



The Pacific We See

Pacific Australian
Emerging Leaders Summit 2022



“Our vision as a delegation is to see healthy environments, empowered young people, and flourishing communities across the Pacific region. This is a vision that will only be realised in full when communities enjoy self-determination and when no one is left behind.”

— Pacific Australian Emerging Leaders Summit
Delegation, 2022

Our Purpose

Young people¹ in the Pacific will be, and indeed already are, vital to the continuing development of their nations' environments, economies, societies, and cultures.

In Fiji, more than 60 percent of the population is under 35; in the Solomon Islands it is almost 75 percent. It is a similar story across most Pacific nations.

With such a high proportion of young people in the region, it is important for countries like Australia, who seek to work in partnership with our Pacific family to listen deeply to, and build on the strengths of, these young people.

As a delegation of emerging leaders – from Pacific Island nations, as well as First Nations Australians, members of diaspora communities, and other members of the extended Australian family² – we believe that the stories, the creativity, and the civic participation of young people in the Pacific region will be crucial in helping to build a safer, and more just and sustainable future for our Pacific family.

This is why the Pacific Australian Emerging Leaders Summit (PAELS) exists; to foster relationships between emerging leaders across Australia and the Pacific, and to build partnerships of mutual respect and trust between those leaders and key decision-makers in Australia and the region.

This inaugural year, we are joined by delegates from across the Pacific and Australia:

- 34 delegates from 13 Pacific Island nations³
- 12 delegates from First Nations communities in Australia
- 13 delegates from diaspora communities in Australia
- 32 delegates from the Extended Australian Family²

The summit is coordinated by Micah Australia and the Pacific Conference of Churches. A number of Pacific delegates⁴ and facilitators from First Nations communities and the diaspora have been supported to attend by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade under the Pacific Church Partnership Program.

¹ Throughout this booklet, we will use the phrases 'young person' and 'youth' to describe anyone under the age of 35.

² Australian delegates who do not identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and are not part of a diaspora community.

³ Fiji, Tonga, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Nauru, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Marshall Islands, Cook Islands, Samoa, New Caledonia, and French Polynesia

⁴ DFAT supported Pacific delegates come from ODA recipient nations. Micah Australia has facilitated the participation of delegates from other Pacific nations who are not recipients of ODA, including New Caledonia, French Polynesia, etc.

Our Research

We come today with a vision, and a set of principles and priorities, that we hope will set the tone and foundations for a longer and deeper conversation between delegates, Australia's political leaders, as well as political and cultural leaders from across the region.

In this booklet, we present the findings of research conducted amongst our Pacific delegates.

For this inaugural year of the Summit, the research has been intentionally kept small in scope – it has involved survey responses, focus group sessions, and storytelling from Pacific delegates around the issues that are most pressing for them and their communities. The delegates surveyed represent 13 Pacific nations.⁵

It is our intention in future years to expand this research, conducting a larger survey to capture an even broader picture of the priorities of young people and their communities throughout the region.






⁵ See above, n 3



Our Message

Our vision as a delegation is to see healthy environments, empowered young people, and flourishing communities across the Pacific region. This is a vision that will only be realised in full when communities enjoy self-determination and when no one is left behind.

This vision was born out of the key findings from our research with Pacific delegates. From our research, 3 key priorities emerged:

-  Climate Change & Natural Hazards
-  Education & Youth Unemployment
-  Improving Access to Water & Sanitation

In addition to these three key priorities, 2 key principles emerged, which delegates expressed must inform and guide any work undertaken or any policy designed to address these priority issues.

-  Self Determination
-  Inclusion

As we unpack these key issues and principles, we invite you to listen deeply; to hear the stories of young people and their communities in the Pacific, to understand their struggles as well as their solutions, and to see their strengths.

Section 1:

Key Principles

 Self Determination

 Inclusion



A woman sells her produce at a market on Malakula island, Vanuatu (Source: DFAT)

Self Determination

94.4% of Pacific Delegates rated self-determination as an issue of high or extreme importance.

Pacific people have a strong vision for their own future, which should frame and guide Australia’s engagement and partnership with Pacific Communities. It is a vision which prioritises a future of self-determination and a story of hope in the region’s ecology and development.

We understand self-determination as the right of all peoples to freely determine their political status and pursue their economic, social, and cultural development.⁶ It is about the exercise of agency; of free, prior, and informed consent; & recognition of alternative indicators of prosperity and wellbeing that account for the wholeness of economic, social, and ecological conditions. These indicators might be different from what Australia and other western nations deem to be the ideals of development, as they reflect the region’s diverse spirituality, religious and indigenous traditions, its worldviews, and experiences and lessons of present realities in development.

Australia’s First Nations peoples have expressed their hopes and aspirations for a voice in the decision making affecting their lives, through the Statement from the Heart. We welcome the Australian Government’s move towards holding a referendum to entrench a voice to Parliament in the constitution.

Similarly, Pacific peoples continue to advocate for the right to self-determination, particularly respecting the rights of indigenous peoples in the use of their land. This delegation acknowledges and affirms those members and communities of the Pacific family who are still seeking the right to determine what happens in their own lands.

Any engagement between Australia and the Pacific Communities must be grounded in the principle of self-determination, and respect the rights, dignity, and agency of communities and nations across the region; any programming and policy work undertaken by the Australian Government to help address key development and sustainability issues in the region must be done in a consultative and co-creative way, led by the wisdom of the people and communities that these programs or policies seek to impact.

“[Self Determination] extends to all facets of daily life. Not just political self-determination but personal and inter-personal as well... freedom is something I think everyone should have; to choose what food to eat, economic/financial decisions we make to even what clothes we wear on any particular day.”

– Anonymous Delegate, Pacific Island Nation

⁶ International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1976). Paragraph 1



Students from Caritas Technical Secondary School in various classrooms, East Boroko, PNG (Source: DFAT)

Our vision of seeing healthy communities, empowered young people and flourishing communities across the Pacific will only be realised in full when those communities enjoy the right to determine their own future.

“I would like Australia to continue to support initiatives that help our communities to be independent and feel empowered to help themselves with their available resources.”

– Karen, Fiji

Inclusion

85% of Pacific Delegates rated ‘supporting persons with disabilities’ as an issue of high or extreme importance.

In alignment with the transformative and ambitious promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to ‘leave no one behind’, we affirm that the principle of inclusivity must be central to any efforts Australia takes to address poverty, inequality, and climate change throughout the Pacific region.

We acknowledge that a person’s gender, sexual orientation, age, ethnicity, disability, or any other circumstance, may impact the way that they access, experience and benefit from development processes and policies.

Inclusion aims to change social structures and systems so that they are equally accessible to all people.

Women

Across the Pacific, women and children face significant marginalisation.

Colonial legacies of male leadership, exclusionary traditions, and patriarchal norms have created obstacles to female empowerment in social, economic, and political spaces. The Pacific has the lowest rate of female representation in parliament in the world.⁷

Pacific women and children also experience violence at a higher rate than the global average. In some Pacific countries over 60 per cent of women have experienced violence.⁸ 1 in 4 adolescent girls have experienced physical violence, and 1 in 10 have experienced sexual violence.⁹

People with Disabilities

The inclusion of people with disabilities in the Pacific is of particular importance to our delegation.

“We need to make sure Pacific persons with disabilities have access to inclusive climate change adaptation initiatives and disaster risk management systems.”

– Anonymous Delegate, Pacific Island Nation

⁷ Interparliamentary Union, Global data on National Parliaments, data from September 2022 <https://data.ipu.org/women-averages?month=9&year=2022> (data includes only Pacific Island nations)

⁸ DFAT Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development report, Unseen and Unsafe: Underinvestment in ending violence against children in the Pacific and Timor-Leste’ (2019)

⁹ World Vision, ChildFund, Save the Children and Plan International, “Unseen Unsafe: The Underinvestment in Ending Violence Against Children in the Pacific and Timor-Leste” (2019)



Representatives from Pacific disability organisations gather in Nadi, Fiji for leadership training funded through Australia's Pacific Leadership program (Source: DFAT)

“[Persons with Disabilities] are often forgotten when it comes to decision making and their rights are continuously violated and swept under the carpet endless times.”

– Nafi, Fiji (Wheelchair user)

1.7 million people in Pacific Island nations are living with a disability. This represents nearly 15% of the region's total population.¹⁰

People with disabilities are some of the most marginalised members of Pacific Communities; they are often excluded from, or lack access to, essential health services, education, assistive technology, social protection, and disability support services. This often leads to higher levels of poverty, poor health, economic and social exclusion, and discrimination.

¹⁰ Pacific Islands Forum, <https://www.forumsec.org/framework-for-rights-of-persons-with-disability/>

“Accessibility, Qualification Mismatch, and Stigma are probably the 3 main challenges that are faced by Persons with Disabilities in the Pacific.”

– Nafi, Fiji (Wheelchair user)

All policy and programming work that Australia takes part in with Pacific Communities must be:

- Accessible: ensuring that any infrastructure, information, communication, and technology is accessible for all.
- Participatory: fully embracing of the principle “nothing about us without us”; Australia must listen to and be led by people with disabilities, and other marginalised groups, and ensure all people have the agency and dignity of being involved in all development processes that impact their lives.

Our vision of seeing healthy and flourishing communities, and empowered young people across the Pacific will only be realised in full when no one is left behind.

“[Australia should] ensure that Persons with Disabilities or Organisations for Persons with Disabilities (OPD's) are at the forefront of planning when it comes to sustainable development by including us and that their voices are heard. Nothing About Us, Without Us.”

– Nafi, Fiji (Wheelchair user)



Students with a disability take part in The Inclusive Education (TIE) pilot program at a primary school in Tonga. (Source: DFAT)

Section 2:

Key Priorities

☀ Climate Change & Natural Hazards

📈 Education & Youth Unemployment

💧 Improving Access to Water & Sanitation



☀ Climate Change & Natural Hazards

94% of Pacific delegates ranked 'Climate change' as an issue of high or extreme importance for their community.

92.6% of Pacific delegates ranked 'Preparing for natural disasters and their impact' as an issue of high or extreme importance for their community.

Why does this matter?

“As Pacific Islanders, the ocean is both a part of our lifestyle, heritage, culture and tradition, and the general health and overall care for the ocean is important for the future of our youth.”

– Winton, Cook Islands

“[Climate change] affects culture, community, and the ability to self-determine your own future.”

– Langi, Samoa

The health of the environment is intimately connected to the lives, livelihoods, and cultures of Pacific people.

For Pacific people, the land, the sea, and the entire ecosystem is part of their identity. Cultures, traditions, spirituality, relationships, physical and mental health are all connected to and affected by their environment. It is a part of who they are.

In many Pacific indigenous communities, it is understood that humans exist interdependently with their ecology – just as they rely on the natural environment for sustenance, they also have a responsibility to protect and conserve that environment. It is critical to their wellbeing; it gives life and meaning.

When the environment is not healthy; when ecosystems are not working in harmony and the natural world is in disorder, it affects Pacific people in profound ways.

Climate change is the single greatest disruption to the natural world, and thus the greatest threat to the way of life of individual Pacific Communities.

It is unequivocally clear that climate change is already having catastrophic impacts across the Pacific and presents an existential threat to the Pacific Island cultures and communities.

Although Pacific nations contribute the least to climate change compared to other nations, they are the most impacted by the adverse impacts of a warming climate.

Nations across the Pacific are already experiencing sea level rises and storm surges, coral bleaching, coastal erosion, saltwater intrusions, and the submersion of islands. In parts of the region, communities now face food insecurity and malnutrition, as increases in the frequency of extreme weather events and their severity hampers access to locally grown foods.

A region already prone to a range of natural hazards including cyclones, floods, droughts, and volcanic eruptions, the Pacific now faces new and increased risks due to climate-induced variations in rainfall patterns and increased severity of storms.

“Tuvalu is one of the low-lying island nations in the South Pacific. As the frequency and intensity of floods and cyclones increase, the island is shrinking, and saltwater intrusion is affecting local production on the plantations. Tropical cyclone Pam is one of the intense cyclones we experienced in March 2015. It caused substantial damage to our houses, public infrastructure and agriculture on the outer island of Tuvalu. We then had tropical cyclone Ula in 2016 and tropical cyclone Tino in 2020. Because we are small with limited resources to recover from these impacts, we are hoping and praying that our partners will see the difficulties that we are facing now. We need to work together to solve and to minimise these impacts.”

– Tetavaa, Tuvalu

So great is the impact on Pacific Communities, that there will be a need to relocate people due to climate-induced displacement. This will not only involve significant economic and social dislocation but will also have a deep impact on the cultural and spiritual dimensions of life. Just as First Nations Peoples in Australia have identified the significant pain caused by land dispossession, so too will this be a reality for those displaced by climate change.

“If climate change does tend to exacerbate much more to a point where the oceans do end up swallowing our lands, how are these communities able to relocate with dignity... would their culture still be intact in the next 10-20 years?”

– Maima, Samoa

Climate change impacts every single other priority issue raised by our delegation. Without addressing climate change we cannot empower young people, and we will not have flourishing communities. Climate change induced displacement also directly links to the principle of self-determination and inclusivity.

“[Climate Change] affects culture, community, and the ability to self-determine your own future.”

– Langi, Samoa

The health of the environment is also deeply impacted by a long and vast history of nuclear colonialism within the Pacific. The region, which has been a theatre for over 315 nuclear blasts by the US, UK, and France, faces ongoing and intergenerational impacts. Entire islands in the Pacific have been incinerated and many are still uninhabitable due to radiation levels. Coral reefs were decimated as well as the marine life those reefs provided habitats for.

Pacific Islanders continue to experience displacement, cancers, chronic diseases, and congenital abnormalities, as a result of the radioactive fallout that blanketed their homes and the ocean, upon which their livelihoods depend.

If we want to create healthy and flourishing communities within the region, we must address all environmental impacts to land, and sea caused by both climate change and nuclear violence.

What is being done?

Though they are least responsible for creating the climate crisis, Pacific Communities, including - and in many cases, especially - young people in those communities, are leading the world in environmental stewardship and innovative solutions to combat the impacts of a warming climate.

Case Study 1: The Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC)



The Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) is an ecumenical organisation representing Christian churches in the Pacific region. As part of their work towards building a safer and more just Pacific, the PCC have called for more urgent and drastic measures to address climate change. This includes supporting the ‘Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty’, which calls for a just transition to renewable energy sources. The PCC is also active in campaigning for bans to deep sea mining.

As a leading voice on climate change in the Pacific region, the PCC has been invited to speak and participate at global forums including COP and the World Council of Churches General Assembly and Ecumenical Youth Gathering. The PCC is also working on mitigating the impacts of climate change-induced migration, conducting research, and developing frameworks for just and effective relocations for communities that may need to leave their homes and lands.

Case Study 2: Engaging youth in Disaster Response



Since 2015 Caritas Tonga has partnered with Tonga National Youth Congress for their preposition stockpile program. The youth are engaged to aid with the distribution of emergency stocks immediately after disasters. At the same time, as part of the partnership the youth also stockpile WASH equipment in the form of portable water purification units for the purpose of de-contaminating water for drinking purposes, which can be mobilised immediately after emergencies but also is implemented during peace time.

Caritas Tonga acknowledges the vital participation of youth in implementing disaster preparedness, risk management and response programmes and together with the National Emergency Management office works closely to implement timely and effective emergency response activities. The partnership with youth also extends beyond stockpiles distribution to include shelter repair programs, income generating projects and even good leadership and advocacy trainings. Caritas Tonga is also mainstreaming youth voices into every governance level of Caritas Tonga's committees.



How can Australia help see this vision realised?

Australia can help see this vision of healthy environments realised throughout the Pacific region by:

- Drawing on the ancient wisdom and knowledge of indigenous peoples that stretches back thousands of years. This includes the ancient wisdom of Australia's First Nations peoples, who should be given a seat at the table when engaging with and building partnerships with the Pacific.
- Ensuring bilateral support for climate action in the Pacific is driven by local needs and priorities, focuses on the most vulnerable countries and communities, and promotes inclusion.
- Heeding the call of Pacific people for Australia to step up and align its domestic climate policies with Australia's commitments under the Paris Agreement to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees and taking action towards a safe transition to renewable energy.
- Engaging with multi-lateral and international human rights instruments and mechanisms to ensure cooperation towards climate justice, nuclear justice, self-determination, and healthy environments within the Pacific

↑↑ Education & Youth Unemployment

94.4% of respondents ranked youth unemployment as an issue of high or extreme importance for their community.

92.5% of respondents ranked access to quality education as an issue of high or extreme importance for their community.

“Young people tend to get pushed aside or silenced and we want them to have a voice for themselves to speak up for themselves and to be able to do something about the environment that they are in.”

– Leila, Papua New Guinea

Why does this matter?

Empowered young people help to create more just, equal, and sustainable societies. Investing in the capacity, education, health, and wellbeing of young people not only benefits those individuals, but also their families, and the future of their communities and cultures.

Education

While rates of children accessing and completing primary education are generally quite high throughout the Pacific region, the secondary education rates vary between nations. In Fiji and Tonga, for example, around 86% of students complete upper secondary school whereas in Vanuatu and Kiribati, the rates sit around 12%.¹¹

We also know that education rates are often lower for children with disabilities. Data for the Pacific region is limited, but globally, on average, one in three children with disabilities of primary age is out of school, compared with one in seven without disabilities. Primary school completion rates amongst children with disabilities are also lower than those without disabilities.

¹¹ Pacific Data Hub <https://pacificdata.org>

¹² United Nations (2019) Disability and Development Report, New York, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/2019/04/un-disability-and-development-report-realizing-the-sdgs-by-for-and-with-persons-with-disabilities/>

“The backbone of a quality democracy is quality education. Without quality education, citizens in Papua New Guinea will not be able to practice fully in development - socially, economically, as well politically.”

– Michael, Papua New Guinea

To participate effectively in the different spheres of cultural, political, economic, and social life, young people must be given the proper tools.

For many years, it was believed that those ‘proper tools’ were predominantly western ideals of education and employment; the impact that colonialism has had on education and employment systems across the region cannot be understated.

A lack of indigenous representation in education curriculums, and stories of indigenous history taught through colonial lenses have resulted in youth disempowerment and a lack of vision for indigenous youth across the Pacific region, including First Nations Australians. Many of our Pacific delegates have highlighted the struggles faced by young people in their communities who are becoming increasingly detached and disconnected from their cultures and histories.

“We have access to education [in Ma’ohi Nui], but the question is what kind of education? Everyone is going to school, but the problem now is that the education is more for French people and French references than indigenous Ma’ohi Nui education...this is important for our community because in 2022 we need to decolonise.... our identity and culture is important ”

– Tama, Ma’ohi Nui

In Fiji, for example, – a former colony of the British empire – the education system was designed to prepare young people to enter workforces that would grow the British economy. Today, this same education system prioritises academics and developing skills that will prepare students for white-collar jobs. These white-collar jobs, however, are hard to attain.

The youth unemployment rate in Fiji has steadily increased over the last 15 years to 18% in 2021.¹³

¹³ International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT database. Data as of June 2022

Youth Unemployment

According to the most recent data, youth unemployment across the region has been estimated at about 23%, compared with a global average of 13%. In the Marshall Islands it is 46%.

High levels of youth unemployment throughout the region have a significant impact on youth disempowerment. Our Pacific delegates have passionately shared the struggles faced by young people who cannot access quality education, or who are unable to find work. For example, when young people feel disempowered or disconnected from their communities, they may become an easy target for criminal gangs and victims of systemic oppression through the justice and prison systems.

“In my community what hurts me the most is youth unemployment. Especially kids who are doing time in prison, they come back to the community they feel like they are not welcome anymore. They carry a stigma which leads them to go back to jail and the cycle goes on.”

– Semisi, Tonga

Decolonising education and employment

Key to seeing youth empowered and young people accessing quality education across the region, will be the decolonisation of the education and employment systems.

Young people in the Pacific need an education system that is fit for their local contexts, that is designed by their communities, influenced by their cultures and customs, and taught by their peoples. The Pacific need education systems that will teach young people to think critically about the world around them and empower them to take control of their own futures.

Delegates also expressed the need for meaningful work that exists outside the regular 9-5, that enables young people to provide for themselves and their families; work that is purposeful, localised, and sustainable.

“The system of working a 9-5 is not our culture, it’s something that’s coming from the outside in and it’s something that we must have to survive...our ancestors didn’t survive that way...I’d like to shift the mindset of our young people to realise that they there are many other things they can do in their communities, they can find purpose in many other things and make a living in other ways.”

– Leila, Papua New Guinea

What is being done?

Young people and their communities are investing in youth empowerment and quality education in creative and powerful ways.

Case Study 3: Empowering youth in the Solomons



Young people in the Pacific have traditionally been excluded from conversations and work undertaken to drive change in their communities. Ola Fou’s youth development program is a project designed to empower young Pacific leaders to become agents of change in their communities, equipping them to be current and future leaders.



Participants in the Ola Fou program in the Solomon Islands partake in a training course that equips them with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to identify and respond to the needs and rights of their own communities. Each of the students will in turn mentor 6 young people, particularly those from vulnerable backgrounds, to develop small-scale practical responses to address priority needs in communities. Graduates of the program have begun planting mangroves, started a plastics recycling business, and begun selling food at local markets. All activities challenge the traditional beliefs that young people have nothing to contribute to their communities.

Through this program, Ola Fou Solomons hopes to see a change in youths’ attitudes, capacities, confidence, dignity – and the positive view of young people by adults and the elderly in the community.

Ola Fou is a partner of Tearfund Australia, a Micah member agency.¹⁴

Case Study 4: Regional Ecumenical Youth Council in the Pacific



In recognition of the critical role that young people play both in the Pacific, both now and into the future, the Regional Ecumenical Youth Council (REYC) was revived in 2021.

The REYC has been established to foster intergenerational engagement with church leaders on critical issues and to lead young people in the Pacific in activism for change. It is made up from young people from across the Pacific region, and works together on issues related to climate change, ecological justice, youth and women’s empowerment, child protection, and self-determination.

This year’s PAELS delegation includes 17 representatives from the REYC.

¹⁴ Tearfund Australia, ‘Engaging Youth for Community Change in the Solomon Islands’ <https://www.tearfund.org.au/stories/engaging-youth-for-community-change-in-the-solomon-islands>



How can Australia help see this vision realised?

Australia can help see this vision of empowered youth realised throughout the Pacific by:

- Working towards integrated approaches to education and empowerment in the Pacific that are locally led, designed, and taught.
- Helping to break down the barriers that prevent young people from attaining employment, for example by continuing to support anti-corruption measures that address nepotism and bribery in recruitment systems, investing in digital technologies and training to connect young people to labour markets within their countries and abroad, and supporting meaningful work experience and practical skills-based training for young people in tertiary education.
- Seeking to create pathways to meaningful work and secure livelihoods that exist outside formal employment systems. This could include more technical vocation training around sustainable agriculture, aquaculture, floriculture, and making maximum use of islanders’ land and sea resources.
- Calling for, and contributing to, the decolonisation of education curriculums, including our own systems in Australia, to ensure young people learn of the struggles and resilience of First Nations peoples.

Improving Access to Water & Sanitation

96% of respondents ranked access to water and sanitation as an issue of high or extreme importance to them and their communities

Why does this matter?

As a delegation, we have a vision of flourishing communities across the Pacific. We believe a community flourishes when it is self-determining, resilient, safe, inclusive, equal, and healthy. A flourishing community is one where all people enjoy the fullness of life.

One of the greatest threats to this vision of flourishing communities is lack of access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH).

Clean water, toilets and good hygiene allow people to live healthy and dignified lives. Access to WASH helps prevent the spread of disease, keeps children in school, and decreases the number of children dying from preventable illnesses like diarrhea. As we have witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic, hygiene practices such as handwashing are a critical first line of defense in keeping individuals and their communities alive and well.

People in the Pacific region struggle with some of the lowest WASH coverage rates in the world – just 30% of people have access to basic sanitation and only 55% can access basic drinking water services.¹⁵ Across the Pacific, water and sanitation-related diseases are one of the leading causes of death for children under 5.¹⁶

“In Kiribati we are most vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Already in my community we have suffered from water contamination. We do not have fresh water for bathing...the water in our community is really salty due to climate change and sea level rises, which almost gave all of the community a rash – scabies. Every day we have to be lined in a queue from all of 10-15 households just to get fresh water for us to drink and use for food.”

– Remwatia, Kiribati

¹⁵ UNICEF and WHO, “Progress on household drinking water, sanitation and hygiene 2000-2017: Special focus on inequalities” (UNICEF and WHO, New York, USA, 2019), <https://washdata.org/sites/default/files/documents/reports/2019-07/imp-2019-wash-households.pdf>

¹⁶ UNICEF, “Water, Sanitation and Hygiene” <https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/what-we-do/water-sanitation-hygiene> accessed 3 Nov 2022

People with disabilities in the Pacific face even greater challenges to accessing WASH, including facilities that are hard to reach or use and inaccessible information relating to sanitation and hygiene.

There are also gendered impacts of access to WASH; women and girls often bear the greatest burden of WASH-related work, such as collecting water for their households – not only does this restrict the ability of young girls to attend school, but also increases their risk of violence as the journeys to and from the water sources can leave them vulnerable to attack. Lack of adequate sanitation facilities for school-aged girls who are menstruating also makes them more likely to miss school than boys.

Progress towards achieving access to basic water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) has been slow and many Pacific countries are off track to reaching the target of universal access to basic water services by 2030.

This progress is likely to be even further hampered by the impacts of climate change, with rainfall forecasts predicted to become less reliable over the coming years. Sea level rises and warming oceans will also influence the quality of freshwater and water resources across the region.

“My community back home [in PNG] is a village, about an hour away from the capital city but we don’t have access to clean water, and I’d say the same for a lot of remote areas in the country. I’ve seen the struggle that people have, especially relying on rainwater. When it rains people put their buckets and pots and pans outside to catch the rainwater and when it’s dry season, they have to walk a distance to fill up at the river... sometimes the river is dry because of changing climate, we sometimes have drought and heatwaves and the river dries up, so we need to dig and get water from under the ground.”

– Leila, Papua New Guinea

What is being done?

Case Study 5: Turn on the Tap Project in the Solomon Islands



For many young girls in the Solomon Islands, their morning begins with a trip to fetch water from small streams for their families to drink, cook with, wash, and bathe in. The process can be time-consuming, meaning they can sometimes miss out on part of their school day. Once at school, the challenges continue – with many schools lacking running water, privacy, and proper facilities for when they are menstruating.

ADRA Australia’s Turn on the Tap project aims to address inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure and knowledge in a range of primary and secondary schools.



Partnerships with local school leaders, education authorities, and local businesses in the Western islands have boosted access to fresh water, clean toilets, low-cost menstrual products, and effective hygiene education. As a result, many more young girls can attend school and have an equal opportunity to receive life-changing education.

ADRA Australia is a Micah member agency.

Case Study 6: Safe Water for Rural Communities in Papua New Guinea



For over 20 years, the United Church in PNG has been providing water tanks, gravity fed systems and taps to some of the most isolated communities in Papua New Guinea. In addition to providing ‘hardware’, the United Church have run a campaign in Milne Bay, which empowers women and men to become agents of change in their families and communities by encouraging them to wash their hands with soap, to take care when preparing food and using toilets. The project has also made an effort to include people with disabilities in the training and decision-making processes. When Covid-19 reached PNG, the United Church were prepared to help educate communities on best practice water hygiene to prevent the spread of disease.

The United Church in PNG is a church partner of UnitingWorld, a Micah member agency. Its initiatives to improve ‘Safe water for rural communities’ have been supported by the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program, Church Partnership Program and the Australian Humanitarian Partnership.



How can Australia help see this vision realised?

Australia can help see this vision of flourishing communities realised throughout the Pacific by:

- Continuing to invest in WASH across the Pacific region, applying a disability inclusive and gender transformative lens to all programming and policy work.
- Working with local communities across the region, leveraging the wisdom and ingenuity of indigenous people to harness fresh water sources and co-create robust water management systems.

Conclusion

“This platform is very important for the future of our region. I admire Australia for stepping up and gathering young people of the region to come together as a family. We need to continue empowering, listening, and working together with the youth of the region if we want the work we do to be effective and fruitful.”

– James, Tonga

Our vision as a delegation of emerging leaders is to see healthy environments, empowered young people, and flourishing communities across the Pacific region. This is a vision that will only be realised in full when communities enjoy self-determination and when no one is left behind.

We thank you for taking the time to meet with us and listen to the stories and experiences of our Pacific brothers and sisters.

It is our hope that this is just the beginning of a longer, wider, and deeper conversation about what it means to be a Pacific family.

May we learn to listen to each other, learn from each other, and work with each other towards a more just and sustainable future for our region.

Pacific Australian Emerging Leaders' Summit
Delegation Leaders, 2022



About the Pacific Australian Emerging Leaders Summit

The Pacific Australian Emerging Leaders Summit (PAELS) gathers emerging leaders (aged 22-35 years) from the Pacific and Australia, for four days of connection-building, leadership development and dialogue. During the first half of the Summit, delegates will learn, both from and with each other, about the key development priorities of young people and their communities; be inspired and equipped to engage with Australia's parliamentarians and top regional decision-makers and form a community of leaders that will continue to learn, share, and create change in the diverse contexts they have influence in.

The second half of the Summit will take place at Australian Parliament House, as delegates engage in meetings with Australian MPs and share their stories and lived experience of critical development and foreign policy issues in the region.



About Micah Australia

Micah Australia is a coalition of Christian international development agencies under the leadership of Rev. Tim Costello AO advocating on the most urgent global justice issues facing our world today — extreme poverty & hunger, rising conflict and climate change.

Micah coordinates events and delegations that enable Australians and representatives from communities across our region, to speak to MPs through a relational advocacy model that is professional, warm, inclusive of lived experience and policy based.



About the Pacific Conference of Churches

Formed in 1961 at Malua in Samoa, the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) unites the region's churches as the conscience of the Pacific, speaking truth to power. From the Gereja Kristen Injili di Tannah Papua (Evangelical Christian Church of Papua) in the West to the Etaretia Porotetani Maohi (Maohi Protestant Church) in the East, the PCC has 33 member churches and 10 National councils of churches in 18 countries and territories across the region. PCC members come from a wide section of Christian faith confessions. The PCC is focused on issues of ecumenism, self-determination, climate change, environmental justice, women's empowerment, child protection and youth mobilisation.



Pacific Australian
Emerging Leaders
Summit



micah