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Leaving nothing to chance: Sustaining Pacific development beyond 2024

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Introduction

The value proposition of Pacific regionalism in an increasingly dynamic geopolitical environment must balance the agreed rhetoric of Blue Pacific stewardship that drives a regional ethos, with the realpolitik of governments looking at shorter-term timeframes potentially at the expense of these stated values of custodianship. Maintaining Pacific agency and regional resolve will become increasingly tested in 2024.
This paper explores Pacific island countries' prospects in advancing sustainable development objectives in 2024. It considers what will be necessary to regain and sustain Pacific development gains while navigating a challenging economic and climate outlook amidst increasingly dynamic geopolitics.

As 2024 forecasts for the Pacific region accumulate, three themes dominate: economic prospects, the climate outlook, and geopolitical dynamics. The latter has absorbed considerable media analysis of Pacific political currents in recent years, notably a pre-occupation by the West with China's Pacific islands relations. The persistent tension between an external framing of our region as the Indo-Pacific and our own framing of the Blue Pacific, will continue to shape the region's strategic engagement on shared security[1] and development aspirations under the *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent*.[2] The strategy charts pathways for the region's political and economic cooperation under 'the Blue Pacific' umbrella, to drive collective engagement of Forum member states to ensure strategically beneficial partnerships for the region. At its adoption in 2022, Forum Leaders said, "Securing the future of the Pacific cannot be left to chance."[3]

With six years remaining for countries to meet the ambition of the global Agenda 2030 on sustainable development, priorities are mapped out in national plans, the *Pacific Roadmap for Sustainable Development*[4] and the 2050 Strategy, the latter two guiding the work of the region's technical agencies, collectively referred to as the Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific (CROP), in support of national needs. The financing requirements to meet this ambition are considerable, as are Pacific countries' responsibilities to both advance and monitor progress and the means of implementation. In 2024, five Pacific countries (Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu) will be delivering Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) on their progress towards meeting Agenda 2030.[5] The VNR process is a chance for countries to show reasonable development progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to highlight areas needing more support.

The interplay of Pacific countries' domestic realpolitik with geopolitical rivalries has a direct bearing on localised sustainable development outcomes.[6] For example, the prioritisation of bilateral relations over collective diplomacy has been observed in relation to post-pandemic economic recovery and security partnerships in some Pacific island countries in 2023.[7] These politics of development are also played out on a regional scale through the CROP in terms of coordinated access to collective resources.[8] Combined, the pressure for Pacific island countries to control the

geopolitical narrative, retain diplomatic agency and manage domestic political agendas, signal a trend that will make or break some key shared targets for the Pacific in 2024. This paper is in three parts. The first part horizon scans the 2024 global outlook and considers the implications of the following key themes for the Pacific islands region: economic prospects, the climate challenge, and geopolitical tempo. The second part examines how these themes intersect with the following priorities: deepening regional resolve, safeguarding Pacific democratic cultures, and leveraging Pacific agency. By taking this intersectional approach, in the third and final section we arrive at recommendations for Pacific policy makers and their development partners, that we consider to be significant to sustaining positive gains for Pacific development in 2024.

What the 2024 global outlook means for the Pacific region

Several global trends will have implications for the Pacific islands region and national governments alike.

Shaky economic prospects

The World Economic Forum forecasts that protracted weaknesses in the global economy coupled with geopolitical rifts are expected to accelerate geo-economic fragmentation in 2024; more than half of the world's chief economists are expecting the global economy to weaken during the coming year.[9] Elevated energy commodity prices in particular will continue to challenge Pacific countries' ongoing post-pandemic economic recovery efforts, despite a forecast decline of almost 5 per cent in 2024.[10] The International Monetary Fund highlights the rising fragmentation in commodity markets, which can lead to high price volatility in 2024.[11] Ongoing supply chain disruption is anticipated to further challenge the region as extreme weather events and conflict hit global trade choke points in the Panama Canal and the Red Sea.[12] While inflation is forecast to lower to 4.8 per cent globally in 2024, this will vary within the Pacific as will GDP growth prospects, public debt levels and cumulative post-disaster recovery needs.[13] Inevitably, the Pacific will continue to feel the ripple effects of global economic volatility via commodity pricing and global inflation from geopolitical flashpoints and conflict zones such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the Israel-Palestine conflict. Prioritising reliable supply chains and affordable commodities will be important for Pacific governments.

The climate challenge for Pacific island countries and the regional collective

Several Pacific forecasters have noted that the series of global structural shocks to Pacific economies in 2023 continue to be compounded by the ongoing climate crisis.[14] A continuing strong El Niño event, with below normal rainfall predicted for Pacific countries at distance from the equator, coupled with normal-to-enhanced risk for tropical cyclones in the eastern Pacific has implications for the region's food and water security.[15] For example, the agriculture and fisheries sectors are particularly climate-sensitive sectors. Forecasts for the annual tropical cyclone season in the South Pacific suggest 4-8 severe tropical cyclones between November 2023 and April 2024.[16] Storm surge, and coastal and river flooding will also continue to challenge communities and livelihoods. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has cautioned that climate-related hazards and associated risks in the near term are expected to also have implications for food, water- and vector-borne diseases adding to the burden on health systems.[17]

The increased pressure on developing health and transport infrastructure from more intense climate-induced severe weather events, and the subsequent post-disaster 'states of emergency' across the Pacific render governments and households in regular crisis mode, focused on basic access to food, water and shelter, stretching limited resources and disrupting hard-won development gains.[18] The IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report has flagged the urgency for a dramatic increase in climate finance for both mitigation and adaptation, proposing that in the Pacific this needs to increase sixfold.[19] Operating in regular emergency-mode and crisis response leaves little space for longer-term strategy implementation. The level of public debt incurred to address these challenges will remain a key priority for PICs, again driving governments' development partner choices in 2024.[20]

The bittersweet outcomes of COP28 offer a glimmer of optimism with the hard-won announcement of the operationalisation of the Loss and Damage Fund, with hopes that 2024 will not be as disappointing a year for global climate action as 2023.[21] Pacific ambition to phase out fossil fuels will need to navigate the posturing of world powers in the search for a new world order beyond them, notwithstanding the IMF's caution that fragmentation of commodity markets could affect the costs of decarbonisation.[22]

Geopolitical shifts: impacts on Pacific regionalism and national sovereignties

Global political change in 2024 will also have implications for the Pacific. With over half the world's population going to the polls this year, including four Pacific countries, 2024 is a watershed year for global democracy.[23] Leadership changes in globally significant elections such as in the United States, the United Kingdom, India, and Indonesia may shift Pacific engagement priorities. For example, the United States Congress has yet to enact legislation to allow for the implementation of the Compacts of Free Association (COFA) with the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of the Marshall Islands, which includes major economic assistance to the countries in line with the Biden Administration's Indo-Pacific, Pacific Partnership and National Security strategies.[24] The respective COFAs end in 2023, with Palau's COFA with the US ending in 2024. Combined, the total value is USD 10.4 billion (FY 2023 dollars) a significant contribution towards national service delivery and infrastructure needs.[25] Micronesian leaders expressed concerns at the US funding delays, citing growing financial pressures are causing them to consider other partners.[26]

Driving Pacific development gains in 2024: Three essential elements

We see three essential elements that Pacific Island countries need to focus on as they collectively and nationally advance the Pacific's development aspirations. By leaving nothing to chance, Pacific regionalism can ensure that 2024 makes a difference to the region's economic prospects, climate outlook and engagement with dynamic geopolitics.

1. Deepening Pacific regional resolve

At the core, Pacific island countries' appetite for the collective diplomacy of the Blue Pacific has a bearing on the advancement of national and regional development aspirations. In 2024, continued competition to draw the Blue Pacific narrative into external geopolitical constructs such as the Indo-Pacific will strain existing political fault lines within and amongst Pacific Island Forum members. Navigating these external political dynamics will necessarily remain a focus for Pacific island countries as they balance bilateral opportunities with regional resolve. Across the various multilateral platforms and evolving global agreements, the Pacific region will be drawn into initiatives on a global scale that also have significance for the Pacific's 2050 aspirations and will require a strong Pacific diplomatic bloc, for example:

- Written submissions to inform the International Court of Justice's advisory opinion on climate justice and human rights – with implications for Pacific island countries' loss and damage claims - are due on 22 March[27]
- the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty continues to gather global momentum led by Vanuatu and Tuvalu[28] and
- a new global treaty on plastic pollution to be agreed this year.[29]

A key 2024 milestone will be the decision on Australia's bid to host COP31 in 2026 up against Forum Dialogue Partner, Türkiye. Whilst the Pacific has indicated support for this, Australia's underwhelming climate ambition, and at times undermining of the Pacific ambition, requires meaningful and genuine action, particularly in aligning commitments to the Pacific's 1.5-degree target. If Australia is successful, then an ambitious preparatory process that delivers genuine outcomes for the Pacific will need to commence at the earliest.

When it comes to economic prospects, a key regional priority is improving Pacific access to climate finance from global mechanisms such as the Green Climate Fund. The Pacific Resilience Facility (PRF) is a homegrown mechanism designed to support Pacific communities and governments in meeting climate adaptation needs at a grassroots level. The work done to date to secure initial capitalisation of this facility (at USD 500 million) has yielded mixed results.[30] The current Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum, Prime Minister Mark Brown of Cook Islands, has made it clear that he would like to see the PRF supported by the Forum Dialogue Partners, including those who are awaiting decisions on their applications to join the group.[31]

Political cohesion is also needed within the Forum family. Within the region, advancing the Pacific 2050 Strategy Implementation Plan will be informed by regained momentum in the overdue PIF-led Review of Regional Architecture. Announced in 2021, the Review is expected to finally conclude in 2024. The Review will test the Blue Pacific's partnership choices as well as the expectations of the different institutional players in implementing the plan. It must carefully consider the political economy of the Blue Pacific's governments and regional organisations whilst also identifying innovative, new pathways for national governments to benefit from a fit-for-purpose regional architecture, that avoids duplication of effort.[32] But competition for financing at both national and regional levels, to resource national sustainable development plans, the Pacific 2050 Strategy Implementation Plan, and numerous other regional sectoral plans, can and does create cracks in the cohesion required for effective Pacific regionalism. For example, the announcement of a new 'Pacific Partnerships for Prosperity' at the 2023 Forum Leaders Meeting in Cook Islands, as a supplement to the *Pacific 2050 Strategy* resourcing strategy can create additional complexity: Forum members are contributing to some of the regional duplication that the much-hyped Review of Regional Architecture will need to resolve.[33]

At the same time, enduring concerns over Japan's Fukushima Daiichi nuclear wastewater release into the Pacific Ocean will need to be addressed, alongside the political fault lines emerging over deep-sea mining.[34] The region will need to progress national approvals to sign on to the 2023 hard-earned Pacific win on the United Nations' adoption of the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction.[35] Indeed, 2024 will be a key year for devising regional governance approaches, and the Melanesian Spearhead Group's proposal for a Zone of Peace, amplified by Fiji Prime Minister Rabuka, is another matter in the mix for regional governance.[36]

The Blue Pacific narrative is not simply rhetoric. It is a revitalisation of the Pacific Way approach to collective diplomacy within the region, which for some time had drifted into an awkward apathy following pockets of national and regional instability in the 2000s.[37] When former Samoan Prime Minister Tuila'epa Sa'ilele Malielegaoi, as then-Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum in 2017-18, articulated the Blue Pacific narrative he was clear in its intent to address the rapidly changing geopolitical landscape:

> *"The opportunity to realise the full benefits of the Blue Pacific rests in our ability to work and stand together as a political bloc. And the challenge for us is maintaining solidarity in the face of intense engagement of an ever-growing number of partners in our region."*

In 2023, his successor Prime Minister Fiame Naomi Mata'afa and Chair of the Alliance of Small Islands States (AOSIS) was equally pointed in how the Blue Pacific is central to retaining Pacific control of the regional agenda, even when there is a preference for bilateralism. Acting as the Blue Pacific has delivered multiple 'wins' for the region across climate, environment, fisheries, ocean, and development domains, amongst others. There is a continuing need to act together, but importantly in a way that is at the same time strategically pragmatic for each

nation and the region. Determining the 'what and when' of a Blue Pacific flex is even more vital when Pacific island countries are facing a particular peak in engagement by and with diplomatic and development partners.

Box 1: Pacific regionalism

In 2024, a deepened resolve for Pacific regionalism can leverage:

- Global loss and damage finance for Pacific priorities.
- COP31 bid outcomes to advance the Blue Pacific's higher ambition on climate action.
- CROP agencies to develop a standardised resource mobilisation criteria focused on the 2050 Strategy Implementation Plan and coordinated to complement Pacific states' national development finance needs.

2. Safeguarding Pacific democratic cultures

Across the world, democracy is in retreat. Autocracy, populism, and a dilution of liberal democratic norms are (re)emerging in many countries. The Pacific region is not immune from this. Domestic anti-democratic tendencies and drivers are converging with external pressures, including those associated with geopolitical competition.

At the national level, we can point to constitutional preambles and text from national plans that indicate or imply the choice of democratic government by countries as they have moved from being governed by others to governing themselves. However, the explicit use of terms such as 'democracy' is less prevalent in action plans. At the regional level, the most explicit commitments to democratic governance and the rule of law appear in the *Biketawa Declaration*[38] and the *Teieniwa Vision*.[39] However, this architecture also holds at its centre the sovereignty of members of the Pacific Islands Forum. It is becoming increasingly apparent that (in)actions that indicate democratic backsliding on the part of one member of the 'Pacific family' are unlikely to be questioned or criticised by the grouping as a whole.[40]

Beyond elections, there is not much at a regional level that fosters robust democratic cultures. Regionally, and sub-regionally, participation in election observer missions is the totality of a Pacific democracy monitor. Media freedom, freedom of expression and other essential democratic stays are primarily left to the domain of the private and community sectors in each country. The regional approach to democracy is too narrow and needs to widen its gaze.

The intersection between democracy and economic prospects in the Pacific region is linked to the increasing geostrategic tempo that is playing out in this part of the world. It also intersects with the dynamics of national and sub-national politics and undermines the self-determination of Pacific territories such as Guam, New Caledonia, American Samoa, and French Polynesia. Safeguarding democracy in the Pacific region is a key part of preserving the enabling environment in which Pacific communities can prosper.

Across the region, politicians and communities are united in calling for more 'development', with a particular focus at local government level on the need for infrastructure to support productive sectors such as agriculture (e.g. roads, wharves). As countries such as Tuvalu, Solomon Islands, Kiribati, and Palau head to the polls in 2024, voters want to know what their elected representatives will 'provide' by way of increased resources to support livelihoods. This clientelistic view of the relationship between voters and parliamentarians persists and continues to overshadow an embedded understanding of the role of MPs as legislators.[41] This creates a range of pressures that can facilitate an atmosphere of ambivalence about democracy or, worse, a dilution of democratic culture and practice because it is getting in the way of 'development'.

In many countries, most notably in Melanesia, popular discourse is characterised by a preoccupation with political stability. Again, this is seen—with good reason—as a prerequisite for development that will create increased economic opportunity for communities and an uptick in revenue to support government spending. There is no doubt that a lack of stability in political leadership acts as a significant brake on policy development and implementation.[42]

However, it is also true that some of the most politically 'stable' countries are those where democratic culture is constrained. Fiji experienced a period of political 'stability' in the period 2006-2014 under a military-led government that had taken power by force rather than via democratic elections.[43] Whilst this coup is often described as 'bloodless' it ushered in a period in which human rights abuses were numerous. Basic democratic norms such as the freedom of association were abrogated, and trade unionists and other members of civil society were subject to arbitrary detention by the police and army. The media was subject to periods of censorship and control, some of which were encapsulated in legislative measures which persisted until very recently.[44] In addition, Satish Chand has argued that Fiji's economy suffered significantly because of its 'coup culture' with an estimated three years of economic setback for each coup event.[45]

In 2019, further to the 'switch' from Taiwan to China, Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare of Solomon Islands claimed that his government wanted to be on 'the right side of history'.[46] However, more significantly, it is about being on the 'right' side of the economy. If democratic Taiwan and/or like-minded partners are unable or unwilling to provide grant or concessional finance to provide the infrastructure needed to build economic activity, in ways that align with the political imperatives of the decision-makers, then it is understandable that offers from China will be entertained and likely accepted.

The prevalence of climate events such as cyclones can add to stresses on the quality of governance, including whether state authorities are overreaching in their exercise of power and infringing on individual or community rights. For example, use of 'State of Emergency' powers (e.g. in Marshall Islands, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Vanuatu) which curtail activities, ration access to resources, or impose curfews.

When it comes to foreign policy and statecraft it is expected that a lot of the work is done out of the public gaze, behind closed doors. However, countries that consider themselves to be democracies need to maintain appropriate levels of self-awareness to ensure that their practice is suitably reflective of democratic principles.

Democracy is at risk of atrophying in the Pacific region.[47] Whilst there have been numerous instances of democratic backsliding over a sustained period and stemming from domestic drivers, it is also clear that this is being exacerbated by increased participation of outside players.

External influence on media platforms is one of the ways that major partners undermine democratic culture in Pacific island countries: attempts have had varying levels of success, with reported interference by China[48] and heavily curated information by Australia.[49]

Partners' long-standing soft power modalities, such as invitations to study tours for members of the Pacific political elite[50,51] and scholarship opportunities,[52] are common diplomatic strategies to promote shared values between countries. For CCP-led China, however, these engagements are unlikely to discuss the importance of democracy, independent media and civil liberties. Similarly, for the democratic 'like-minded' (USA, Australia, New Zealand, India, Taiwan), the apparent willingness to turn a blind eye to illiberality in the interests of preserving geostrategically valuable relationships and influence does not foster a stronger democratic culture in the region. There are also serious concerns about the undermining and chilling effect of activities such as the 'Pacific Solution' in Australia and the region.[53] The muted response to recent attacks on the independence of the judiciary in Kiribati[54] is an example of behaviour that can create this impression. It is reminiscent of a reluctance to speak out about similar attacks on the rule of law in Nauru.[55]

Box 2: Pacific democratic culture

In 2024, safeguarding Pacific democratic cultures requires:

- A broadened regional assessment of democratic integrity of Pacific states, to include independent media, civil society engagement and respect for the rule of law, in addition to election observation.
- Targeted efforts to promote and safeguard human rights for all Pacific peoples via regional partnerships.

3. Proactively leveraging Pacific agency

Given the increased and increasing tempo of bilateral and multilateral engagement with Pacific island countries and regional organisations, upholding and maintaining the centrality of Pacific agency has never been more important. However, moving beyond mere lip service to working in ways that concretise a commitment on all sides remains a challenge. A foundational element of the exercise of agency on the part of Pacific leaders, whether individually or collectively, is to progress the decolonial bargain. This includes the assertion of indigenous terminology and strategic frameworks.[56]

Putting Pacific agency front and centre when it comes to development in the region is important because it is what will drive success in every field. Whether it is addressing the implications of labour mobility, safeguarding budgets against debt distress or navigating the green transition, leveraging Pacific agency will be at the heart of those initiatives that succeed.

Closely linked with the issue of agency is that of capacity. Discussions of capacity constraints in Pacific island countries or regional organisations are often constructed too narrowly and fail to appreciate the fuller context in which people are operating. Even more unhelpfully, they too often adopt a deficit narrative as their starting point. This disregards the crucial fact that some of the most important resources (when it comes to effecting change) are those held by Pacific people in our own contexts. They include cultural competence, local networks, and social and political capital to influence our communities.

A significant challenge to increasing economic growth in the Pacific islands region is the impact of increasing sovereign debt and the implications for Pacific agency. The impacts of economic shocks such as natural disasters, COVID-19, and global inflationary pressures create an environment in which risks of debt distress come to the fore. Participation in the Belt and Road Initiative by Pacific island countries with small, fragile economies, has attracted a great deal of comment in this sphere, for example in relation to Tonga, a country which has tried unsuccessfully to have its significant debt burden to China forgiven and is now commencing repayments: in 2024 Tonga is expected to spend more on servicing debt to China than on providing health services to the population.

Entering arrangements that incur debt are an exercise of sovereign power and the agency of Pacific governments to do so is to be not only acknowledged but respected. There are opportunities for partners to support the agency of Pacific governments by providing advice about managing debt to maximise economic and development returns. Partners should also avoid adding to debt burdens.

The current development discourse surrounding 'localisation' is insufficient when it comes to achieving what is needed in terms of full activisation of Pacific agency as we envisage it here. The 'localisation' discourse is a product of the 'projectisation' of the Pacific, which is itself an unhelpful framing for how people and communities in the region determine our priorities and go about achieving our aspirations. In addition, unless these discussions are firmly rooted within an ongoing process and practice of decolonisation across multiple dimensions, it cannot be accurately described as a means of centering and leveraging Pacific agency.

Given the evident—and increasing—impacts of the climate crisis across the region, it is somewhat paradoxical that this is a sphere in which we have seen some of the most striking examples of Pacific agency being exercised, including on the global stage. We can expect to see more of this in the coming year, with the work towards seeking an Advisory Opinion at the International Court of Justice being a striking example. There is a particular aspect of Pacific agency that requires attention, which relates to increased participation in Pacific regionalism so that its value proposition can be achieved (see above). The rationales for Pacific regionalism are largely unexplained and unappreciated beyond the rarefied atmospheres of regional organisations. For the regionalism project to thrive (and not merely survive) we need to grow the 'regionalism literacy' of Pacific communities. Addressing the multifaceted challenges of the climate crisis provides a valuable entry point for work of this type.

The presumption of the rapidly formed 'Partners to the Blue Pacific ' (PBP) in the wake of the 2021 PIF endorsement of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent extends the geo-strategic competition into the region's development domain. In fact, the PBP – which also includes Australia and New Zealand, underscoring their somewhat schizophrenic relationship with the Pacific Islands Forum—maintains a paternalistic approach to our region, aiming to 'bolster Pacific regionalism' and to be a facilitator 'to expand Pacific participation in international fora.' Leveraging Pacific agency requires investments in creating and

maintaining the right 'enabling environment': one that provides for decolonised, Pacific-designed ways of engaging and doing on all sides. On the part of Pacific leaders, policymakers, and negotiators there is a need for assertiveness and an ability to be comfortable in telling development partners 'no' when the need arises. A good example of when this should happen is if access to resources or assistance is subject to taking an approach that is contrary to national interest.

When it comes to development partners and metropolitan countries in the region, they need to develop and prosecute an approach that is based on doing things with Pacific counterparts, not to or for them. This does not mean that partners' national (including security) interests should be disregarded. Part of what is required is the willingness and ability to develop high trust relationships that allow for matters to be discussed that may be uncomfortable for some participants. This requires a solid foundation in Pacific literacy, including a recognition of Pacific peoples' agency and capacity in Pacific territories.

Box 3: Pacific agency

In 2024, proactive Pacific agency can leverage:

- Global discussions on loss and damage finance to advance framing that recognises the unique challenges for SIDS and facilitates enhanced access to finance.
- Bilateral Forum summitries with partners to maximise the value of development support on Pacific priorities.

Summary and recommendations

The year 2024 presents significant challenges and opportunities for Pacific island countries amidst economic uncertainties, an ongoing climate crisis, and geopolitical shifts. The region's collective diplomacy embodied in the Blue Pacific narrative remains crucial for achieving the development aspirations of Pacific peoples. Pacific regionalism is interconnected with international trends, and strategic engagement is necessary to tackle economic recovery, geopolitical narratives, and global structural shocks. Leveraging Pacific agency is key to building necessary bilateral and multilateral relationships for developmental progress in the region. A renewed focus on Pacific democratic practice and values will also be important to enhance the enabling environment for national and regional development. Renewed focus on Pacific democratic values is vital for fostering an enabling environment for national and regional development. Pacific leaders and peoples must address challenges, seize opportunities, and shape the trajectory of development in the Blue Pacific.

We offer some thoughts on how each of these areas can be addressed by the leaders of the Pacific—national or regional—and by external partners. We have purposefully kept these high-level, not least because of the concern expressed above about the 'projectisation' of the Pacific and Pacific people. These are offered as conversation starters to promote thought leadership within the region and beyond to grapple with the challenges we have identified. Our recommendations are cross-cutting across the three strategic areas: economic prospects, climate challenge, and geopolitical shifts. Moreover, they are focused on the 'how' and 'why' of engagement with and within the Pacific rather than the 'what'.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Deepening Pacific regional resolve

For the leaders of the Pacific:

Revive annual State of Pacific Regionalism reports by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat to guide dialogue and strategy for the region's political and development goals. Implement a dedicated Track 2.0 dialogue involving broader strategic communities like academia, civil society, and the private sector for enhanced thought leadership.

For partners of the Pacific:

We recommend renewed and revitalised attention to the Blue Pacific Principles for Dialogue and Engagement, the Framework for Pacific Regionalism, and other blueprints that guide established and potential partners to work with and within the regional architecture.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Safeguarding Pacific democratic cultures

For the leaders of the Pacific:

We recommend that national governments and the Pacific Islands Forum undertake a 'democratic integrity' audit of national and regional statements, plans, and policies to identify where deficits in both language and programming need to be rectified to safeguard democratic cultures in the region.

For partners of the Pacific:

We recommend that partners, in the spirit of acting in partnership, ensure that their interventions first 'do no harm' to democratic practice and integrity institutions in the region, whether in bilateral or multilateral engagements. Further, democratic partners have an additional responsibility to ensure that their modes of engagement are designed to avoid dilution of democratic resilience (as a minimum) and, wherever possible, actively support and strengthen it.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Proactively leveraging Pacific agency

For the leaders of the Pacific:

We recommend that Pacific leaders and their administrations invest in regional diplomacy training, supporting officials to build networks, enhance regionalism literacy and skills to engage in challenging partner conversations where their assertion of Pacific agency can produce transformative partnership outcomes.

For partners of the Pacific:

We recommend that partners engage Pacific peoples in advisory committees, including via CROP agencies, to enhance their Pacific literacy and strategy orientation towards approaches that produce greater mutual benefit for all parties involved.

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