



The Pacific Urban Partnership works to accelerate the implementation of the New Urban Agenda to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in the Pacific through a multi-stakeholder partnership. We mobilize resources for regional and cross-country learning and development across different sectors to achieve better integration and synergies. We host the interannual Pacific Urban Forum, with PUF-6 to be held in mid 2023.

Re: Australian Government International Development Policy – Call for Submissions

1. What key trends or challenges will shape Australia's engagement in our region and globally over the next five to 10 years? What risks and opportunities does this present for Australia's development assistance?

At least one-quarter of the Pacific's inhabitants already live in the region's cities and towns, however the share of the region's population living in urban areas is increasing at rates well above the global average. The growth of urban populations is leading to socio-economic and environmental challenges such as an increase in unemployment, rising inequalities, a growing pressure on urban service delivery and a great demand for affordable housing. Critically, cities house a disproportionate share of young Pacific Islanders who are seeking new livelihoods and economic opportunities, as well as education and international opportunities.

Intertwined with these issues are the region's high levels of vulnerability to climate change and disaster risk, which threaten traditional livelihood resources, marine and low-lying island areas, and poverty alleviation. Climate stresses that are already impacting these areas will continue to worsen, accelerating migration to the region's cities and towns. This presents a key security risk at both household and national levels that could significantly impact Australia's national interests and disrupt regional development assistance programs.

To date, ODA from bilateral donors and non-government organisations to the Pacific has primarily focused on either rural areas and associated livelihood issues, or fragmented investment in urban areas through infrastructure initiatives that lack both strategic frameworks and explicit consideration of the urban poor and vulnerable.

The review of Australia's international development strategy presents an opportunity for Australia to show leadership in this space, aligning with recent multilateral engagement in urban strategic planning in the region, both by members of the Pacific Urban Partnership and other organisations (such as the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, and the International Office for Migration).

2. What development capabilities will Australia need to respond to these challenges?

The Fifth Pacific Urban Forum (PUF5) was held in Nadi, Fiji in July 2019, bringing together over 200 urban practitioners, including two heads of government and six ministers and delegations from eight Pacific Island countries, to discuss sustainable urban development. Hosted by the Government of Fiji, PUF5 was an inclusive multi-stakeholder platform for review of progress towards the Pacific New Urban Agenda and knowledge exchange on development and policy approaches.

At the Forum the four pillars of the Pacific New Urban Agenda were reviewed and recommitted to by PIC representatives. These four pillars are:

- ❖ Social Equity and Urbanisation;
- ❖ Environment, Resilience and Urbanisation;
- ❖ Urban Economy; and
- ❖ Urban Governance.

Across each PIC, representatives have set out detailed workplans with commitments at a country scale for programs ranging from the creation of more public urban spaces to the strengthening of traditional governance in cities and towns. These commitments have recently been reviewed as part of the [2021 Virtual Pacific Urban Forum](#).

The four pillars of the Pacific New Urban Agenda and their constituent thematic areas offer not only a structural basis for a comprehensive approach to sustainable urban development as part of Australia's new international development policy, but also demonstrate areas of potential alignment with existing initiatives and programs.

3. How can Australia best utilise its national strengths to enhance the impact of our development program and address multidimensional vulnerabilities?

Australia's recognition for effective support across the Pacific throughout the COVID-19 pandemic is reflective of its existing core capabilities as a development partner to the region in the health sector. The Pacific region itself is recognised globally for having performed relatively well in reducing the spread of COVID through quarantine, border closure as well as State of Emergency declarations, responses, and more recently in vaccine uptake.

However, the effect of economic fallout from the pandemic on Pacific countries has been particularly severe. Slumping national economic activity and a collapsed international tourism industry mean many of the socioeconomic gains achieved in recent decades risk being swept away. Disruptions to shipping and other international trade highlighted the risks of food insecurity for island countries that depend heavily on food imports.

These impacts are felt most keenly by those already at risk, particularly the urban poor which account for around a quarter of the Pacific population. A focus on residents of informal settlements, daily wage labourers and vulnerable groups (particularly women, disabled people, ethnic minorities, youth, and elderly groups) is a priority to safeguard against poverty.

Australia's extensive investment in the region's health infrastructure – as well as infrastructure more broadly – could be more effectively targeted and coordinated through a more strategic urban planning approach. Critical health infrastructure is primarily located in the region's cities and towns, which in turn have acted as transmission nodes throughout the pandemic. Shortfalls in sanitation infrastructure – including access to clean water and hygiene in urban areas – also inhibit basic preventative strategies such as handwashing.

4. How should the new policy reflect the Government's commitments to build stronger and more meaningful partnerships in our region, founded on mutual trust and respect and shared values of fairness and equality?

In 2016 the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) put forward a proposal for an Australian development agenda for urbanisation in the Pacific, titled '[Prosperous and Sustainable Cities for All](#)'. The policy paper built on extensive cross-sectoral engagement, setting out eight key recommendations for integrating sustainable urban development into Australia's foreign policy, both for the Australian Government and for the NGO sector itself.

These recommendations remain critical both to the Pacific and beyond it, highlighting the need for technical expertise on urban poverty and development within DFAT, in addition to the resourcing of an urban focal point to liaise with partners and other Australian government entities. The Pacific Urban Partnership – which represents a cross-section of urban engaged non-government organisations – is itself spearheading action across several the recommendations themselves (including through facilitation of the Pacific Urban Forum, aligned with Recommendation 5), and stands ready to support efforts by DFAT to consider the policy paper anew.

5. What lessons from Australia's past development efforts should inform the policy? What is Australia seen to be doing comparatively well?

Although DFAT has not engaged extensively in sustainable urban development as part of its previous policy platforms, infrastructure investment, health services and good governance are all strengths that can be drawn upon in engaging more strategically in urban issues in the Pacific. There is also a clear alignment with the region's climate security priorities, with climate-induced migration likely to become a significant factor in regional migration patterns. Planning for these urban adaptation pathways will strengthen regional security in line with the Boe Declaration.

The Pacific's urban poor primarily occupy cities 'informally', occupying settlement areas that make up an estimated 50% of some of the region's largest cities, including Port Moresby, Port Vila, and Honiara. Informal markets and livelihoods also dominate urban economies, however, operate outside of formal governance, often with poor hygiene and safety, disproportionately affecting Pacific Island women and their livelihoods.

The Australian Government has a strong track record supporting aspects of the informal economy, for instance, through the [Markets for Change](#) program in partnership with UN Women. It has also engaged sporadically in addressing informal land tenure and land

administration, for example, through the Solomon Islands Strengthening Land Administration Program (SISLAP). By revisiting these initiatives and taking a regional approach to supporting informal settlement upgrading and the livelihoods of the urban poor, Australia has the potential to significantly address several aspects of the *2030 Agenda* focusing squarely on those people and places that are currently being 'left behind'.

6. How should the performance and delivery systems be designed to promote transparency and accountability, as well as effectiveness and learning in Australia's development assistance?

Over the last decade Australia's development assistance – and particularly its implementation – has become increasingly dependent upon third-party private sector providers, inhibiting external transparency and oversight, and promoting a competitive, tender-driven environment that steers 'providers' away from meaningful partnerships and capacity building. The lack of internal capacity and subject-matter expertise within DFAT – a function of both movement across portfolios, and limited staff capacities – is a key factor in limiting meaningful engagement with sectoral experts and organisations, both in and beyond the field of sustainable urban development.

If applied rigorously, the UN SDGs can be used to provide a detailed framework of 169 targets and 232 unique indicators, comparable across global contexts and reviewed by an [interagency group](#) of UN subject matter experts. Application can vary depending upon project scale; however, they can be used to benchmarking sustainable urban development progress across both developing and more developed contexts.

7. How should the new policy address the role of ODA and non-ODA in supporting the development of our regional partners?

In the Pacific context regional engagement, resourcing, and technical that operates both outside of bilateral ODA designations and contributes to countries and territories not considered ODA eligible, is critical. With urban technical expertise in both governments and CROP entitles severely limited, this is especially the case if the region's cities are to be made sustainable, resilient, and equitable in the faces of the multiple and compounding crises of the 21st century.

The Pacific Urban Partnership strongly recommend that DFAT engage fully sustainable urbanisation efforts in the Pacific as part of its new International Development Policy, both in terms of support of national government engagement and representation in regional fora (both relating to localisation of the SDGs and urbanisation more broadly), and through an extensive normative program (as set out in the ACFID urban policy paper). The 6th Pacific Urban Forum presents a critical opportunity to deepen DFAT's understanding of the issues faced across the region, and we look forward to further participation and engagement going forward.