



A Green-Blue Alliance in Motion

Pacific Island Countries and Europe Fighting Climate Change

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► Key Takeaways

- **The Pacific Island Countries (PICs) are particularly vulnerable to climate change, but they are also resilient actors that find innovative solutions to adapt and push for a renewed approach, including climate justice.**
- **The European Union (EU) and PICs are leaders and like-minded partners on climate change governance. The EU is actively supporting the PICs through many channels and projects, but cooperation could be enhanced by building up the capacity of the PICs to access adequate funding and better implement projects.**
- **Europeans and Oceanians both call for a transformative, holistic and tailored approach that bridges global and local knowledge as well as norms and standards, and that breaks silos to encompass environmental, economic and cultural approaches. In pushing for such change, they are complementary actors.**

Introduction

The Pacific Islands Countries (PICs) were the first to ratify the Paris climate agreement in 2015. Indeed, for them, climate change has had very concrete implications for years. Islanders have seen the sea level rising, endangering the very existence of atolls. They have also experienced increasingly violent cyclones and other natural disasters, and must deal with multiple impacts of a changing climate on their everyday lives.¹ More than bearing the brunt of such impacts, and they have been calling for the rest of the world to awaken to this existential threat. At the recent UN General Assembly, the government of Vanuatu, supported by other states, led an initiative to ask for the opinion of the International Court of Justice on climate change.²

The European Union (EU) has been a proactive leader in international negotiations on climate change; it strives to lead by example and do its share to mitigate climate impacts and support adaptation efforts. But it was perhaps on only this past summer that climate change began to feel very real for European public opinion, as the continent was ravaged by a series of heatwaves, major wildfires and droughts that had serious impacts on biodiversity, agriculture, but also human health. Some have said this is the “end of innocence” for the Europeans on climate change.³ This episode might help bridge the gap and make Europeans better understand what the populations of the Pacific Islands have been enduring, keeping in mind that PICs are more exposed and have fewer financial resources to implement solutions. It might also raise greater interest about the way Oceanians could adapt and provide innovative solutions.

This *Briefing* argues that climate change challenges require an innovative, transformative approach to deliver results on mitigation, adaptation, and compensation for loss and damage. Europe and Oceania are two leading actors that already have a fruitful record of cooperation, and are willing to step up their cooperation to lead this transition to a new model.

This paper is based on discussions that took place during the webinar “Climate Change: The Pacific Island Countries, seven years after the Paris Agreement” organized by Ifri’s Pacific Islands Program, in partnership with the Pacific Community, on September 20, 2022.⁴ Contributions from panelists will therefore be highlighted.

1. See the excellent documentary by Géraldine Giraudeau, which also highlights the complex legal issues raised by climate change implications for PICs: “Nations of Waters”, 2022, free access on: www.nationsofwater.unc.nc. For detailed information, see also: www.pacificclimatechange.net.

2. See the website of the Vanuatu ICJ Initiative: www.vanuatuicj.com.

3. S. de Royer (with A. Leroyer), “Climat: l’été de la fin de l’insouciance”, *Le Monde*, August 20, 2022.

4. “Climate Change: The Pacific Island Countries, Seven Years after the Paris Agreement” organized by Ifri’s Pacific Islands Program on September 20, 2022. Panelists were: Espen Ronneberg, Adviser, Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability Program, The Pacific Community; Stefano Signore, Head of Unit, Climate Change & Sustainable Energy, Nuclear Safety, at the Directorate-General for International Partnerships, of European Commission; Joachim Claudet, Research Director, Centre for Island Research and Environmental Observatory (CRIOBE), CNRS and Bakoa Kaltongga,

The PICs and Climate Change: Victims, but also Fighters

If the PICs are at the forefront of climate change, they are also leading international players, pulling forward initiatives on mitigation and adaptation.

The PICs at the Forefront of Climate Change: From Damages to Human Rights Violations

The geography of the Pacific Islands and their heavy reliance on the ocean for resources, transportation and livelihoods makes them particularly exposed. The 2018 Boe Declaration endorsed by members of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) recognized that “climate change remains the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and well-being of the peoples of the Pacific”.⁵ This principle is regularly reaffirmed, recently by the Fijian Defense Minister Inia Seruiratu at the 2022 Shangri-La Dialogue, a global defense summit.⁶

Indeed, as Minister Bakoa Baltongga,⁷ the Special Envoy on Climate Change for the Pacific of the Republic of Vanuatu explained, climate change is a multilayered threat to small island developing states, causing more violent and frequent natural disasters that may lead to the devastation of infrastructures, but also to the lack of freshwater, the collapse of agricultural systems, and the spread of pests and diseases. In the past ten years, Vanuatu was hit by two cyclones that reduced national GDP by half. There are other challenges, such as the disappearance of coral reefs resulting from acidification and warming of the ocean waters.

Because of these many, profound effects, PICs now see climate change as a threat to fundamental Human Rights such as the rights to life, self-determination, development, food, health, water, sanitation and housing.⁸ Prime Minister Loughman of Vanuatu expressed this new paradigm: “We are no longer measuring [climate change] in tons of carbon emissions or degrees of Celsius, but also in human rights violations and life loss”.⁹

Caretaker Minister of Agriculture, Livestock, Forestry, Fisheries and Biosecurity & Special Envoy on Climate Change for the Pacific, Republic of Vanuatu. A special message recorded by the Prime Minister of Vanuatu, Mr. Bob Loughman, was broadcasted at the beginning of the session. Program and video available at: www.ifri.org.

5. Boe Declaration on Regional Security, Nauru, September 2018. See: www.pacificsecurity.net.

6. “Machine guns, fighter jets, ships... are not our primary security concern... The single greatest threat to our very existence is... human-induced, devastating climate change. It threatens our very hopes and dreams of prosperity,” Seruiratu said. J. Brock, “Fiji Says Climate Change, not Conflict, Is Asia’s Biggest Security Threat”, Reuters, June 2, 2022.

7. Bakoa Kaltongga, Caretaker Minister of Agriculture, Livestock, Forestry, Fisheries and Biosecurity & Special Envoy on Climate Change for the Pacific, Republic of Vanuatu, speaking at the Ifri-SPC conference, September 20, 2022, *op. cit.*

8. C. Diver, “Climate Action for Human Rights”, The Pacific Community, December 9, 2020, available at: www.spc.int.

9. A special message recorded by the Prime Minister of Vanuatu, Bob Loughman, broadcasted at the Ifri-SPC conference, September 20, 2022, *op. cit.*

"We're not Drowning, We're Fighting"¹⁰: PICs as Proactive Actors and Solution Providers

The narrative of “disappearing islands” often marginalizes awareness of the climate leadership by the Pacific Islands.¹¹ In fact, since the 2015 COP21 in Paris, the PICs have stepped up their coordination to weigh on climate change negotiations.¹² They have been calling for the early phasing out fossil fuel production and combustion and for ambitious targets for nationally determined contributions (NDC). Fiji took on the presidency of COP23 in 2017 and worked to advance the interests of Small Island Developing States in both combatting and adapting to climate change.¹³ The PICs advocated for urgent action at the UN General Assembly in September 2022, especially from large emitters, to commit to net zero emissions by 2050, deliver on the \$100 billion climate finance goal before COP27, ensure that developed countries deliver on their commitment to double adaptation finance by 2025 from 2019 levels and allocate for 50% of all new climate finance to adaptation.¹⁴

Today, the focus is on the necessity to take concrete action on loss and damage and to claim climate justice.¹⁵ In this respect, Vanuatu has called for the creation of a financial

While innovative ideas are plenty, the issue is often the capacity to implement these projects

mechanism for loss and damage. In September 2021, the island nation launched an initiative to request that the International Court of Justice (ICJ) provide an advisory opinion on the obligations of states under international law to protect the rights of present and future generations against the adverse impacts of climate change. “It is not a court case or litigation, but a campaign to build ambition” said Prime Minister Loughman in his message.

Since the 1990s, PICs have also embarked on ambitious and inventive adaptation projects regarding food security, water management and ecosystem protection, which can inspire other countries around the world.¹⁶ Financed through the Global Environment Facility, such projects also benefit from the EU’s global climate change alliance program in the region. The PICs have also developed a real capacity to work together to jointly

10. Brianna Fruean, addressing the World Leaders Summit at COP26 in Glasgow, November 1, 2021, available at: www.sprep.org.

11. C. Farbotko and T. Kitara, “Climate Leadership in the ‘Disappearing Islands’”, *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, May 6, 2022, available at: www.gjia.georgetown.edu.

12. G. Carter, “Establishing a Pacific Voice in the Climate Change Negotiations”, in: G. Fry and S. Tarte (eds.), *The New Pacific Diplomacy*, 2015, pp. 205-220.

13. See the website of the COP 23: www.cop23.com.fj.

14. Joint Press Release: Pacific Leaders meet with United Nations Secretary-General, September 23, 2022, available at: www.un.org.

15. “What Is Climate Justice?”, *Carbon Brief*, October 4, 2021, available at: www.carbonbrief.org.

16. See for example: E. Mcleod *et al.*, “Lessons from the Pacific Islands – Adapting to Climate Change by Supporting Social and Ecological Resilience”, *Frontiers in Marine Science*, Vol. 6, Article 289, June 2019.

implement solutions at a subregional level that can be a model for other players.

While innovative ideas are plenty, the issue is often the capacity to implement these projects, according to Espen Ronneberg,¹⁷ due to a lack of trained human resources. Other challenges are difficult access to financial solutions, and the slow development of renewable energy to lessen the reliance of the PICs on fossil fuels.

Enhancing the Existing Europe-Oceania Cooperation

The EU and the PICs are like-minded partners on climate change governance, and a dynamic cooperation is already ongoing. Considering the needs, the EU's contribution could be further strengthened and improved.

EU Cooperation on Climate Change with the Pacific

Stefano Signore, from the European Commission, explained that the EU and the PICs share fundamental values and principles, as well as a similar approach to climate change, on which a solid cooperation could develop.¹⁸ Recently, at the COP26 in Glasgow, Pacific and EU negotiators launched the Green Blue Alliance for the Pacific that focuses on climate action, resilience and the sustainable use of natural resources. This framework is developed from a convergence of values and principles of the European Green Deal, the

future post-Cotonou Pacific Protocol and the 2050 Strategy for a Blue Pacific Continent, and form the basis for ambitious, sustainable efforts in terms of climate ambition, disaster risk reduction, ocean governance and environmental protection in the Pacific countries.¹⁹ It comes with a financial package of €197 million for the years 2021-2027. Additionally, European countries have contributed for \$4.5 billion to the Green Climate Fund set up by the Paris Agreement (45% of its total budget) to support developing countries in raising and realizing

their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) ambitions towards low-emission, climate-resilient pathways. Germany and France are, for example, also supporting the regional Pacific NDC hub, established under the leadership of Fiji at COP23 to assist the region. There is the possibility of some further support coming from the EU.

The Green Blue Alliance for the Pacific comes with a financial package of €197 million

17. Espen Ronneberg, Adviser, Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability Program, The Pacific Community, at the Ifri-SPC conference, September 20, 2022, *op. cit.*

18. Stefano Signore, Head of Unit, Climate Change & Sustainable Energy, Nuclear Safety, Directorate-General for International Partnerships, European Commission, at the Ifri-SPC conference, September 20, 2022, *op. cit.*

19. "EU – Pacific Launch Green-Blue Alliance in Bid for Climate Neutrality", EEAS, November 12, 2021, available at: www.eeas.europa.eu.

Initiated in 2017 by France and the EU, soon to be joined by Canada, Australia and New Zealand, the Kiwa Initiative is a flagship project that brings together many partners, including the French Development Agency (AFD), the Pacific Community, the South Pacific Regional Environment Program (SPREP) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, which are all in charge of implementation. The Initiative aims to strengthen the resilience of Pacific countries and territories' ecosystems, economies and communities by setting up a dedicated one-stop shop for funding projects that promote [nature-based solutions](#).²⁰ Managed by AFD, the Initiative is currently endowed with €57 million.

Other initiatives supported by the EU include efforts to enhance ocean governance in the Pacific, to support adaptation and resilience, and assist the development of science-based projects. The Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) has initiated the Intra-ACP Climate Services and Related Application Program (ClimSA), under the 11th European Development Fund (EDF), which aims to support the climate information services value chain with technical and financial assistance, infrastructure and capacity building assistance to improve wide access and use of climate information.²¹ Other projects include the 'Building safety and resilience in the Pacific' project²² funded by the European Development Fund, or the Living Labs²³ project to share local knowledge within the global research agenda.

Paths to Improve Cooperation

While significant progress has been made through projects to tackle climate change through EU-Oceania cooperation,²⁴ some challenges remain that should be addressed to expand cooperation. The first issue to tackle is facilitating access to funding for the PICs. This has to do with technical assistance and capacity building: indeed, heavy paperwork to apply to EU funding schemes, as well as other international schemes, can be a challenge to governments with limited human resources.

In addition, Stefano Signore admitted that the EU, along with other developed countries has still not achieved the goal set at the 2009 COP15 in Copenhagen to mobilize \$100 billion per year for climate action in developing countries. So additional efforts should be made, also to direct more funding to small island developing countries.

Espen Ronneberg also suggested that efforts should be made to shorten applications processes and make implementation easier. Supplementing capacity is necessary to allow

20. See the website of the Kiwa Initiative: www.kiwainitiative.org.

21. See the website for the ClimSa program: www.climsa.org.

22. See the website of the project: www.gem.spc.int.

23. See the webpage: www.oacps-ri.eu.

24. See, for example, the Pacific Community Results Report 2021: www.spc.int.

the PICs to absorb the needed financing and also to implement the activities that are required. Proper management should be put behind each project. Regional organizations such as the Pacific Community have put in place mechanisms to support PICs on this.

Finally, there is a need to attract private investments, as well. Important needs should mobilize all partners that are able to contribute, including the private sector, banks, and multilateral financial institutions. In addition, more money should be channeled to adaptation projects, as so far projects focusing on mitigation are much more likely to attract funding.

Setting Up an Alternative, Innovative Approach on Climate Change

Deeper Europe-Oceania cooperation has strong has much to offer in advancing an alternative an alternative and transformative approach to climate change.

Towards a Transformative Approach

Joachim Claudet, from the French CNRS,²⁵ explained that today a new approach is needed to support sustainable development: solutions must be good for biodiversity conservation, but also for local populations – or else they will not be endorsed and nor successful. In this regard, it is important to break up silos and build up synergy and a transversal approach between environmental, social, economic, even psychological sciences.

Furthermore, gaps between globally designed success indicators and local indicators that are culturally grounded should be bridged. For example, the UN Millennium

Sustainable Development Goals might not be relevant in some local contexts. In particular, they fail to integrate dimensions of well-being that are very important in the Pacific Island Countries, for example, connectedness between people and places that are grounded in indigenous and local knowledge and practices. These types of worldviews are still poorly integrated into approaches to climate adaptation. This is why biocultural indicators should

be considered to allow for more holistic and tailored approaches.²⁶

Another synergy to achieve is between the 17 domains of action for sustainability.²⁷ Ocean health is relevant, as well as equity and justice, which is very important in climate

The Vanuatu ICJ initiative is, in this respect, a constructive and non-contentious transformative approach

25. Joachim Claudet, Research Director, *Centre for Island Research and Environmental Observatory (CRIOBE)*, CNRS, at the Ifri-SPC conference, September 20, 2022, *op. cit.*

26. R. Dacks, T. Tickin, A. Mawyer, S. Caillon, J. Claudet *et al.*, « Developing Biocultural Indicators for Resource Management », *Conservation Science and Practice*, 2019.

27. See the website of the UN sustainable development goals: www.sustainabledevelopment.un.org.

change policies. Ensuring an equitable access to ocean resources and recognizing and protecting the rights of women and indigenous communities is key. Innovative ocean finance that is linked to climate and conservation finance efforts should also be developed.

Minister Kaltongga also recalled the importance of considering loss and damage and the human security aspect of climate change. The Vanuatu ICJ initiative is, in this respect, a constructive and non-contentious transformative approach that global leaders, including Europeans, should be supporting.

The Way Ahead: Europe-Oceania Cooperation for Innovative Solutions

In this endeavor, the EU should take the transformative power of the European Green Deal to the Pacific and strengthen the EU's alliances with the region. The EU and the PICs should build on their historical connections, as well as interdependent links (in terms of food security, for example) to act on climate change together. A transformative action requires a global push, and the PICs are seeking European support for their initiatives.

Espen Ronneberg suggested seizing opportunities for mitigation and renewable energy in the Pacific. In Samoa, there is a surplus of biomass: 30% of the coconut harvest goes to waste and could be turned into biodiesel, with the support and expertise of European companies. On the adaptation side, there are opportunities for the PICs to exchange ideas and work with other island communities, including EU islands.

Europe and Oceania need to share their best practices, but also their failures to innovate and to better integrate all forms of knowledge

Supporting the green transition in the PICs is indeed a promising way to reinforce cooperation with the EU, according to Stefano Signore. Already, Brussels has supported energy sector reform programs in Tonga and in Samoa. The regional window for the Pacific under one of the EU financial instruments, *Electrifi*, aims to support private sector investment in this sector.²⁸ The EU can also support a science-based approach, as it is developing a digital twin of the ocean, by connecting EU assets (Copernicus, satellites, marine infrastructures) to gather data and turn it into real-time knowledge and long-term prediction. A digital twin funded by the EU and its member states should be operational by 2024.²⁹ It would make ocean knowledge open access, available to citizen science and policymakers around the world, and there will be a platform for global cooperation that includes the Pacific Island states.

28. See the website of the portal: www.electrifi.eu.

29. See the website of the project: www.research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu.

The EU wants to emphasize inclusiveness as an important element in tackling climate change. Women and girls are 14 times more likely to die or be injured due to natural disasters than men. Women should be included on an equal basis in decision making. Finally, initiatives for clean energy for EU islands, managed by the DG Energy of the European Commission, is an interesting project that promotes the exchange of experience amongst islands in terms of decarbonization, and which can be beneficial to the PICs as well.

For Joachim Claudet, Europe and Oceania need to share their best practices, but also their failures in order to innovate and look at how to better integrate all forms of knowledge. Through their experiences in tackling climate change, Pacific Island Countries have indeed become innovation hubs “where climate strategies are piloted and refined to inform adaptation efforts globally”.³⁰

Minister Baltongga expressed the need of the PICs to obtain greater financial support from the EU, which should not only come in terms of project, program or country financing, but also in terms of budgetary support that offers greater flexibility, and by better taking into account local conditions such as indigenous land ownership and so on. European private investments in renewable energy are certainly welcome, as well. Finally, ocean and marine resources are key not only for the PICs, but also for the world, and developing tools to better understand and monitor the effects of climate change on the ocean is crucial.

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30. E. Mcleod *et al.*, “Lessons From the Pacific Islands – Adapting to Climate Change by Supporting Social and Ecological Resilience”, *Frontiers Marine Sciences*, 2019.



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