

REGIONAL CONSULTATION

**PACIFIC CIVIL SOCIETY DRIVING CHANGE FOR A DYNAMIC COMMONWEALTH:
PREPARATION FOR CPF CHOGM¹ 2011
23-24 MAY, 2011
SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA**

OUTCOME STATEMENT

“Our ancestors first voyaged and traded across the vast Pacific, the world’s largest ocean, thousands of years ago. They settled and thrived on its atolls, volcanic islands, river valleys and forests, developing intimate and dependent inter-relationships with the sea and land, embracing the richness of life. Over one thousand unique languages have since evolved and define today, the unique cultural and spiritual identity of our diverse peoples.”

Preamble

Representatives of Pacific Island Civil Society Organisations, including Australia and New Zealand, met in Sydney, Australia, from 23-24 May, 2011 as part of regional preparations for the Commonwealth People’s Forum to be held in Perth, Western Australia, in October 2011.

The regional consultation identified key issues affecting Pacific people in the areas of democratic governance, the environment, vulnerabilities of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), climate change, human rights, trade, gender, health, education and culture. It also heard the findings of the report of the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) and assessed the importance of civil society to the future of the Commonwealth. The meeting also articulated ways in which Commonwealth institutions, governments and CSOs could effectively respond to the priority concerns of Pacific peoples.

It also assessed the importance of civil society to the future of the Commonwealth and articulated ways in which Commonwealth institutions, governments and CSOs could effectively respond to priority concerns of Pacific peoples in the following areas:

Governance, Peace and Security

Pacific Civil Society believes that it is necessary to promote equitable participatory decision-making processes through capacity building and training, including sharing of existing good practice amongst Commonwealth countries. These areas could include

¹ CPF – Commonwealth People’s Forum
CHOGM – Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting

elections, multi-party processes, good governance practices and values-based governance across the private and public sector. Strategies, mechanisms and targets must be designed to achieve the equitable participation of women in governance at every level of society. The Commonwealth Charter will play an important role in recognising the value of civil society in achieving such aims and the Charter should be used as a reference point to progress these issues. An additional resource to the Charter could be mapping examples of good decision-making practices and governance in Commonwealth countries.

Climate Change and Small Island Developing States' (SIDS) Vulnerabilities

Pacific island countries are experiencing a rise in droughts, coastal erosion, salination of water and food insecurity as a result of anthropogenic climate change. These funds will be used for adaptation that is based on the unique needs of each Commonwealth region in the areas of: renewable energy; water rights and supply, sanitation and hygiene; food security; fisheries protection and coastal protection; agroforestry; reforestation and resettlement and capacity building. There must be an appropriate and accessible mechanism established for accessing funds. This can be channeled through a government-CSO mechanism or the Commonwealth Foundation. The overarching principle should be accessibility of funds, which is a huge difficulty in the Pacific Islands.

This funding would also provide for the creation of a Commonwealth Climate Technology Exchange that provides an open source for Commonwealth countries to share clean technologies and promote renewable energy in the Commonwealth countries. This institution would also conduct research and development into renewable energy technologies.

Education, Technology and Innovation

Pacific Civil Society acknowledges the impacts of technology and other factors on education and is conscious of the role of the educational system in providing an environment for socialisation and development of youth. We recommend that Commonwealth Countries create a regional working group to explore the re-modelling of education systems and curricula to reflect and adapt to new technologies, especially information technology, to increase opportunities and meet local needs.

We are concerned by the constant drain of trained educators and other professionals from Pacific States, we therefore call on member states to ensure that projects in the Pacific prioritise local expertise over expatriate consultancies. This can be achieved through piloting training programmes that are geared towards retention of local human resources that enhance local opportunities, including computer literacy for adults.

Human Rights

Pacific Civil Society believes that in order to ensure that civil society organisations are included as equal partners in planning and implementation processes, the Commonwealth should directly support local community human rights advocates and community legal centres to build capacity and mechanisms for bottom-up advocacy for human rights and progressive reform towards better governance, with priority given to the most disadvantaged groups and with a focus on sharing experiences between countries with similar issues (such as through exchange programs).

Acknowledging the low level of sign-on and implementation by nations within the region to international human rights instruments (eg. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities), the Commonwealth should pressure member states to ratify, implement and report on human rights conventions and declarations. This could be done through creating a Commonwealth Commissioner of Democracy and the Rule of Law, noting importance that it is an independent position with a properly resourced commission to enable it to identify emerging problems and to prompt commonwealth action of serious and persistent violations of the rule of law.

Health and Wellbeing

Pacific Island Civil Society is concerned with the lack of priority, funding and access to acute and primary health care for people living in the small island states of the Pacific and specifically vulnerable groups such as women, children and people at risk of or living with HIV.

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 4 and 5 are the furthest off-track globally and in the Pacific, with the shortage of health workers an acute problem. We therefore call on Commonwealth developing country governments to prioritise the delivery of acute and primary health care by implementing national costed health care plans which include the education, training and retention of health workers with a particular focus on female health workers. We call on Commonwealth donor governments to support and provide sufficient funding for these national health care plans, including dedicated funding for the education, training and retention of health workers. Such a program must include partnership with civil society.

We are concerned by the profound impact of laws or the absence of laws that inhibit the ability of governments, civil society and the broader community to anticipate and respond to pressing public health issues in the Pacific such as HIV, maternal, newborn and child health, and domestic or gender-based violence. We call on Commonwealth governments, the Commonwealth Secretariat and civil society to act with urgency to undertake appropriate legal reforms. This should include legislation which facilitates effective public health responses, with processes that include open and effective consultation with communities.

Economic Development, Trade and Finance

Pacific Civil Society acknowledges the importance that remittances play in the Pacific communities. We are concerned about the out-migration of the skilled and unskilled workforce and the implications that this has on Pacific communities and the provision of essential services. We call on the Commonwealth Member States to hold tripartite annual meetings of Commonwealth Labour Ministers to discuss the role that labour mobility will play in broader development strategies that reflect the unique needs of each country.

Trade and development policy must support the right of countries to determine their own culturally relevant developmental paths and that support is provided for that realisation. We reiterate the statement on trade and subsidies in the 2009 CPF Peoples' Statement (Partnering for a More Equitable and Sustainable Future). We call on Commonwealth Member States to ensure that future trade agreements are driven by social and development objectives, and not by markets.

Gender and Women's Rights

Pacific civil society recognises the centrality of gender equity and women's empowerment in achieving development goals, international peace and security, and human rights. We reaffirm our existing commitments under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) 1979, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 1995, UN Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals 2000 and the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality.

We believe that the Commonwealth has a particular and unique role as a champion for equality and human rights, and that achieving gender equity and women's empowerment is at its core an issue of political will and values. We therefore call on the Commonwealth to take a leading role in advancing gender equity and women's empowerment internationally. We propose focusing on a small number of strategic, prioritised and achievable actions to ensure maximum impact.

We call on the Commonwealth to support the development and continuation of dedicated Ministries for Women, adequately resourced to support legislative reform for non-discrimination based on gender, and the elimination of violence against women and girls, ratification of CEDAW, increased women's political participation and representation at national and local governance levels, development and implementation of national gender equity policies and culturally relevant action plans. Gender equity education should be a mainstream component of educational systems.

We call on Commonwealth Member States to advance efforts to ensure gender equity in access to, and outcomes of education at all levels, including early childcare and development. We further call on the Commonwealth Secretariat, Commonwealth Member States and civil society to work together to eliminate barriers for women and girls to access quality education.

Culture and Identity

Pacific Island Civil Society affirms that the Pacific is founded on religions that view life holistically. Our religious life, culture and identity are connected to our relationship with the land. The spirituality of our people is a core part of who we are and how we live as responsible citizens. We call on all stakeholders to discuss and identify the nature of early childhood development and to identify values in life, identity which builds self esteem. We call on all Commonwealth countries to become signatories to the *UNESCO 2003 Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* and to ratify the *UNESCO 2001 Declaration on Cultural Diversity*.

Acknowledging the important place of Indigenous Peoples in the culture and identity of the Commonwealth and its Member States and concerned about the persistent transgenerational poverty among Indigenous Peoples; We call on the Commonwealth to recognise the impact of colonisation on Indigenous Peoples, to empower them in their progress towards self determination and we further call on Member States to protect their rights in the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

We must work together to better articulate and enhance our Pacific Island identities and solidarity, recognising that cultures are dynamic. We also call on the Commonwealth to work with PIANGO² to promote cross-cultural understanding and respect through working with its National Liaison Units at regional level.

Aid and Development Effectiveness

Sustainable development needs to resolve social, governance, economic and environmental challenges for the wellbeing of present and future generations. To this end, all governments, donors and other stakeholders need to progress commitments made under the *Paris Declaration 2005* and the *Accra Agenda for Action 2008*. Governments have accepted that civil society organisations are essential development actors in their own right and that governments therefore have obligations “to deepen their engagement” with CSOs in the development process.³ (Ref. *Paragraph 14 (a)-(e). “Cairns Compact on Strengthening Development Coordination in the Pacific – Regional Workshop.” February 2011, Nadi, Fiji*).⁴

² PIANGO – Pacific Islands Association of Non Government Organisations

³ Accra Agenda for Action, para 21

⁴ Paragraph 14 (a)-(e). “Cairns Compact on Strengthening Development Coordination in the Pacific – Regional Workshop.” February 2011, Nadi, Fiji “*Greater involvement of the non government sector in planning and*

Pacific Island Civil Society calls on Commonwealth governments to support CSO participation in the Fourth High Level Forum in Busan, South Korea, in November-December 2011 and to progress aid effectiveness and development effectiveness objectives. We also call on the Commonwealth to establish the legal, fiscal, bureaucratic, informational, political and cultural conditions that are necessary for civil society organisations in the Pacific to engage in their countries' development in a sustained and effective manner.

In conclusion, we, as representatives of Pacific Island Civil Society, further commit ourselves to work together to progress the outcomes of this regional consultation.

Sydney, Australia
24 May, 2011

implementation of development activities to ensure more broad based efforts to support development coordination. The following areas of improvement include:

- (a) Increased transparency in partnership arrangements with government;*
- (b) Improved coordination within the non government sector and with government;*
- (c) Umbrella national non government and private sector organisations to lead in policy engagement, monitoring and reporting of aid flows and tracking the effectiveness of aid;*
- (d) Strengthen regional engagement strategies with regional umbrella non government entities;*
- (e) Coherent funding mechanisms at national and regional levels.*