



# A QUICK GUIDE TO ENGAGING WITH REGIONAL POLICY



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In Solomon Islands: Development Services Exchange (DSE), National Council of Women, Vois Blo Mere, Honiara Youth Council, Provincial Council of Women (including Councils of Temotu and Malaita), Kastom Garden Association, Solomon Islands Development Trust (SIDT), representatives of People Living with Disabilities in the Solomon Islands (PWDSI), Family Support Centre, Stepping Stone Ministries, Water Aid, Natural Resource Development Foundation, Vois Media Focal Point, People's Human Rights, Tawatana Community Conservation Development Association, Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), Music Gateway, Forum Solomon Islands, World Vision Solomon Islands, Transparency International Solomon Islands, Women in Media Solomon Islands, Live and Learn, Solomon Islands Indigenous People's Human Rights Association (SIPHRA).

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# Introduction

The purpose of this booklet is to provide information on the regional governance system and share some ideas on how civil society can constructively engage to influence policy.

When using this booklet, bear in mind that the regional agencies and the processes that make up the regional system are constantly in review and may change.

Pacific Leaders have expressed their ambition to come together as a region to collaborate around regional solutions and move closer to regional integration. They refer to this as:

*“the expression of a common sense of identity and purpose, leading progressively to the sharing of institutions, resources and markets with the purpose of complementing national efforts, overcoming common constraints and enhancing sustainable and inclusive development within Pacific countries and territories and for the Pacific region as a whole.”<sup>1</sup>*

This is the vision that drives the relatively new Framework for Pacific Regionalism (FPR), a high-level commitment by our Leaders through the Pacific Islands Forum. For our purposes, the Framework importantly offers a regional public policy process which encourages civil society participation.

**Some things have changed! There is a growing global push to include and work with CSOs.**

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1. The Framework for Pacific Regionalism is available online at [www.forumsec.org](http://www.forumsec.org) or by emailing [FPR@forumsec.org](mailto:FPR@forumsec.org).

**Let's look at the benefits of engaging with regional institutions.** Civil society, or more specifically citizens, are in a position to feel the impacts or benefits of policies and services that come from the regional level. Communicating your perspectives to government helps to **inform responsive, relevant, effective and impactful policy**, which in turn could make a difference in the lives of our people we work for.

When Leaders prioritise a regional initiative, they are committing that national governments will work with intergovernmental agencies to implement the initiative they have agreed to. Development partners (including donors) are also encouraged to support these initiatives. Effective engagement in the regional processes can lead to your issue being prioritised for work at national level. Engagement also gets your regional initiative on record. This can lead to greater public awareness of your issue, an important side benefit.

## What does this all mean you might ask?

Quite simply, there are processes and spaces available. Effective engagement that impacts on policy decisions requires solid preparation and a convincing, constructive approach to dialogue. Let's claim these spaces and engage constructively to make them work for us. Let's not give decision-makers a chance to rethink the space because we did not turn up prepared.



Photo Credit: Hamish Pattison/OxfamNZ

Developing public policy involves several steps. One way to think about it is that it involves: priority setting, policy development, decision making, implementation and monitoring.

Policy influence refers to how we as civil society interact with these processes to inform or change approaches, behaviour and policy positions. A wide range of actors, institutions and processes are involved in the different stages. Understanding the setup, and entry points available, can help civil society identify strategies, decide who to target, and how to approach advocacy at regional level.



**Priority setting:** what makes an issue important for countries across the Pacific Islands?



**Policy development:** what can we do together as a region that can make the most difference?



**Decision-making:** equals agreement, commitment and instructions to do something.



**Implementation & monitoring:** how, what, who and by when to do the work? Did the decision make a difference?

The diagram below describes different people, organisations, and regional meetings that provide opportunities for civil society to influence regional policy.

## LEADERS

NATIONAL INITIATIVE

CHAMPIONS

LEADERS' MEETINGS

## ADVISERS

FORUM SECRETARIAT

MINISTERIAL &  
OFFICIALS' MEETINGS

CROP AGENCIES

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REGIONAL CSO  
FORUM

MINISTERIAL &  
OFFICIALS' MEETINGS

WORKING GROUPS

REGIONAL  
INTERNATIONAL  
NGOs

# LEADERS

Civil society can influence regional policy by influencing regional leaders' meetings, influencing leaders to take up national initiatives, or identifying champions among the leaders.

## Leaders' Meetings

There are a number of regional and sub-regional groupings of leaders in the Pacific. Some of the key bodies are:

- Pacific Islands Forum
- Pacific Islands Development Forum
- Melanesian Spearhead Group
- Micronesian Presidents Group
- Small Island States Group

### The Pacific Islands Forum

The Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) is a political grouping made up of eighteen Pacific countries and territories, including the Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, French Polynesia, Australia and New Zealand (<http://www.forumsec.org/pages.cfm/about-us/>). The Forum administers and coordinates the mandates of Leaders, mandates that are considered to be the highest level of political will and cooperation for the region.



PACIFIC ISLANDS  
FORUM SECRETARIAT



Photo Credit: Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat

### The Annual Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting

This meeting is usually held in the month of September and hosted in the country that is currently chair. The agenda for the meeting is put together in advance. The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat helps put the agenda together for the main meeting and attached events. The priority setting process embedded in the Framework for Pacific Regionalism<sup>2</sup> (discussed below) is one of the ways that items are raised to be added to the Leaders' agenda. Leaders have agreed they will look at what comes to their meeting table from the Framework and share their decisions in the meeting communique (letter to the public).

Other side events like cocktails and dinners have been used in the past to raise some awareness and lobby leaders and their officials on particular issues. The Forum Secretariat would be a good first point of contact on this. – Email <info.cso@forumsec.org> or get in touch with the CSO Engagement Officer if you're in Suva. Often locally based CSOs are invited to official functions like dinner or cocktails around official and ministerial meetings so find out if you can attend.

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2. Refer to Footnote 1.



## The Pacific Islands Development Forum

The Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF) was endorsed by Pacific Island Leaders to support the efforts of countries in sustainable development through the green economy. Rather than look at membership, the PIDF lists eligible countries, and encourages private sector, civil society and the public sector to collaborate toward achieving the mission and strategic objectives of PIDF.



### PIDF GOVERNANCE

**The Conference:**  
 apex decision making body (every 2 years)

The **Annual Summit and Governing Leaders Council** includes civil society representation. Regional organisations like PIANGO and the Pacific Islands Private Sector Organization (PIPSO) have charter membership which allows them a seat at the table alongside governments, regional agencies and private sector.

Other arrangements like the Memorandum of Understanding of Cooperation between PIDF and WWF Pacific for example articulate specific areas of work. PIDF refer to these as foundational development and technical partnerships and are signed with organisations that we share the regional space with. The list for now includes the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), University of the South Pacific (USP), International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), World Wildlife Fund (WWF).

The PIDF Summit takes place annually in July so make a note of this on your calendar.

### **The Melanesian Spearhead Group**

The Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu governments make up the membership for this sub-regional grouping alongside a group of pro-independence parties in the French territory of New Caledonia. The Secretariat is located in Vanuatu. There aren't specific mechanisms in place to facilitate civil society engagement. In the past, some consultations on private sector development have been inclusive of civil society but, based on the MSG Secretariat's programming, the private sector and government are targeted beneficiaries. This does not prevent CSOs from providing their perspectives and engaging constructively for change.

**The Leaders' Summit:** policy, oversight and advisory functions to PIDF (annual).

**The Members' Representative Council:** implement Summit and Conference decisions through the next level (twice a year).

**National/Local Sustainable Development Boards:** national focal point and great source of information on PIDF.





**The 2013 Melanesian Spearhead Group Meeting in Noumea, New Caledonia.**  
(Credit: Melanesian Spearhead Group Secretariat)

### **The Micronesian Chief Executives Group**

The membership for this group consists of the the Presidents of the Republic of Palau, Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesian along with the Governors from Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. They also have an annual meeting which is held in the sub-region. Although there aren't specific entry points for civil society at the moment there is scope for this to take place through the "Not for Profit Congress" organized by the organization Payuta Inc, the umbrella organization on Guam. The opportunity here is to connect with Payuta Inc to see what collaboration is possible for progressing policy issues and securing high-level leader support from the sub-region.

## **The Polynesian Leaders Group**

This group of countries established by memorandum of understanding brings together states and territories including American Samoa, Cook Islands, French Polynesia, Niue, Samoa, Tokelau, Tonga and Tuvalu to mirror the cooperation efforts of other sub-regions. A memorandum of understanding binds this grouping to annual meetings for example despite their not having the support of a regional Secretariat.

## **Small Island States**

Within the Pacific Islands Forum processes the Small Island States are recognised as a sub-grouping with specific support and developmental requirements. This means they have their own meeting in the margins of official and leader level meetings e.g. the SIS officials meet before the Forum Officials' Meeting to set the Leaders' agenda. In the week of the Forum Leaders' meeting the SIS Leaders also have their own meeting before engaging with the rest of the leadership.

## **National Initiative**

One way to get an issue on the agenda for a Leaders' meeting is for it to be proposed by a country. A Leader and his/her government can add or table agenda items at or before a Leaders' meeting. This means that building national awareness and momentum on your issue is important! There is no regional without national so if you can influence your government to take on the issue that is half the job done. Keeping government delegations to regional meetings well informed of your perspectives and aware of regional policy influence initiative adds another dimension to your advocacy work.

# ADVISORS

## Champions

You need only look within the region to find a Leader championing a cause. For example, former Kiribati President Anote Tong has been a prominent champion of climate change at regional and global levels. Finding a champion of your issue and keeping them well informed is another way to help make sure your issue is on the regional policy agenda.

There are several institutions and inter-governmental actors that report to, support and provide technical advice to Leaders and their governments. Interacting with these institutions can also be valuable for civil society

## The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat

As mentioned earlier the Forum Secretariat is the policy institution in the regional governance system. It serves, coordinates and reports on the implementation of Leader directives which also means it manages the agenda, logistics and the preparation of the communique at the Leaders' meeting. The Forum Secretariat also works in the areas of political, economic governance and security and other areas that Leaders direct them to. The Governing Council of the Forum Secretariat is called the Forum Officials Committee (FOC) and there are two sittings per year for governance and budget. The governance FOC is held around August.

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There is a **dedicated engagement officer role and a unit** managing a Strengthening Non-State Actor (NSA) Programme within the Forum Secretariat. This team supports the whole organization with civil society and private sector engagement so it good place to start if you're seeking information.

### Ministerial and official meetings

The Forum Secretariat also supports a range of Ministerial and official meetings. These are official parts of the regional system and can make decisions on thematic issues. Standard annual meetings are the Forum Economic Ministers' Meeting in April, Forum Foreign Ministers' Meeting in August, Forum Leaders' Meeting in September, and Forum Officials' Committee Meetings in August and December. Other meetings such as the Forum Education Ministers' Meeting and the Forum Regional Security Committee Meeting occur on a needs basis.

### CROP Agencies

The Council of Regional Organisations (CROP) is a process that brings together the inter-governmental agencies established to support the member governments of the Pacific Islands Forum. This means they come together to coordinate programming and report on progress. The only organization in the membership that has dedicated resourcing for supporting civil society policy influence is the Forum Secretariat. The others are technical agencies and work with

Let's look at a scenario. An alliance of CSOs lobbies a Ministerial meeting for the development of a strategic framework to address a particular issue. The Ministers endorse the idea and commission the development of the proposed framework. For a year or two the framework exists but is slow in being mainstreamed and implemented across Forum countries. To secure further political will, the Ministers make a submission for Forum Leaders to endorse the framework.





Photo Credit: Vlad Sokhin/Panos/ OxfamAUS

CSOs on implementing programmes mostly at the national level. The Secretary General of the Forum Secretariat is the chair of the CROP. To strengthen coordination across organisations, programming and thematic overlaps CROP Working Groups (which include a range of actors outside CROP as well) offer another opportunity for CSOs to engage.

Sub-regional groupings like the Melanesian Spearhead Group, the Polynesian Leaders Group and the Micronesian Congress might not have specific entry points to go through but their Secretariat might be easier to access for national NGOs in the same country.

# INFLUENCING PLATFORMS

## The Framework for Pacific Regionalism



The Framework for Pacific Regionalism sets out a process that civil society organisations, businesses or citizens can use to submit a regional policy initiative for priority attention of Pacific Islands Forum Leaders. Based on the last two years of operation, an open call for submissions comes out around February. This year (2017) the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat will run it in October. Proposals appear on the Forum Secretariat website so everyone can read what is being proposed.

The calls are made when the Secretary General is satisfied that the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat has made satisfactory progress with implementation of previous priorities before opening up for another call. Based on this, if there is a call the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat suggests that most likely timing will be post-Leaders' Meeting in October.

The proposals go to the **Specialist Sub-Committee on Regionalism (SSCR)** which is a sub-committee of the FOC (see above under Forum Secretariat). This committee decides on submissions that represent regional priorities and that need to go before Leaders. The SSCR is made up of sector and sub-regional representatives. So far the SSCR has recommended five proposals per year using a series of tests provided by the Framework. The priorities are put forward to the FOC and (barring any major objection from a committee member) generally endorsed onto the Leaders' agenda. There is a booklet with more information on the Framework available on the Forum Secretariat's website ([www.forumsec.org](http://www.forumsec.org)).

The Forum Secretariat has facilitated engagement between the SSCR and the regional NGOs based in Suva.

### **Regional Civil Society Forum**

There is also a CSO Dialogue held for civil society in the margins of the annual Leaders' Meeting. The idea behind the dialogue is for civil society to present their perspectives on the priorities identified through the Framework process. In the leadup to this CSO Dialogue, the Forum Secretariat has established a Regional Civil Society Forum.

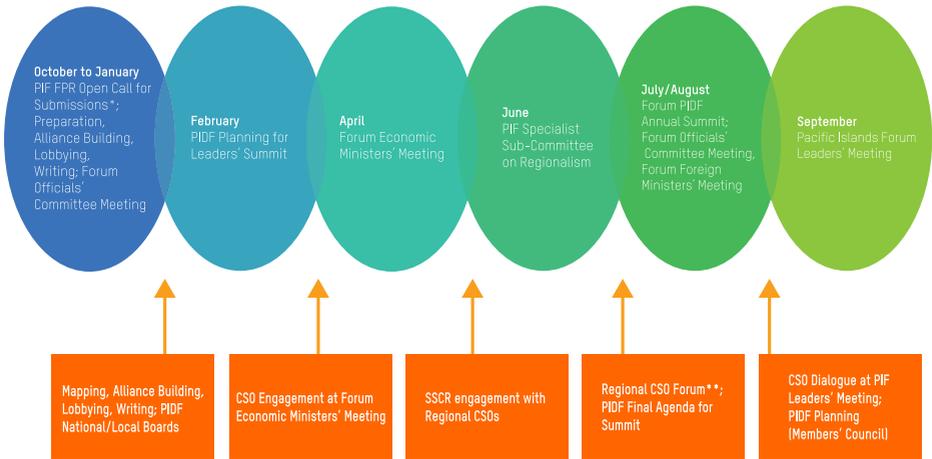
This meeting brings together national and regional CSOs to develop their perspectives on the priorities identified through the Framework. There is also scope at this meeting to convey alternative priorities for Leader consideration. Attendance at this event is through an open call for expressions of interest. The selection of representatives to be supported to attend the CSO Dialogue with leaders is done at this meeting.

### **Alliances with Regional/International NGOs**

These organisations are based at the regional level and already operate in the influencing space. At the moment they also have a formal engagement mechanism with the Forum Secretariat that is called the PIFS–NSA Executives’ Meeting. As the name suggests, this meeting is for Executives from the above organisations with the senior leadership at the Secretariat. The agenda is focused on high-level interaction on programming for civil society engagement, access and space for policy influence, strengthened coordination and improved participation of CSOs. At the very least one of these partners would be able to provide some technical advice and or rally behind your issue so it is worth engaging regional NGOs on your issue.

If civil society wanted more information on process, for example, this could be requested through regional NGOs at this **PIFS–NSA Executives’ Meeting**. The policy engagement environment looks like it will be a standing item on the agenda.

## WHAT A YEAR COULD LOOK LIKE



\* PIF FPR Calls for Submissions are made on the basis of satisfactory progress with implementation of previous priorities. Therefore the calls are likely to be made post-Forum Leaders' Meeting in October.

\*\*The PIFS CSO Engagement Strategy is available on the PIFS website [www.forumsec.org](http://www.forumsec.org). Also see References in this publication.

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