

CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE PACIFIC PLAN

CIVIL SOCIETY

- Civil society in the Pacific plays a critical role in advocating for change , policy development and service delivery. Their contribution to development has long been recognized and mechanisms put in place at different levels to consolidate their input to the policy formulation process.
- The 2004 Eminent Person's Group (EPG) report, *Voices of the Region*, recommended the strengthening of Pacific Island Forum (PIF) engagement with civil society through its Secretariat (PIFS). It recognized the annual civil society forum held parallel to the Forum Leaders' meeting as one of the avenues to solicit civil society views on policy issues.
- In 2002 PIFS developed a Framework for Engagement with Non State Actors to formalize the already on-going collaboration between PIFS and civil society. Now, discussions on the Accreditation Policy on Consultative Relationships between the Pacific Islands Forum and Non State Actors are underway.
- This growing relationship between PIFS and civil society has led to the appointment of an NSA Liaison Officer, based at PIFS, to liaise with civil society on the Pacific Plan. This has occurred at varying degrees across the Pacific and within each country for each sector and issue. Consultations with civil society organizations have contributed greatly to the development of the Pacific Plan and both complement and are consistent with issues raised by governments.
- PIFS efforts at engaging civil society are not in isolation. The Cotonou Agreement mandates civil society participation as a prerequisite for EU negotiation with member governments. Other donor agencies work with and support activities managed by civil society groups. While recognition of civil society's contribution to development is now assumed, institutionalizing mechanisms for their voices to be heard and resourcing their activities has been difficult. Only in recent years have governments begun to formalize this collaboration.

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- Civil society manifests itself in regional, national and grassroots associations and groupings that cover a wide spectrum of issues, ranging from disabilities, youth, gender, trade, health, environment, culture and governance. These issues have been prioritised through specific initiatives under the Pacific Plan and are discussed in separate Issues Papers. For civil society as a whole, however, the Pacific Plan identifies several initiatives for immediate implementation in the first three years (2006-2008) as a way forward in enhancing existing partnerships and networks.
- The key initiative for civil society under the Pacific Plan is the building of stronger partnerships with national and regional stakeholders and with development partners. This includes an outcomes-oriented process with representatives from the business sector, academia and civil society organizations, to provide feedback to Leaders and a platform for wider debate on Pacific regionalism and the longer term direction of the Pacific Plan.

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- Civil society organizations will also be involved in participatory monitoring and evaluation processes to monitor the success, or otherwise, of Pacific Plan initiatives to ensure their concerns continue to be voiced.
- Another important initiative under the Plan is the development of regional approaches, plans, policies and programs in each country. It is envisaged that such policies will include clear statements of national interests and the establishment of appropriate mechanisms and processes for regional approaches at the country level through to planning and budgeting. These are to be based on inclusive participatory national processes. The Plan calls for these national processes, policies and strategies to be developed by all Members with annual reporting to Leaders. Therefore, in establishing Pacific regional mechanisms at a national level, Pacific Plan initiatives relating to civil society can be linked to and complement specific activities in respective countries.
- Other initiatives benefiting civil society identified during the consultations and prioritised under the Pacific Plan include:
 - o A strategy to support participatory democracy and electoral process
 - o Enhancement of governance mechanisms, including in resource management; and in the harmonisation of traditional and modern values and structures
 - o Implementation of a regional digital strategy for improving information and communication technology with a particular emphasis on extending broad-based access.
 - o Regional support for the development and implementation of National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDS).
 - o Ratification and implementation of international and regional rights-based conventions and agreements and meeting reporting and other requirements
 - o Strengthening processes for national and regional Non State Actors (NSAs), particularly through current mechanisms, to encourage implementation partnerships, disseminate information and harmonise work programmes. Coverage to include sustainable development focal points, resource management, governance, HIV/AIDS, peace and conflict management and monitoring.
 - o Inclusion of a key governance indicator for monitoring the success of the Pacific Plan as an ‘increase in voice and accountability’ which is an international measure of political, civil and human rights.