanent chair to CROP*

Deepening partnerships and collaboration remains of paramount significance to accelerate sustainable development in the Pacific Islands given that many of the challenges faced by PICTs are not specific to any individual country. For example, the overexploitation of fish stocks and other marine assets on which tourism is largely based, extend beyond national borders. Furthermore, expanding stakeholder engagement from international organizations to local communities is an essential means to address the weak institutional capacity of PICTs. Country specific standards and uncoordinated actions have so far not proven to be sufficient to cope with the interconnected nature of PICTs and the Pacific Ocean. Governments' capacities to effectively implement international norms and standards (such as the Agreement on Port State Measures and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea) in their national contexts are often insufficient.

When partnerships involve local communities, individuals will be less likely to conduct illegal and unsustainable activities and will be more inclined to report such activities to authorities, reinforcing the states' monitoring and enforcement capacity. This approach is equally effective for the sustainable development of the tourism sector. To sustain the tourism sector as a driver of sustainable development in the Pacific region, the sector's linkages to local communities should be strengthened. Deepening partnerships with local communities should also be linked to increased appreciation and use of local content. For example, in the tourism sector, it should not only be focused on revenue and employment creation, but focus on culture-based and marine-based tourism which draws on local assets and contexts.

In addition to building intra-state and local community partnerships, partnerships among individual PICTs will be crucial. The tourism sector can again serve as an example, where PICTs cooperation can be used to strengthen a common image and brand, and to harmonize taxes/fees and other policies which enable broader diffusion of sustainable development gains, especially in those PICTs that have benefited less from tourism in the past.

5. Risks and Opportunities for Transformational Development

The Pacific region and PICTs have made significant progress in aligning their development priorities and goals with the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs (see 2.2). Pacific Island countries have also embarked on a broad-based consultative process on how best to achieve a prosperous and peaceful “Blue Pacific Continent” by 2050³⁹⁴ where “all Pacific peoples are leading free, health and productive lives”.³⁹⁵ As outlined in chapter 2.3, consultations across PICTs engage a wide range of stakeholders to identify key events, issues and trends which can have positive or negative effects on PICTs’ long-term development paths. These so-called “drivers of change” are associated closely with a number of multi-dimensional risks and opportunities which should be taken into consideration in boosting transformational development in the Pacific region and accelerate achievement of the SDGs.

These region-wide consultations to envisage a prosperous and peaceful future for the Pacific Island countries are taking place against the sobering background that the entire Asia-Pacific region, including PICTs, remains off-track on all 17 SDGs (see 2.2). The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to further complicate the pathways for accelerating progress on the SDGs in the next few years. The following provides a synopsis of prevailing and emerging risks, and outlines opportunities to embark on transformational development in a complex and challenging context.

COVID-19

COVID-19 and its sweeping impact across all dimensions of PICTs public and private lives presents the greatest immediate threat to the Pacific region and its populations, with important implications for medium-and longer-term development perspectives. To better understand and calculate the negative effects COVID-19 can have under different scenarios, a number of PICTs have conducted or planned socio-economic impact assessments (SEIAs) of key sectors and themes including health, social protection, education, nutrition and food security, gender-based violence, the macroeconomy and employment, as well as governance, social cohesion and community resilience. SPC is also currently undertaking a regional SEIA.

As with other key threats such as climate change, COVID-19 greatly increases a range of risks for the most **vulnerable and marginalized groups** including women, children, older people, young people, persons with disabilities, LGBT+, single and women-headed households, and poor households.³⁹⁶ Emergency measures such as lockdowns and curfews restrict autonomy and mobility, women and those with caring responsibilities are burdened with increased unpaid care responsibilities, and rates of gender-based violence and violence against children escalate. Border closures have had a significant economic impact, including loss of jobs in the tourism industry, reduction in remittances, and have affected imports and exports. Service delivery data from frontline providers and women’s networks in Tonga and Fiji confirm that domestic violence has increased since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Tonga Women’s Crisis Centre monitored the impact of lockdown on survivors and witnessed a 54 percent increase in the number of cases being reported to the centre³⁹⁷. With 84 reports made to Crisis Centres and another 28

³⁹⁴ <https://www.forumsec.org/pacific-regionalism/>

³⁹⁵ PIFS (2017). Pacific Roadmap for Sustainable Development
<https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/The-Pacific-Roadmap-for-Sustainable-Development.pdf>

³⁹⁶ UN Pacific (2020). SEIA Fiji (September 2020).

³⁹⁷ <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2020/06/across-the-pacific-region-crisis-centres-respond-to-increased-cases-of-violence> accessed 22 June 2020

reported to police, March 2020 saw a total of 112 reports of domestic violence³⁹⁸. The national Domestic Violence helpline in Fiji recorded a total of 87 calls in February 2020 rising to 187 calls in March and 527 calls in April. In April, 54 percent of the calls were domestic violence related, and close to 50 percent of women reported a correlation between COVID-19 and an increase of violence, linked directly to the restrictions of movement and economic strains on families. Cases of violence being reported are serious, with close to 75 percent of women reporting physical violence. Controlling behaviors such as monitoring of phones and social media by partners was also reported by 27 percent of domestic violence callers³⁹⁹. The ongoing financial stressors of a protracted economic recovery mean that an elevated rate of domestic violence can be expected to continue even without lockdowns or curfews. High stress levels among couples is associated with a 3.5 times higher rate of violence than among couples with low stress levels⁴⁰⁰.

COVID-19 also threatens to exacerbate **risks to children**, as children and adults spend more time at home. Previous crises in Pacific countries have found several serious child protection issues including instances of neglect, separation, abandonment, abuse, economic exploitation, illegal adoption and trafficking, physical, sexual and other forms of violence (see chapter 3.6). To mitigate the multiple risks and impacts associated with a rise in poverty levels caused by COVID-19, it will be critical to ensure continued access for the most vulnerable and at-risk populations to basic services and social protection (see also 3.4).

Women and other vulnerable groups typically employed in the tourism sector or the informal economy are most at risk of a reduction and loss of income, and typically lack access to social protection and safety nets⁴⁰¹. The global **drop in tourism due to COVID-19** will hit hardest countries such as Fiji, Vanuatu, and Palau where the sector accounts for a large proportion of employment and MSMEs. Women are overrepresented in service industries that rely on tourism. Producers of handicrafts - a market that depends largely on tourism—are overwhelming female (76 percent in Kiribati, 64 percent in Solomon Islands, and 75 percent in Tonga).⁴⁰² Women in PICTs face barriers to accessing the credit that might sustain a business through a crisis period, such as requirements of fixed collateral such as real property or lack of access to banking facilities. The options available to them often carry high interest rates, as reported by 33 percent, 28 percent, and 56 percent of businesswomen in the Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu, respectively.⁴⁰³ In addition, women’s businesses that lie outside the formal economy are likely to take longer to recover. Experiences from other pandemics, for example the Ebola pandemic, found that while men’s economic activity returned to pre-crisis levels shortly after preventative measures subsided, the impacts on women’s economic security and livelihoods lasted much longer.⁴⁰⁴

Specific vulnerabilities of Pacific Island countries in the COVID-19 context include their **high dependence on imports** which can increase the risk of shortages of medical supplies, food and other necessary goods during the COVID-19 crisis. This may lead to inflated prices and cases of unethical profiteering, as well as parallel and black markets. To address this risk, it will be crucial to further strengthen anti-corruption efforts in the Pacific region (see also 3.5) and develop local production and value chains. COVID-19 will fast-forward future **fiscal risks** (with limited policy maneuvering due to economic lockdowns and travel restrictions) and larger fiscal deficits are to be expected in 2020. Pressure on fiscal expenditure will mount

³⁹⁸ Information provided by Department for Women, Tonga

³⁹⁹ MWCPA/FWCC DV Helpline Data Analysis Report, April 2020

⁴⁰⁰ ‘Covid-19 and Domestic Violence: an Indirect Path to Social and Economic Crisis,’ Amalesh Sharma and Sourav Bikash Borah, *Journal of Family Violence*, 28 July 2020.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰² ADB, 2018. *Women and Business in the Pacific*, ADB, Manila, Philippines

⁴⁰³ ADB, 2018. *Women and Business in the Pacific*, ADB, Manila, Philippines

⁴⁰⁴ United Nations, 2020. *Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women*.

as needs rise to provide extraordinary support to businesses and livelihoods of vulnerable households affected by COVID-19.

A prolonged COVID-19 pandemic and slower global recovery—can hamper demand for PICT’s exports and further lower growth; vulnerability to natural disasters and climate risks can have an immediate impact on growth and fiscal sustainability. Uncertainty with respect to tourism, global trade tensions, and subdued growth in Asia could dampen near-term growth prospects for tourism-intensive countries and for commodity exporters. Debt-to-GDP levels are expected to increase in many PICTs in the medium term. Given that several PICTs are currently at risk of high or moderate debt distress, it will be essential to follow a delicate balance in support of post COVID-19 recovery.

An already **challenging WASH context** presents important risks with regards to COVID-19, given that good WASH practices play a critical role in blocking transmission, particularly through hand hygiene (see 3.4). For example, the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the need to accelerate progress on WASH in schools. Global school closures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic present a risk to children’s education and wellbeing, with prolonged closures expected to have negative impacts on learning outcomes and disrupt school-based services essential for the nutrition, health, welfare and protection of vulnerable children. WHO and UNICEF guidelines on COVID-19 infection prevention and control in schools emphasize the importance of hygiene for reducing transmission and recommend all schools enforce regular handwashing, ensure daily disinfection and cleaning of surfaces, provide basic water, sanitation and waste management facilities, and follow appropriate environmental cleaning and decontamination procedures. However, in the 60 countries identified as having the highest risk of health and humanitarian crisis due to COVID-19, one in two schools lacked basic water and sanitation services and three in four lacked basic hand washing services at the start of the pandemic. **Accelerating progress in countries with the lowest coverage of WASH in schools** will therefore be critical to improve school safety during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

Climate change and environmental protection

The growing threat and impact of climate change has been contributing to the rise of multiple risks across PICTs for many years. The negative effects of climate change on **fisheries** through rising ocean acidification, and on **subsistence farming** through erratic weather patterns, extreme weather events, and increasing soil salinity, compounded by a **loss of traditional knowledge and food systems**, threaten the food security of many rural communities and increase PICTs’ dependence on imported foods (see 3.3).

The shifting patterns of fish stock distribution might have an impact on overall revenue from fishery. At the same time, coastal fishery resources, critical for food and employment, are at risk of depletion due to habitat degradation and overexploitation, as well as loss of traditional fishing practices, especially in areas close to population centers.²³⁴ Poor **health**, including mental health, and death are also increasing as a result of extreme weather events and climate-sensitive diseases such as malaria, dengue, cholera, filariasis, leptospirosis, schistosomiasis, and ciguatera fish poisoning (see 3.4). The existential threat of climate change to some PICTs and its pervasive impact on the Pacific region will continue to make it a top priority for governments and policy makers in the coming years and decades. In particular, governments should look to develop relevant regional and national policies to ensure protection of people at risk of displacement in the context of sudden and slow-onset processes.

Substantial **additional investments** are needed for offsetting the impacts of climate change, including measures for climate change adaptation and for climate proofing of key sectors. Depending on the global CO2 emissions scenario, funding requirements for the Pacific region until 2050 could average \$447 million or 1.5 percent of GDP per year under a “business as usual scenario”, could be as low as \$158 million per

year if greenhouse gas concentration stabilizes, or could go as high as \$775 million or 2.5 percent of GDP per year.⁴⁰⁵ In any case, PICTs will benefit from early climate action, as climate risks and costs due to impacts of climate change are expected to accelerate over time. **Mainstreaming climate change** objectives and agendas into existing national and multisector agency programmes and policies will be crucial.⁴⁰⁶ It needs to be supported by increased financial and technical support for building climate resilience and promoting renewable energy production, thus ensuring continued economic growth in the face of climate change across the Pacific region.

The combination of growing threats and impacts of climate change, an increasing population and rising environmental degradation across PICTs, demands a strong focus **on environmental protection**. It serves to address the multiple high vulnerabilities of PICTs to the effects of climate change and natural disasters, the loss of biodiversity, and increasing environmental degradation due to unsustainable exploitation of natural resources and lack of sustainable waste management. Transformative actions to curb marine plastic pollution are necessary in the region. This includes the implementation of transitional mechanisms to phase out plastics, and also, enhancing waste management by increasing capacity, technology and by adopting a comprehensive, circular-economy approach to address land-based pollution from the source.

Effective environmental protection and natural resource management will be essential to ensure and sustain people's long-term food security and health, as well as gender equality, economic prosperity and peace. Across many PICTs, this is especially important for the poorest and most marginalized populations who often rely on subsistence-farming and fishing for their livelihoods. In view of major existing challenges in measuring progress against key goals including SDGs 13 and 14, more **systematic data generation and management**, and regular comprehensive and accurate assessments of the multiple and growing threats to the biodiversity, infrastructure and populations of PICTs, and of the environmental, social and economic vulnerabilities in each country, will be critical to understanding the multidimensional risks to achieving environment and climate change-related SDGs.

The upcoming UN Decade of Ocean Science (2021-2030) for Sustainable Development,⁴⁰⁷ provides an opportunity to focus on the issue of conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdictions. Under the term "Beyond National Jurisdictions" (BBNJ) efforts are made to develop a new international instrument for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity with emphasis on marine genetic resources; area-based management, including marine protected areas; environmental impact assessments; and capacity building and transfer of marine technology.⁴⁰⁸ Given the importance of transboundary marine biodiversity and impacts of marine activities on complex ecosystems of the terrestrial biodiversity in the Pacific, the Pacific nations engage closely in the BBNJ processes and actions.

Population growth, youth and urbanization

High population growth and an accelerating trend of **rural-urban migration** contribute to numerous risks in the Pacific region. The rapid growth of urban populations, faster than national populations (especially in Melanesian countries)⁴⁰⁹, combined with scarcity of land and lack of affordable housing has contributed

⁴⁰⁵ ADB (2013). The economics of climate change in the Pacific.

<https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/31136/economics-climate-change-pacific.pdf>

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ <https://en.unesco.org/ocean-decade> .

⁴⁰⁸ https://www.un.org/bbnj/sites/www.un.org.bbnj/files/draft_text_a.conf_.232.2019.6_advanced_unedited_version.pdf

⁴⁰⁹ Lowy Institute (accessed 16/11/20). DEMANDING THE FUTURE: NAVIGATING THE PACIFIC'S YOUTH BULGE
https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/demanding-future-navigating-pacific-youth-bulge#_ftn23

to an increase in informal settlements without access to basic services and infrastructure facing greater hardship, exposure and vulnerability to natural disasters and climate change. Under these conditions, informal safety nets are increasingly coming under strain, with escalating costs of living and scarcer stable employment opportunities posing significant risks to resilience and poverty alleviation. Urbanization has also increased dependence on cash income and imports of processed food, thus increasing risks to food security and nutrition. It is also a key factor contributing to the extremely high prevalence of NCDs due to lifestyle changes including tobacco use, unhealthy diets, physical inactivity, and the harmful use of alcohol. A multi-sectoral approach encompassing, *inter alia*, health, education, and agriculture and food systems is essential to combat NCDs (see 3.3 and 3.4).

At the same time, urbanization, as a cross-cutting issue, also presents several opportunities for the acceleration of the SDGs and recovery from the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19. As important contributors to national economies, comprising over half of GDP in most PICTs, urban centers are extremely valuable for the development of the rural sector and contribute to a more diversified economy. Advances in technology, more accessible finances and improvements in road and sea transport are creating stronger **rural-urban linkages**, while the understanding of urban markets and their contribution to the wider value chain is growing, helping to create more resilient livelihoods for both rural and urban populations and improved food security. The agglomeration effects afforded by cities also provide opportunities to improve service delivery, enhance labour skills, health and education. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the potential of innovations in urban farming and agriculture for more localized food production and healthier diets, and the strength of **community-based organizations** in low-income neighborhoods to provide quick and targeted actions such as awareness raising and the trade or exchange of goods and services⁴¹⁰. These provide good entry points for enabling **urban resilience** by building on existing local capacities to help reduce the vulnerability of urban poor communities to current and future climate and disaster impacts. Important challenges remain in scaling up sustainable service and affordable housing provision, while ensuring urbanization does not exacerbate climate and natural hazard vulnerability. This is compounded by capacity and resource constraints of actors and agencies involved in urban governance, which often suffer from poor vertical and horizontal coordination. Some progress has been made in this regard through the adoption of **National Urban or Urbanization Policies** in Samoa, Kiribati, Fiji and the Solomon Islands, helping to improve land administration and strengthened planning capacity, providing a more inclusive planning framework between government agencies, service providers and communities⁴¹¹.

The urban transition is inseparable from the demographic transition, both being linked to social and economic development. For many years, population growth has exceeded economic growth across the Pacific region. Half the region's population is now aged under 23, increasingly concentrated in urban areas due to the possibilities offered for expression, forging new identities, better access to technology and wider social networks⁴¹². There are a range of causes of the youth bulge phenomenon across the Pacific. These include high fertility rates, varying take-up of contraception, and the difficulty of delivering reproductive health services.

⁴¹⁰ One example being Fiji's "Barter for Better" Facebook page which began in response to job losses caused by COVID-19, providing a way for people to trade goods and services. The page has over 173,000 members with many trading serves and hand-crafted goods, such as mats, for groceries.

⁴¹¹ UN-Habitat (2020). National Urban Policy: Pacific Region Report. <https://unhabitat.org/national-urban-policy-pacific-region-report>

⁴¹² Lowy Institute (accessed 16/11/20). DEMANDING THE FUTURE: NAVIGATING THE PACIFIC'S YOUTH BULGE https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/demanding-future-navigating-pacific-youth-bulge#_ftn23

With stagnant labor markets, weak governance, fiscal pressures, and high dependency on aid, Pacific Island nations are very vulnerable to the negative consequences of a large proportion of youth.⁴¹³ Overall, this “**youth bulge**” represents one of the principal risks to the political, social and economic stability of the Pacific region in the coming decades.

At the same time, **targeted investments in youth** can turn this risk into opportunities and pathways to achieve transformational development and the SDGs in the Pacific region. The enormous potential of the “youth bulge” can be used to create a “**demographic dividend**” for PICTs where the proportion of a young dependent population declines in relation to the working-age population. Achieving this “demographic dividend” in the coming years and decades requires investing in young Pacific Islanders to reach their full social, economic, and political potential. This includes investing in quality education, as well as tackling major health risks which threaten Pacific youth and their prospects in later adulthood.⁴¹⁴ These health risks include NCDs, such as coronary and respiratory diseases and diabetes, substance abuse and mental illness, as well as lack of access to quality sexual and reproductive health.⁴¹⁵ In addition, it requires careful targeting of labor and employment strategies to reach marginalized youth, promising migration pathways, skills development, harmonization of qualifications and addressing gender discrimination and greater political engagement with and of youth.⁴¹⁶ Acknowledging the scale and breadth of challenges facing youth across PICTs, the **Pacific Youth Development Framework 2014–2023** outlines a comprehensive approach which seeks to mainstream youth development across national sector policies and programs. The framework focuses specifically on the most vulnerable, such as the uneducated, unemployed, young women affected by gender inequality, and youth living in rural areas.⁴¹⁷ Economic prosperity, and political and social stability in the Pacific Islands region in the coming decades will depend on harnessing this demographic dividend and preventing youth marginalization and disillusionment.

Gender equality and women empowerment

Another key pathway towards transformative development and effective achievement of the SDGs lies in expanding investments in gender equality and women’s empowerment (GEWE). Strengthening GEWE will be essential for improved health and education outcomes in the Pacific region and for economic growth, as well as food security, disaster prevention and response, climate change adaptation and mitigation and environmental conservation for families and communities. The review of the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration will provide an opportunity to support renewed efforts to achieve gender equality.

Government progress towards gender equality differs within the Pacific, sometimes subnationally. In Vanuatu, the National Gender Equality Policy was scheduled to launch within months of the Government decision to dissolve the Ministry of Justice and Community Services, within which the Department of Women’s Affairs was based, in order to establish a Ministry of Fisheries. The justification of this decision was to develop Vanuatu’s productive sector.⁴¹⁸

⁴¹³ Stewart Firth (2018). Instability in the Pacific Islands: A Status Report, Lowy Institute Analysis, 4 June 2018, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/instability-pacific-islands-status-report>.

⁴¹⁴ Lowy Institute (accessed 16/11/20). DEMANDING THE FUTURE: NAVIGATING THE PACIFIC'S YOUTH BULGE https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/demanding-future-navigating-pacific-youth-bulge#_ftn23

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

⁴¹⁶ SPC (2013). The Significance of Youth in Sustainable Development in the Pacific, Sustainable Development Brief, (March 2013) https://www.sprep.org/attachments/sids/9_youth_sdwg_brief_14mar13_final.pdf.

⁴¹⁷ Lowy Institute (accessed 16/11/20). DEMANDING THE FUTURE: NAVIGATING THE PACIFIC'S YOUTH BULGE https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/demanding-future-navigating-pacific-youth-bulge#_ftn23

⁴¹⁸ Vanuatu Government Statement on the Establishment of the Ministry of Fisheries (2020): https://dailypost.vu/news/new-fisheries-ministry-to-replace-ministry-of-justice/article_b25fc02a-1e20-11eb-8268-f3c03956681b.html

Legal, policy and institutional reforms which address structural barriers to women’s empowerment, including cultural and social gender norms and stereotypes, lack of access to quality sexual and reproductive health care, lack of access to land and finance, and the burden of unpaid care, will be essential to achieve transformational and lasting change for Pacific women and girls. Increasing opportunities, sustained support and political will for women’s leadership and political participation alongside advancing the Women, Peace and Security agenda is critical for promoting human rights and conflict-sensitive development outcomes. In addition, direct targeted programmes should help to empower women and girls economically, politically and socially, and to build networks, collectives and civil society organizations that support them and bring their voices into policy making processes. For example, programmes in skills training, access to credit, and social protection schemes should set targets for women’s participation and enrolment, and COVID-19 mitigation measures such as food assistance should establish quotas for sourcing inputs from women-led businesses.

Underlying power imbalances between men and women in the family and the normative acceptance of violence to resolve conflict are issues that must be addressed to sustain equitable development. Violence against women in Fiji is estimated to cost USD\$ 0.3 billion per year, equal to 6.6 percent of the country’s GDP.⁴¹⁹ Remedying the highest rates of intimate partner violence in the world will take a whole of society approach that includes effective, responsive institutional frameworks, the mainstreaming of violence concerns across sectors, social norm change programmes, and incentives for the development of positive masculinities that build on Pacific cultures.

Digital transformation and e-governance

In an increasingly digital world, measuring global development entails centring e-governance as a cornerstone for sustainability and resilience. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, development is witnessing a transformational challenge in which technology indispensably plays a vital role in crisis management and beyond. Accordingly, there is an urgent need to ground technology in global development plans to achieve inclusion and equity both nationally and internationally.

The United Nations E-Government Survey undergirds the intersections between technology and development to measure progress in accessibility and inclusion. Central to the survey is the E-Government Development Index (EDGI), a composite measurement that incorporates three subindices which track progress of e-government in a given country (Figure 23). The EDGI reflects how a country is using information technologies to promote access and inclusion of its people.

Figure 23: 2020 UN E-Government Development Index for the Pacific Islands⁴²⁰

Country Name	E-Government Index	E-Participation Index	Online Service Index	Telecommunication Infrastructure Index
Kiribati	0.43200	0.55950	0.49410	0.12410
Marshall Islands	0.40550	0.42860	0.34120	0.12470

⁴¹⁹ CARE International (n.d.). Counting the Cost: The Price Society Pays for Violence Against Women.

⁴²⁰ UN E-Government Knowledge Base (accessed 03/12/20). <https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/data-center>

Micronesia (Federated States of)	0.37790	0.33330	0.35290	0.10610
Nauru	0.41500	0.20240	0.17060	0.47380
Palau	0.51090	0.32140	0.27650	0.37450
Papua New Guinea	0.28270	0.21430	0.22350	0.12330
Fiji	0.65850	0.46430	0.50590	0.64680
Solomon Islands	0.34420	0.32140	0.32350	0.21060
Vanuatu	0.44030	0.39290	0.33530	0.38450
Tonga	0.56160	0.36900	0.37650	0.48000
Tuvalu	0.42090	0.35710	0.30000	0.28070
Samoa	0.42190	0.25000	0.26470	0.25960

Despite the positive development in connectivity and online services over the years, many countries in the Pacific are hurdled by obstacles in the adoption of digital technologies on the governmental level. The pressing problem facing the progress of e-government development in the Pacific is due to the geographical layout of the region itself, which renders infrastructure development costly and broadband access complex and expensive. In 2017, only fifty-thousand individuals out of 19.9 million people living in the Pacific Islands were connected to fixed broadband services, while nine countries registered fixed broadband penetration rates below 2 percent.

Another challenge facing the Pacific Islands are natural disasters and their potential damage and disruption of information and communication technologies infrastructure. In a region prone to such risks, the Pacific Island states incurred several billions US\$ in losses caused by natural disasters, including considerable damage to ICT infrastructure. On the positive side, however, the advent of submarine fibre-optics cables in the region has been steadily contributing to resilient forms of infrastructure and more connectivity altogether.

To further strengthen e-government development and digital technologies, PICTs need to improve their legislative frameworks, policies and regulations. In this regard, some PICTs are now pursuing regulatory reforms that support national and regional efforts to mobilise and manage technological changes, improve economic standards and provide affordable ICT services. In addition, Samoa and Vanuatu have introduced digital-specific economic policies that seek to encourage competition in the ICT sector.

The relatively small size and limited financial resources of the public sector across PICTs make it particularly challenging to address the unique challenges of rural populations and people living on outer

islands in accessing public services in Pacific region. The combination of a small public sector and vast distances presents a major risk in achieving the goal of “leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind first.” In this regard, investing in digital or e-governance can be especially effective in overcoming these major contextual constraints to sustainable development (see also 3.5). Increased investments in e-governance could enable “smart” and cost-efficient solutions. Together with investments in ICT planning and infrastructure, recent studies recommend increasing efforts in establishing a more open and transparent knowledge-sharing culture, both amongst government institutions, and between state institutions and non-state actors, including civil society and the general public.⁴²¹ The adoption of digital access-for-all frameworks could help increase the flow of information, with greater transparency and accountability for government actions and a wider distribution of services to stakeholders, whether in government, business, or the community.⁴²² Women should be expressly targeted for improvements in digital literacy and access, especially for business registration. Rural women in particular may be uninformed about the benefits of registration or are wary of ongoing fees in some countries, such as Vanuatu. Tonga provides a good model of a simple, low-cost process to register a business.⁴²³ Digital approaches have also been used successfully in domestic violence response services, piloted during COVID-19 lockdowns. Women in Tonga had access to legal services and the courts during lockdown through online platforms. Services established new avenues for women to reach them; for example, the Women and Children’s Crisis Centre created a Facebook page to facilitate 24-hour online counseling. Similarly, Women United Together Marshall Islands trained case workers on tele-counseling and remote case management. These initiatives could expand the reach of services for better coverage of outer islands.

Inclusive, green and resilient growth

Inclusive, green and resilient growth has been identified as central to sustainable development in the Pacific. In this regard, the COVID-19 crisis has shown the importance of increasing the **resilience and sustainability of supply chains** through strengthening local and regional production, and diversifying sourcing, and shipping of goods and services across a range of economies. With a more diversified base, PICTs will be able to reduce the chances of a single manufacturing hub or shipping route creating a supply shock due to a pandemic, natural disaster or other unexpected event. The recovery of the tourism supply chain, however, cannot fully begin until the COVID-19 health emergency is under control.⁴²⁴ The multiple economic challenges and risks associated with COVID-19 also provide an opportunity for PICTs to invest adequately in a green and resilient recovery. While some countries in the region are leading the way and showing progress, in others the outlook appears mixed or no progress.⁴²⁵

Maritime connectivity continues to constitute the greatest impediment to PICTs trade costs and access to global markets.⁴²⁶ Although PICTs are highly dependent on seaborne freight, their connectivity level is only a third of the regional average in Asia and the Pacific in 2019.²³⁵ Most of the countries are located far from trunk routes and feeder networks and require low cargo volume, which prevents them from taking

⁴²¹ Graham Hassall (2018). Special Issue on public sector enhancement in Pacific Island states, *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Administration* (published online: 18 December 2018)

⁴²² Ibid.

⁴²³ ADB, 2018. *Women and Business in the Pacific*, ADB, Manila, Philippines

⁴²⁴ The World Bank. (2020). *COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Policy Response on Tourism Support in Russia*. The World Bank, Washington DC.

⁴²⁵ UNESCAP (2020) Forthcoming report, *Increasing the resilience and overall sustainability of supply chains in the Pacific*

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

advantage of the economies of scale of the global shipping network. This in turn forces PICTs to pay high prices for restricted and unreliable shipping services. Key challenges related to the shipping sector in the region include: long distances between ports; low trade volumes; small population size; distant islands and communities, trade imbalance as exports usually far outweigh imports; and widely varying port facilities with generally inadequate funding for operation and maintenance.⁴²⁷ Thus, the improvement of the quality of maritime connectivity should be an important strategy aiming at stimulating exports and promoting the participation of the domestic economy in global chains of production. In line with green and resilient growth, strengthening PICTs connectivity needs to consider the significant **greenhouse gas emissions caused by international civil aviation and maritime transport**. In this regard, the Pacific region can work with other countries in the region such as Australia to address greenhouse gas emissions through the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and International Maritime Organization (IMO).⁴²⁸

The growing **digitization of goods and services** makes increased digital connectivity and access to trade-enabling ICT critical factors for PICTs to deepen their participation in regional and global trade. In this regard, the benefits of undersea fiber-optic cables on international internet bandwidth have been shown already in Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu.⁴²⁹ Despite the progress in ICT development over the last 20 years, significant gaps remain in ICT related outcomes that need intervention from policy makers, donors, regulators and operators so that countries can make use of them to enhance growth and development.⁴³⁰ Moreover, barriers to digital trade often come from **burdensome regulations, regulatory divergence from international best practices and the lack of inclusive access to supporting ICT infrastructure**. Research shows that regulatory barriers have been undermining digital trade integration, in particular those with middle and low income. The high trade costs in PICTs underscore **the importance of digitalizing trade procedures**. The well-functioning trade facilitation framework will help reduce trade costs as well as mitigate the risks of disruptions on trade and global value chains. In this context, the global framework like the WTO's Trade Facilitation Agreement complemented by regional approaches, such as the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific can play an important role.²³⁶

Despite the development of effective vaccines for COVID-19, the **recovery of the international tourism sector** is likely to take some time. Recommendations to support tourism recovery for Pacific Island countries include creating a “roadmap to recovery” that would include clearly outlined sector recovery arrangements and procedures to improve health and sanitation both at points of entry and within businesses. Innovations on quarantine (some countries have moved beyond the blanket 14-day requirement) can help in gradually opening the borders for travel and tourism. This roadmap must be equipped with enough financial resources and be allocated to respective agencies to manage and implement systematically.⁴³¹

Regional collaboration

The COVID-19 crisis has exposed interdependencies across sectors and borders which require solidarity and cooperation beyond national borders. Pacific Island countries have long recognized the value of

⁴²⁷ ADB (2007). *Oceanic Voyages: Shipping in the Pacific*. Asian Development Bank, Philippines.

⁴²⁸ UNESCAP (2020). *Forthcoming report, Increasing the resilience and overall sustainability of supply chains in the Pacific*

⁴²⁹ Pacific Region Infrastructure Facility (2015) *Economic and social impact of ICT in the Pacific*. Pacific Region Infrastructure Facility, Asian Development Bank, Sydney.

⁴³⁰ UNESCAP (2020). *Forthcoming report, Increasing the resilience and overall sustainability of supply chains in the Pacific*

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*

regional cooperation which can help in building resilient and green economies and ensuring an effective COVID-19 recovery in line with existing climate commitments. Key areas could include:

- Reaffirming commitment towards the need for regional cooperation and solidarity which will allow leveraging existing policies and mechanisms
- Addressing impediments to institutional and policy integration by harmonizing and rationalizing institutions and policy processes across the region to resolve resource constraints
- Enhancing functional policy coordination in areas of common challenges, including building climate and supply chain resilience
- Strengthening mechanisms to realign national interests with regional interests to facilitate inclusive growth and an equitable distribution of benefits
- Support towards resilience-building in supply chains through regional cooperation on sustainable trade and ICT policies
- Enhancing competitiveness and foreign direct investment attractiveness by accelerating the process of domestic reforms
- Providing support and incentives to diversify national economies and to increase linkages between agriculture and other sectors across rural and urban areas towards maximizing benefits to local farmers
- Integrating rights-based approaches and gender mainstreaming into policies, laws, strategies and action plans to ensure nobody is left behind
- Enhancing social equity through housing and settlement upgrading programmes, building stronger partnerships across sectors especially national and regional housing and WASH programmes
- Enhancing regional cooperation to address pollution, in particular, in the form of plastic debris in the ocean
- Promoting recognition and legal protection of migrants and displaced persons, particularly in the context of climate change, including through the development of flexible regional labour migration schemes⁴³²

Regional collaboration, industry collaboration and multi-stakeholder partnerships can help reduce costs, enhance competitive advantage, and strengthen the transfer of knowledge, experience and technology. Potential initiatives for regional collaboration could focus i.a. on **raising incomes, revenue and economic stabilization** as key pathways towards achieving the vision and goals of the 2030 Agenda.⁴³³

Measures to **raise incomes** could include: 1) investing in improving people's basic financial skills for budgeting, accessing credit, making savings and investment decisions and businesses, 2) expanding seasonal employer schemes and labor mobility arrangements,⁴³⁴ 3) increasing economies of scale, and scope the feasibility of regional producer cooperatives for select primary commodities, natural cosmetic products, seaweed farming, etc., 4) reducing the transaction costs related to remittances through technology based solutions and regulations overhaul, and 5) promoting entrepreneurship, new firm

⁴³² IOM (2020). Pacific Governments Conclude Regional Policy Dialogue on Climate Related Mobility. <https://www.iom.int/news/pacific-governments-conclude-regional-policy-dialogue-climate-related-mobility>. Accessed 08.12.2020.

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ Gibson, John; McKenzie, David (2014). Development through Seasonal Worker Programs : The Case of New Zealand's RSE Program

formations and business expansions by reducing compliance costs, and facilitating “ease of doing business” by harmonizing regulation and accounting standards across the region.⁴³⁵

Potential initiatives for **raising revenue** could include: 1) exploring mineral resources located on the seabed, including through a regional partnership for deep sea mining, based on further research to ensure the highest standards of environmental protection, 2) reviewing fishing joint ventures, 3) agreeing on tax reforms (a broad based low rate tax system, location specific economic rents and tax expenditures, government take from resources), 4) Negotiating a tax agreement with Australia and New Zealand for seasonal workers’ income, 5) supporting a joint regional ship registry and vessel day scheme, and g) setting up a Pacific emissions trading scheme (sell carbon credits from forestry land, ocean).⁴³⁶

Sustainable policies (including debt sustainability) and tightening/stimulus measures towards **economic stabilization** could include the following: 1) A defined contribution regional stabilization fund to (i) help maintain steady revenue, (ii) set aside funds for debt repayment, (iii) reduce management fees and (iv) reduce the cyclicity in development partner funding; targeted/conditional debt relief payments could be made into the fund; 2) a global insurance scheme for natural disasters (e.g. a Pacific Islands Climate Change Insurance Facility); and 3) a universal code of conduct on responsible borrowing and lending.

⁴³⁵ UNESCAP (2020). Forthcoming report, Increasing the resilience and overall sustainability of supply chains in the Pacific

⁴³⁶ Ibid.