

**1.** **What key trends or challenges will shape Australia's engagement in the Pacific region and globally over the next five to 10 years?**

**The increasing impact of climate change** is likely to be accompanied by economic downturns, more fluctuation and lower growth rates than the previous decade particularly in the South Pacific (including PNG). At regional, country, and local level, this is linked with increasing political instability. Without strong governance, climate change impact risks further eroding state capacity and because of this, the social contract between people and their government will be strained. This comes on the back of social dislocation, distrust and antagonism facilitated through the internet and social media. Together these factors jeopardize SDG commitments. For UNFPA purposes, this will impact efforts to promote gender equality and health, including SRH goals.

**Increasing frequency of natural disasters will necessitate a greater investment in humanitarian preparedness and response.** Natural disasters should provide opportunities to rethink existing (failing) systems e.g.: health and education and rebuilding must include building back better. There is a need for bridge programs that could be extended to help people transition into a more sustainable situation (nothing changes in 6 months if there was little to begin with). The case of climate refugees will also become more acute as sea levels continue to rise. The issue of land ownership for refugees located to the mainland will become a point of contention that the host government will need support to address or face civil unrest when communities clash over shrinking resources.

**Population growth** is expected to accelerate with the larger population count, increasing school dropout rate and lack of access to family planning information and services. The UN Secretary-General has identified demographic change as one of five mega-trends that are shaping our common future. In PNG today 60% of the population is under 25 years - which will only continue to grow if no interventions are planned. With a young age structure PNG is more likely to experience outbreaks of conflict than those with a broader distribution across different age ranges. While PNG is still mainly rural, the youth bulge, governance challenges, poverty and inequality, increasing urbanization, and violations of women's rights, as with natural resource scarcities, can exacerbate or mitigate the direct factors that may trigger a conflict.The continued population pressures coming from PNG will impact Australia most likely through increased economic (and irregular) migration particularly.

**Multi-dimensional poverty will continue to fuel interpersonal, tribal and gender-based violence**. Already ranked as one of the most violent countries globally, without a joined-up approach to address the underlying causes as well as a pathway towards peaceful conflict resolution, tools for building socio-emotional intelligence and destigmatizing mental health, violence will remain the default tool for conflict resolution. Programs to address gender-based violence that targets men, women and communities will need to be scaled up to build new social norms. This is also linked to the need to address culture and the tension between the past and modern lifestyles.

**The digital divide** is another global megatrend that continues to shape the region. Recent study ([Ray et al. 2021](https://nsc.crawford.anu.edu.au/publication/18422/digital-indo-pacific-regional-connectivity-and-resilience)) showed how the Indo-Pacific remains one of the world’s most digitally divided regions, with digital gender equity gap being an area in which the region is particularly lagging. With remote populations and locations, access to information, services, commodities, necessitates more digital and innovative approaches, however in countries like PNG with extremely low levels of education (4 years on average) without focused interventions to bridge the gap, greater inequality will follow. The digital divide can also become a generational, digital divide.

**Mining for Rare Earth Elements** (REE) will increase in countries that may have reserves. Competition for REE (as in the case of Bougainville) may lead to political and civil unrest.

**Militarization of the South Pacific** – with recent moves by China and the United States to increase their physical and military presence in the South Pacific the traditional players have been disrupted. While the CTBTO scrambles to get nations in the SP to sign/ratify the non-nuclear testing treaty, there are other challenges afoot. PNG with its growing population, and massive natural resources, dwarfs the smaller countries in the South Pacific and is thus of strategic geopolitical interest.

**2.** **What risks and opportunities does this present for Australia's development assistance?**

In a post-COVID world there is an opportunity for Australia to adopt a **female-focused development strategy** to build human capital, aimed at supporting policies, programs and strategies that support SDG targets. It does not mean that men and boys are not targeted, but a female-focused program will result in a stronger focus on access to sexual and reproductive health SRHR), support to expanding the SRHR workforce, improving access to comprehensive sexuality education within and outside of schools.

With the prevalence of STI and HIV/AIDs in PNG shifting from key population groups to a generalized population, more must be done to **destigmatize condom use and to promote health seeking behaviors for SRHR.** There is a role for young people to support destigmatizing condoms (e.g.: Condomize!) but this will need to be backed up by investments in midwifery, CHWs and professional educators working together to promote family planning. Family planning interventions are also cost effective, the return on investment for meeting the demand for family planning and maternal and newborn services is US$ 120 per every US$1 spent.

PNG’s population is young, which presents an **opportunity to harness the demographic dividend** (when the dependency rate of the population is lower than the working age population), but that must be planned for. Positively impacting PNG’s development trajectory will require **further investment in education, health, and social protection/welfare systems**. It requires the establishment of sustainable, long-term social safety nets especially for those already at greatest vulnerability and most marginalized. Key mechanisms can include free (ie. subsidized) SRHR services, social health insurance, gender responsive cash assistance and social work services, as well as job placement schemes especially for youth. People’s access to basic services like these is also a critical aspect of maintaining the social contract which is increasingly fragile.

Efforts to promote appreciation for PNG’s diversity, culture and traditions leading up to the 50th anniversary of Independence can be an opportunity to meet PNG nationals where they are today – uniquely positioned between their 1000-year history and the 21st century. The tension there can be explored and harnessed to **help the country navigate its identity leading up to the 50th anniversary in 2025.** According to SIL only seven languages are spoken by more than 100,000 people in PNG (English and Tok Pisin, being the top two) which is why more effort is needed to promote cross-cultural understanding, and nonviolent conflict resolution between the different language groups.

There will be a need for **climate risk mitigation and disaster preparedness**. Here, young people can play an important role as they are often at the front line of a humanitarian response. Integration of mental health and psycho-social support (MHPSS) into preparedness and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) mechanisms can contribute to the resilience and empowerment of affected or at-risk communities. Integrative strategies can enhance community engagement and empower youth to participate actively in DRR. There can be more active engagement of communities in preparedness and response plans (more specifically for MHPSS) youth and community members can be trained on Psychological First Aid and stress management as they are the first respondents to natural and artificial disasters). Their engagement will contribute to community ownership during the rebuilding phase.

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

The impacts of climate change will only exacerbate existing hardships, impacting on women, children, elderly, disabled and key populations the most. There is a need to understand the scale of impact on human populations in the next decades as we stand at the tipping point of ecological transition. **An accurate population count is needed** - using modern methods and/or conventional methods. Australia may choose to engage with IFIs and other partners to support governments to map the PNG population and dynamics driving rural-urban and national - international migration.

UNFPA has found that **engaging the young effectively can be just as powerful as other development incentives.** Currently there are no youth-focused development programs supported, instead support is directed to young children (primary education, WASH, nutrition) but very little targets adolescents and young people who are searching for a place in the PNG’s development narrative. National unity comes from the ability of the government to create a shared vision, built on the Constitution and a shared appreciation of diversity. Australia may support youth engagement e.g.: Mock Youth Parliaments at national and provincial levels, supporting youth engagement in climate-change mitigation, cross-provincial exchanges for young people to learn/appreciate other tribes’ cultures and break down social/language/traditional barriers and help promote a shared vision for PNG.

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

More **exchanges between PNG and other countries in the region** can promote greater learning, more opportunities for scholarships (also for Bachelor’s degrees) would also transfer Australian knowledge and thinking back to the PNG economy. Alumni networks are untapped potential for future change. Australia may consider a strategy that actively links their scholarship recipients with agencies implementing Australian-funded programs, thereby promoting a cross-fertilization of ideas and opportunity.

**Regular labor mobility programs** may offer opportunities for income-generation and remittances (the Global Forum on Migration can offer practical solutions on how to best leverage these funds beyond individual gains), it can also promote a greater interest in education from within PNG. It would be important to show a pathway towards socioeconomic growth and agency for the PNG nationals participating in these schemes, rather than PNG relying solely on their human capital as a source of foreign exchange revenue.

Australia has an expanding mental health sector. A cooperation framework could support the protection of human rights by **expanding provision of mental health care in PNG** aligned with international guidelines and international human rights standards through the revision of mental health laws and policies and the implementation of a mental health system that is multi-layered, with adequate human resources and long-term funding. Cooperation frameworks can also support sustainability by investing in capacity building and further development of existing health systems. Given the amount of physical and emotional trauma experienced by a significant portion of the population, the provision of mental health services (from self-care tools to psychiatric support) can support other development efforts in the country.

Deeper **analysis of the role of men and boys in the perpetuation of violence** and how this has evolved through time. Look into issues of toxic masculinity and adopting effective and sustained ways of how men and boys could help prevent the violence in the community. See how men could be positively engaged in improving access to SRHR through messaging which includes women and men given that male spouses and partners heavily influence the decisions in family planning.

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

Australia’s interventions to promote gender equality have been strong, but there is a big opportunity for both **prevention and response to GBV to be incorporated into expanding social protection** efforts, including support for an expanded social workforce.

Australia’s **investment in supply chain for reproductive health commodities** (C-Surge) has had very good results in only 18 months of the program. Thanks to C-Surge there is an ongoing effort to reduce stockouts, promote information sharing and increase capacity to order the correct quantities of stocks. Similarly, Australia’s support to UNFPA SUPPLIES has led to PNG for the first time ever utilizing a third-party procurement (TPP) agreement with UNFPA to secure reproductive health (RH) commodities, thereby also accessing a matching grant. Without continued support to a program like this, the supply chain will once again be broken. It needs to be strengthened so that it runs without UNFPA in the future. Australia is alone in supporting RH supplies through UNFPA, yet this is the backbone of a successful health management system in rural areas.

While not directly supported through UNFPA, **Australia’s support to on-the-job training for midwives is very strong and could be scaled up.** More support will be needed from external midwifery educators once the NDOH policy to expand access to midwifery is cleared for action. This is an area that UNFPA has been pushing together with Burnet Institute to address the catastrophically low health workforce levels. It would mean introducing a Bachelor’s program for midwifery for school leavers as well as keeping the current 18-month specialization. PNG has less than 800 midwives, and needs 5000 (almost double that, if the modelled population estimate is accepted)

Australia’s support for population data has **revolutionized how NSO works with new population technologies**. While the population estimate using the latest modelling is yet to be released, the project has allowed UNFPA, DFAT and the Government to better understand the urgent need to revise the current population figures. The same project has promoted a better understanding of data literacy, visualization, use and storytelling among DNPM and NSO staff nationally and provincially. The data trainings have been shared with research institutions like IMR and they have requested further trainings on how data can be presented in a more accessible manner to promote evidence-based policymaking.

**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?**

Exploring opportunities for value co-creation at the national and sub-national level: Conventional approaches to development in PNG such as the traditional medium-term planning and policy development and budgeting in a combined centralized (national planning) and decentralized (service delivery) governance setting and increasing vulnerabilities, uncertainties and ambiguities all require re-thinking. A strong advocacy for enabling and institutionalizing platforms for change and innovation to tried and tested approaches such as value co-creation, innovations at scale and scenario thinking where relevant in the areas of Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights, Gender-based Violence prevention and population dynamics at both the national and local levels provide an exciting and promising area for accelerated and sustained change to happen in Papua New Guinea.

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

Strong health and social protection systems are beyond the capacity of one donor. They **require a broad range of financial instruments and approaches including, but beyond, Official Development Assistance**. Any development interventions should be closely linked with taxation reform and anti-corruption efforts. Growing global economic downturns risk further eroding donor country appetite for this scale of development aid so this must be accounted for in financing strategy while prioritizing efforts to ensure minimum standards for health, social protection, education, and decent work.

A **shift from funding support to “financing” from domestic and non-traditional sources of support and leveraging are important** if PNG wants to meet its SDG health targets, including family planning and maternal health.SRHR targets can’t be achieved with limited donor appetite for SRHR and low levels of the government’s sustained and timely health expenditures per capita, high out-of-pocket costs with service delivery points charging for medication and qualified service providers, and stock-outs of commodities, including essential medicines and modern family planning contraceptives. Traditional beliefs and violence that are prevalent in PNG also affect health-seeking behaviours such as women’s ability to seek and receive care during pregnancy and childbirth. Australia can leverage its influence as the largest development actor in PNG to mobilize support from IFI’s to address the acute needs for women’s health and wellbeing.