



**Submission by Caritas Australia to the**

**Inquiry into strengthening Australia's relationships  
with countries in the Pacific region**

**May 2020**

**The Catholic agency for international aid and development**  
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## Who we are

Caritas Australia is the international aid agency of the Catholic Church in Australia. We are a member of Caritas Internationalis, the world's second largest humanitarian network which collectively has more than 500,000 staff and 20 million volunteers operating through 169 national Caritas agencies in over 200 countries and territories.

Over the last 56 years Caritas Australia has worked to uphold human dignity and promote justice in partnership with marginalised communities regardless of their ethnicity, political beliefs or religion. Caritas Australia supports long-term and holistic development programs in the Pacific, Asia, Indigenous Australia and Africa.

In 2019-20, working with 91 partners, we supported 65 long-term programs in 23 countries and 30 humanitarian and emergency responses in 20 countries. Caritas Australia reached over 1.52 million people directly through emergency and development programs.

Over 60,000 people in Australia actively support our work through fundraising and advocacy.

## Our partners in the Pacific

Caritas Australia is a member of **Caritas Oceania**, which brings together highly diverse members from the larger and smaller islands of the Pacific. Alongside Caritas Australia, other members are Caritas Fiji, Caritas Papua New Guinea, Caritas Samoa, Caritas Tonga, Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand and CEPAC (Caritas Pacific Islands). Together, we work on development, emergency response, climate change and peace building. Collectively, the Caritas Network has a wide presence across the Pacific, covering 20 countries.

Caritas Australia is a member of the **Church Agency Network (CAN)**, a Church-based network of eleven Australian overseas aid and development agencies committed to empowering people and providing avenues for them to overcome injustice and poverty. We work closely with our churches and in-country partners to strengthen civil society.

We are also a member of the **Church Agency Network Disaster Operations (CAN DO)**, a network of eight Australian church-based aid and development agencies with long-established relationships in humanitarian and development programs in the Pacific. CAN DO members work with local church partners and grassroots organisations to increase their capacity to respond to emergencies, as well as supporting them to build resilience and implement disaster risk reduction activities in their communities.

## About this submission

This submission is based on our experience in working with our Caritas Oceania partners and our CAN and CAN DO networks. It incorporates the lived experiences of our partners across Oceania.

We welcome this Inquiry and the opportunity it represents to re-assess Australia's relationships with our Pacific neighbours and to identify opportunities to strengthen these relationships.

### Contact for this submission

Zhi Yan, Campaigns Coordinator, Caritas Australia

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## Overarching statement

Caritas Australia believes that Australia's relationships with other Pacific island countries will be strongest when Australia's engagement is founded on two principles:

- **Putting the rights of the most vulnerable and marginalised people at the centre of our engagement.** Australia's engagement in the Pacific should focus on ensuring that vulnerable communities and groups are protected and key drivers of marginalisation addressed to achieve inclusive and dignified development.
- **Subsidiarity.** Decisions should be made by the people closest and most affected by the issues and concerns of the community. Programmatically it is expressed through 'localisation', where local communities and organisations are supported and empowered, as partners in a reciprocal relationship, to lead their own development.

## Engage and empower Pacific churches as key community and development partners in the Pacific

With over 90 per cent of people across the Pacific identifying as Christian, faith is central to the lives of Pacific peoples and churches play a central role in Pacific societies. Churches in the Pacific have extensive reach and long-established networks, and have been key actors in community development, humanitarian emergency response, peace-building and advocating for good governance.<sup>1</sup> Partnerships between Australian and Pacific faith-based organisations reflect the shared values around the freedom of belief and the importance that faith plays in open and democratic societies.

Churches are often amongst the first responders in emergencies, with the ability to activate their local networks quickly and to access areas that other humanitarian responders sometimes cannot (e.g. high conflict zones) due to their respected status. Church leaders are trusted and influential messengers in the Pacific and can frame social issues in locally appropriate terms. For all these reasons they are key community and development partners in the Pacific.

**Recommendation:** Engage and empower Pacific churches as key community and development partners, when implementing the Pacific Step-up and the new International Development Policy.

### **Case study: Church networks respond to Cyclone Harold in Samoa, Tonga and Fiji**

Across the Caritas Network in the Pacific, Member Organisations have responded to the impacts of Tropical Cyclone Harold (April 2020) in Samoa, Tonga and Fiji. The ability of the Caritas network to reach affected communities in a timely way through the reach of the Church in affected communities puts them in a unique position to respond quickly and collaborate closely with communities and key stakeholders on the ground. Key activities being implemented include the provision of immediate relief, psychosocial support and access to water, sanitation and hygiene. Ensuring churches are supported to continue to build their preparedness and response capacity, in conjunction with local communities strengthens the resilience of vulnerable Pacific communities and promotes local action.

<sup>1</sup> An example is that, collectively through Church Partnership Program, PNG Churches advocated for a "seat at the table" of the Disaster Management Team, so that the Churches are now represented on that body and can contribute to disaster responses in the country and ensure decision making reflects the needs on the ground and churches are actively engaged in responses given their reach.

## Promote locally-led development and humanitarian response

Development works best when local communities are the architects of their own development. Our experience working with partners and communities in the Pacific has emphasised that partnerships based on a localisation approach, as well as reciprocity and mutual learning, are the most effective partnerships with the best development outcomes.

In the humanitarian context this approach aligns with the Grand Bargain principles. The Grand Bargain, to which Australia is a signatory, commits donors and humanitarian organisations to supporting locally-led humanitarian responses, with commitment to get more means into the hands of people in need and to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the humanitarian action.

The importance of localisation is more pronounced than ever in the face of our region's newest challenge, the COVID-19 pandemic. In light of travel restrictions and other challenges, it is critical that local actors have the capacity to lead responses to COVID-19.

A key element in localisation is enabling local organisations to access long-term, multi-year funding. One example of implementation of this approach is the Church Partnership Program, where the combination of long-term partnership (16 years over three phases) and multi-year funding agreements for church partners has been significant in deepening the capacity of churches, strengthening church collaboration and improving finance and administrative efficiencies.<sup>2</sup> Multi-year funding also enabled partners to maintain their response capacity and quickly scale up to deliver assistance in the event of an emergency, such as the PNG Earthquake response and the COVID-19 crisis.

However, generally speaking many local organisations including churches have found it challenging to access funding, partly because of difficulties in navigating high levels of bureaucracy and complex donor requirements.

**Recommendations:** Promote localisation measures that empower and support Pacific churches and other local actors to lead their own development and humanitarian initiatives. This includes:

- a) Ensuring local actors have opportunities to access long-term, multi-year funding for development programs and institutional strengthening.
- b) Promoting locally-led humanitarian action through developing new ways of working, forming new partnerships, removing barriers to participation and investing in capacity strengthening of local organisations. To support this, the Government should work towards the Grand Bargain target of providing at least 25 per cent of humanitarian funding to local and national responders as directly as possible.

### **Case study: Building the capacity of local PNG churches brings sustained results**

The Church Partnership Program (CPP) in Papua New Guinea is an example of how supporting and empowering local churches to work with communities and each other leads to stronger, more resilient communities.

Funded by DFAT, the CPP brings together seven mainline churches and their Australian faith-based NGO partners including Caritas Australia. The seven mainline churches are  
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<sup>2</sup> Church Partnerships Program Mid-term Review. Quality and Technical Assurance Group, 2019.

attended by over 70 per cent of the population and deliver a significant proportion of core government functions, including 50 per cent of basic community-based health and education services.

The CPP has enabled churches to enhance their existing development and service delivery work, and provided unique opportunities to work collectively on common issues such as promoting greater gender equality and social inclusion. The CPP's independent mid-term review found that 'for a relatively small investment, CPP has a multiplier effect across the development sector through its emphasis on capacity building, cross-learning and increasingly on policy engagement'.<sup>3</sup>

## Support Pacific Churches to frame their own development narratives

'Reweaving the Ecological Mat' is a transformative, Pacific-wide initiative driven by Churches and faith-based groups to re-frame the Pacific development narrative into one that is uniquely Pacific and based on their own value system including placing ecology at the heart of their development. Reweaving the Ecological Mat (REM) is led by the Pacific Theological College's Institute of Mission and Research and the Pacific Conference of Churches and is being developed in conversation with church leaders, academic institutions, governments and other civil society groups. DFAT has supported the REM project through its partnership with members of the Church Agency Network including Caritas Australia.

*'It's about reframing the narrative or conversation in the way we address the issue of life in the Pacific, holistic life, looking at the way we learn things and the world, the influence of global structures and systems, recognizing those, and offering alternatives so that people of the Pacific and creation and the environment is able to live a truly sustainable life and we are able to grow into the future with a more healthy outlook, not just spiritually, physically, emotionally but also in the sense of how we thrive. We need to change the conversations around resilience in the context of climate change disaster from survival mode to thriving.'* - Reverend James Bhagwan, General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches

Churches are well placed to lead this dialogue. As George Hoa'au, a member of the Advisory Committee of the REM Framework said, 'The church has a very special kind of respect within villages, people don't see the member of parliament every day, they see the pastor and priest every day.'<sup>4</sup>

Another example of a locally-driven framework for development is the Gutpela Sindaun model in Papua New Guinea (see next page).

**Recommendation:** Support partnerships and initiatives that empower Pacific churches and communities to frame their own development narratives based on Pacific values and including environmentally resilient approaches.

<sup>3</sup> Church Partnerships Program Mid-term Review. Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> 'Reweaving the Ecological Mat', Pacific Theological College. [http://ptc.ac.fj/?page\\_id=2016](http://ptc.ac.fj/?page_id=2016)

### **Case Study: Gutpela Sindaun (Abundant Life) in Papua New Guinea**

The Church Partnership Program supports Pacific communities to frame their own development narratives through the church networks. These development narratives are founded on local understandings of wellbeing, such as Gutpela Sindaun (abundant life) in Papua New Guinea. Gutpela Sindaun refers to a 'life in balance', and is distinct from Western models of wellbeing as it does not refer to individual wealth, but instead prioritises abundance for all community members. The CPP partners work together to ensure that Gutpela Sindaun is promoted in Papua New Guinean communities in order to support local leadership and solutions.

Gutpela Sindaun is composed of six pillars:

1. Spiritual: comfort via religion and tradition, such as seeking comfort from God,
2. Physical: the importance of shelter, family and community, and responsible stewardship of natural resources,
3. Mental: the dignity of all human beings,
4. Emotional: fulfilment and the feeling of being supported and safe from threats of violence,
5. Environmental: responsible and respectful management of resources so that there is no hunger or thirst,
6. Cultural: the value of community order and positive participation of all.

For development narratives to be meaningful to communities in Papua New Guinea they must address all six pillars of Gutpela Sindaun, as the six pillars are considered equal and indivisible for wellbeing.

## **Listen to the priorities of the governments and peoples of Pacific island countries**

Our experience working with Pacific partners and communities has shown us the importance of talanoa in relationship-building – of having open, respectful dialogue between partners and listening deeply to each other's priorities. The same approach will help ensure Pacific Step-up initiatives reflect the priority needs of the governments and peoples of Pacific island countries.

In these unprecedented times of the coronavirus pandemic, building resilience to prepare for and respond to COVID-19 is a critical priority for countries across the Pacific.

On a longer-term basis, the Catholic Church, partners and communities we work with in the Pacific have consistently told us that protection of the environment and climate change, and the protection and inclusion of women and youth, are amongst their top priorities.

## **Strengthening Pacific resilience to the impacts of COVID-19**

We commend the Australian Government for the steps it has already taken to support other Pacific nations to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and to establish a regional humanitarian corridor. We welcome the 'Partnerships for Recovery' COVID-19 Development Response plan, and encourage the Government to continue dialogue with local actors including churches, and with Australian aid organisations who have partnerships with local actors, about the details of implementing the plan. We endorse this cooperative long-term approach.

Many countries in the Pacific are highly vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic due to underlying challenges to public health systems and access to sanitation. COVID-19 has highlighted ongoing and underlying needs to improve water, sanitation and health services and to promote better hygiene practices and nutrition. At this time, Australian assistance is much needed to strengthen the resilience of countries' healthcare systems to support COVID-19 preparedness, prevent secondary health impacts and combat existing infection diseases such as tuberculosis.

Pacific nations are also highly vulnerable to the economic shocks created by the COVID-19 pandemic, as many of their economies are heavily reliant on domestic travel and trade as well as tourism. Building economic resilience and supporting an inclusive, COVID-safe and environmentally sustainable economic recovery is now a key priority for the region.

An important focus for economic resilience is strengthening livelihoods, particularly for people in the most vulnerable sectors such as the informal economy. In many Pacific countries, a large proportion of the workforce is engaged in the informal economy (around 77 per cent in the Solomon Islands, 59 per cent in Vanuatu and 41 per cent in PNG).<sup>5</sup> To support people who have lost their jobs or income through the informal sector as a result of the crisis, strategies to provide readily available funding for income generation, e.g. community microcredit schemes, will be key in supporting people to regain economic independence.

COVID-19 has also highlighted the importance of engaging indigenous leaders and using indigenous local knowledge and skills to increase local community resilience, especially in the areas of livelihoods and food security. In some cases, the crisis has forced communities to go back to some of the 'old ways' where survival knowledge and skills are learned from the elder members of the community.

### **Recommendations:**

- Scale up Australia's assistance to Pacific nations to strengthen the resilience of their economies and healthcare systems to respond to the primary and secondary impacts of COVID-19 on incomes, livelihoods and health. This will hinge on new and additional funding for COVID-19 initiatives to ensure that existing development programs that are critical to building community stability and resilience are not diminished.
- Leverage and support established local networks, including church networks, to quickly activate and scale up timely local responses to COVID-19.

### **Case study: Local PNG churches activate a fast response to COVID-19**

The CPP has played an important role in supporting the PNG government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Church networks have been able to leverage their existing health and education infrastructure and staff on the ground to effectively respond to the crisis. The COVID-19 CPP outreach has included provision of health services and dissemination of important hygiene messages through these existing church networks.

Church-run education facilities have also played an important role in promoting change through awareness-raising and community outreach activities to ensure that even the most vulnerable have access to life-saving knowledge and services. With the support of CAN DO/AHP through DFAT, three church NGOs (Caritas PNG, the United Church of

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<sup>5</sup> Development Asia policy brief: Strategies for Transforming Businesses from Informal to Formal.  
<https://development.asia/policy-brief/strategies-transforming-businesses-informal-formal>

PNG and ADRA PNG) are implementing risk communications and WASH activities in local dioceses and parishes in Western and Milne Bay provinces.

Church leaders are also able to provide crucial psychosocial support through existing pastoral care mechanisms, and have been supporting communities by addressing fears and confusion about COVID-19. The church network in PNG is currently focussing on ways to support the 'new normal' through preparedness and prevention measures in schools and other church-run facilities.

## Environmental protection, climate change and disaster risk reduction

The Pacific region is increasingly vulnerable to the effects of climate change and environmental degradation. As documented in annual Caritas Oceania State of the Environment reports<sup>6</sup>, communities are losing homes, food and water security, public infrastructure, health, wellbeing, livelihoods and even lives as a result of environmental degradation and climate-related disasters.

This is why Caritas Oceania has made environmental protection one of their top strategic priorities and dedicated themselves in 2018 to 'caring for our common home – the Earth'.<sup>7</sup>

The Federation of Catholic Bishops Conferences of Oceania (FCBCO) highlighted this issue in their 2018 Statement 'Care for our Common Home of Oceania: a sea of possibilities', saying:

*'An urgent ethical challenge facing the worldwide human family today concerns economic development dependent upon fossil fuel-based energy, especially coal. More than any other factor this form of commercial growth is contributing to destructive climate change. Every day our people are suffering from the negative - indeed sometimes disastrous - effects of global warming. These include rising sea levels, rising ocean temperatures, acidification of waters and coral bleaching, and threats to biodiversity (cf. Laudato Si' 41) alongside the more widely noticed increasing extreme weather patterns of cyclones, typhoons and storms.'*

The FCBCO statement ends: 'We again implore governments to exercise responsible leadership in favour of the common good, future generations and our mother earth.'

The Pacific Conference of Churches also identified environmental protection and climate change as a key priority, as evident in the Reweaving the Ecological Mat framework. At a government level, Member States of the Pacific Islands Forum affirmed in their 2018 Boe Declaration that 'climate change remains the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific'.<sup>8</sup>

We welcome DFAT's recently released Climate Change Action Strategy, and its recognition of the growing impacts of climate change in the Pacific and the fundamental link with natural disasters. We welcome any opportunities to discuss strategies to embed climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction throughout our international development assistance program and the wider Pacific Step-up.

<sup>6</sup> Available at [www.caritas.org.au/oceania](http://www.caritas.org.au/oceania)

<sup>7</sup> Statement from the 2018 Caritas Oceania Forum: Caring For Our Common Home.

<sup>8</sup> Boe Declaration on Regional Security <https://www.forumsec.org/boe-declaration-on-regional-security/>



Given that Pacific Island nations have a disproportionately high exposure to climate-related catastrophes, we believe that disaster risk reduction and disaster preparedness measures should be a strong focus of Australian assistance to the region. Such measures should include support for disaster risk reduction programming, the development of disaster management activities, mobilizing communities to identify risk and vulnerabilities, the development of early warning systems and working with government bodies to strengthen capacity at all levels.

However, no preventative or restorative disaster strategy will be effective without a deep understanding of the root causes of that vulnerability, and of our own influence, domestically as well as regionally, in relation to tackling climate action.

Pacific leaders have been unequivocal that Australia's stance on climate change mitigation efforts at home is affecting Australia's relationships with small island Pacific nations<sup>9</sup>, and have urged the Australian Government to align its domestic climate policies with Australia's commitments under the Paris Agreement to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees. Australia now has a unique opportunity as it considers new strategies in light of COVID-19 to invest in climate-friendly systems that will simultaneously respond to post-COVID economic recovery efforts, future-proof our economy against increasing climate shocks and protect our shared climate.

Under the Paris Agreement, the Australian Government has also committed to contributing to the global climate finance goal to help fund climate adaptation and mitigation for less wealthy countries. We encourage the Australian Government to increase investment in funding mechanisms that enable grassroots organisations to access climate finance. This has been a challenge for many communities in the Pacific, who have found that 'processes are complicated, time-consuming and not tailored to local culture. All too often, climate finance instruments do not provide for realistic support to local communities or small-scale projects' (Caritas State of the Environment for Oceania Report 2018).<sup>10</sup>

### **Recommendations:**

- Increase investment in climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction funding mechanisms that are accessible to local civil society actors including churches, consistent with the principle of localisation.
- Mainstream climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction across all Pacific Step-up initiatives.
- Develop and implement a roadmap to align Australia's domestic climate policies with our commitment to the Paris Agreement target of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees, especially in light of any new policy framework emerging from the COVID-19 recovery.

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<sup>9</sup> Recent examples include statements made in media interviews by Pacific leaders at the 2018 and 2019 Pacific Island Forums

<sup>10</sup> Waters of life, oceans of mercy. Caritas State of the Environment for Oceania 2018 Report

## Participation of Women and Youth in decision-making

Another priority for Caritas Oceania is to increase the participation and influence of women and youth in both community and regional initiatives, and to enable their voices to influence decision-making at local, regional and international levels.

Women and girls in the Pacific face significant challenges to equality and inclusion. Violence against women and girls is of high concern – in some Pacific countries over 60 per cent of women have experienced violence<sup>11</sup> (including family violence, rape and in some countries, sorcery accusations-related violence) and there remains a strong need for culturally appropriate interventions targeting mindsets and behaviour in the long term. The underlying issue of violence against women undoubtedly affects participation rates by women in civil society. Across the Pacific, men outnumber women in paid employment (outside the agricultural sector) by approximately two to one, and males typically earn 20 to 50 per cent more than women because they work in jobs attracting higher salaries.<sup>12</sup> The percentage of women in Pacific parliaments is currently very low at around 8.6 per cent.<sup>13</sup>

A DFAT-funded program that has gained much ground towards strengthening women's leadership and improving the political, economic and social opportunities of Pacific women is the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development Program (PWSPDP). Funding for this 10-year program is set to expire in 2021-2022. To continue supporting our Pacific family to encourage women's leadership and participation, we recommend renewing the PWSPDP, along with supporting other new innovative forms of funding targeting this issue. We also recommend measures to increase local church engagement in the PWSPDP to ensure that local churches are part of the dialogue on this initiative and engaged to explore the role that they can play.

In the Pacific 56 per cent of the population is under the age of 25. Young people in the region face a number of challenges, including youth unemployment and access to training opportunities, with specific challenges encountered by young women, rural youth and young people with disabilities. Youth in the Pacific are also largely excluded from meaningful participation in decision making in areas that concern their development.<sup>14</sup>

Caritas' experience in involving youth may provide some useful insights for the Australian Government's engagement of youth in the Pacific Step-up. The 2019 Caritas Internationalis General Assembly marked the first time in Caritas' history that a Youth Forum was held. Their message to the Assembly was: 'Recognise us as leaders with unique perspectives and talents and give us ownership of our contribution to Caritas' work. Youth are not just the future of Caritas but the present. We can only have greater impact on the communities where Caritas is present if we are an inclusive intergenerational family where Youth have a word in our common home.'<sup>15</sup>

Caritas Oceania has taken a number of steps to increase youth participation in our region, including creating a Youth Representative position on the Caritas Oceania Regional

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<sup>11</sup> WHO supports the end of violence against women and girls in the Pacific. WHO, 2017.

[www.who.int/westernpacific/about/how-we-work/pacific-support/news/detail/12-12-2017-who-supports-the-end-of-violence-against-women-and-girls-in-the-pacific](https://www.who.int/westernpacific/about/how-we-work/pacific-support/news/detail/12-12-2017-who-supports-the-end-of-violence-against-women-and-girls-in-the-pacific)

<sup>12</sup> Pacific Regional - Empowering women and girls, DFAT. [www.dfat.gov.au/geo/pacific/development-assistance/Pages/gender-equality-pacific-regional](https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/pacific/development-assistance/Pages/gender-equality-pacific-regional)

<sup>13</sup> National Women MPs 2020, Pacific Women in Politics. <https://www.pacwip.org/women-mps/national-women-mps/>

<sup>14</sup> The Pacific Youth Development Framework 2014–2023. Social Development Division of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Final Message, Caritas Internationalis General Assembly. Rome, 23-28 May 2019.

Commission to inform decision making, and holding youth-focused events such as a youth-led webinar during 'Laudato Si' Week' in May 2020.<sup>16</sup>

### **Case study: Youth leadership in Caritas Tonga**

Caritas Tonga has a strong disaster preparedness and response program which actively involves young people in emergency relief. Since 2015 Caritas Tonga has partnered with Tonga National Youth Congress for their preposition stockpile program. The youth are engaged to provide assistance with the distribution of emergency stockpile immediately after emergencies. 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. Caritas Tonga is also most grateful for the alliance with the Catholic Diocesan Youth who lend manpower and survey teams to augment the efforts of the Caritas Tonga office. We envision that the partnership will continue for many years to come. The partnership with youth also extends beyond stockpile 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. – *Caritas Tonga*

### **Recommendations:**

- Promote women's leadership by renewing the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development Program, along with other new innovative forms of funding targeting leadership and participation by women.
- Identify and implement measures to increase local church engagement in the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development Program, to ensure that local churches are part of the dialogue and engaged to explore the role that they can play.
- Ensure Pacific Step-up initiatives and Australia's new International Development Policy recognises the rights of the most vulnerable members of our Pacific family, particularly women and youth.

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<sup>16</sup> Laudato Si' Week is a global campaign to encourage Catholic communities to take action to care for the earth. Laudato Si' is the name of the 2015 encyclical written by Pope Francis on 'caring for our common home'. <https://laudatosiweek.org>

## Summary of recommendations

### **TOR1: The implementation of Australia's Pacific Step-up as a whole-of-government effort to deepen and coordinate Australia's Pacific initiatives**

In implementing the Pacific Step-up and the new International Development Policy we recommend that the Australian Government:

- Engage and empower Pacific churches as key community and development partners.
- Promote localisation measures that empower and support Pacific churches and other local actors to lead their own development and humanitarian initiatives. This includes:
  - Ensuring local actors have opportunities to access long-term, multi-year funding for development programs and institutional strengthening.
  - Promoting locally-led humanitarian action through developing new ways of working, forming new partnerships, removing barriers to participation and investing in capacity strengthening of local organisations. To support this, the Government should work towards the Grand Bargain target of providing at least 25 per cent of humanitarian funding to local and national responders as directly as possible.
- Support partnerships and initiatives that empower Pacific churches and communities to frame their own development narratives based on Pacific values and including environmentally resilient approaches.

### **TOR 3: Measures to ensure Step-up initiatives reflect the priority needs of the governments and people of Pacific island countries.**

In response to priorities identified by the governments and peoples of Pacific Island countries, we encourage the Australian Government to:

- Scale up Australia's assistance to Pacific nations to strengthen the resilience of their economies and healthcare systems to respond to the primary and secondary impacts of COVID-19 on incomes, livelihoods and health. This will hinge on new and additional funding for COVID-19 initiatives to ensure that existing development programs that are critical to building community stability and resilience are not diminished.
- Leverage and support established local networks, including church networks, to quickly activate and scale up timely local responses to COVID-19.
- Promote women's leadership by renewing the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development Program, along with other new innovative forms of funding targeting leadership and participation by women.
- Identify and implement measures to increase local church engagement in the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development Program, to ensure that local churches are part of the dialogue and engaged to explore the role that they can play.
- Ensure Pacific Step-up initiatives and Australia's new International Development Policy recognises the rights of the most vulnerable members of our Pacific family, particularly women and youth.
- Increase investment in climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction funding mechanisms that are accessible to local civil society actors including churches, consistent with the principle of localisation.
- Mainstream climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction across all Pacific Step-up initiatives.
- Develop and implement a roadmap to align Australia's domestic climate policies with our commitment to the Paris Agreement target of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees, especially in light of any new policy framework emerging from the COVID-19 recovery.