



**PACIFIC ISLANDS
FORUM SECRETARIAT**



CONCEPT NOTE
REGIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATION FORUM
SUVA, FIJI
20 – 22 MARCH 2019

Background

1. Working with Non-State Actors (NSAs) is an important part of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) approach to realise the vision of Pacific Island Forum Leaders articulated in the Framework for Pacific Regionalism (FPR). The Forum Secretariat remains committed to building stronger partnerships and relationships with NSAs.
2. In terms of working with NSAs, the Forum Secretariat focuses on:
 - Engagement – facilitating the constructive engagement of NSAs with regional policy, at the development and implementation side (downstream)
 - Capacity building – supporting non state actors to better inform regional policy with evidence based approaches, and implementing the same.
 - Partnership – working with NSAs to effectively test and challenge policy advice.
3. In partnership with the European Union, under the European Development Fund (EDF) 11, continued ¹funding support to NSA programming within PIFS has enabled opportunities to further strengthen and institutionalize CSOs (including women’s groups) to participate meaningfully in regional policy processes and dialogues.
4. Since the implementation of the FPR in 2015, civil society organisations have actively participated in the regional agenda setting process. Over this period 3 issues namely West Papua, Cervical Cancer and ICT were proposed by CSOs and partners and have been endorsed by Forum Leaders. In addition, at the CSO dialogue with Forum Economic Ministers in Palau in 2018, Economic Ministers endorsed the establishment of (i) Pacific sport, physical activity and physical education (PSPAPE) Action Plan; and (ii) regional mechanism to develop the PSPAPE Action Plan and take the lead in its implementation. This highlights the importance of inclusive policy making espoused under the Framework for Pacific Regionalism.
5. As part of PIFS efforts to further enhance CSO engagement in regional policy processes and mechanisms, the annual regional CSO Forum will be convened by PIFS in Suva from the 20th – 22nd March, 2019

¹ Under the RAO TECCBUF and Pacific Partnership in Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (PPEVAWG)

6. The regional CSO Forum will explore opportunities and entry points for partnerships in the implementation and monitoring of regional priorities and frameworks. Building on the past and current success CSOs have had in the upstream “regional policy setting process”, this year targeted support will focus around activities that can strengthen CSOs to impact the downstream process of implementation.
7. In addition there will be a concerted effort to explore opportunities to forge partnerships with governments, development partners and CROP agencies to empower CSOs contribute to the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the regions key priorities.
8. The annual regional Civil Society Organization Forum is the corner stone of the NSA Programme. The CSO Forum aims to provide a space for Civil Society Organizations from across the region to convene, discuss specific policy issues facing the region, and provide governments and policy makers with evidence-based, collective positions on regional level policy. In the lead up to the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders meeting in Tuvalu in August and the Forum Economic Ministers Meeting (FEMM) in May 2019, civil societies and their communities will gather in Suva, Fiji for the annual regional CSO Forum.

Aims and expected outcomes of the regional CSO Forum

9. The aims of the regional CSO Forum will be to:
 - Provide representatives from civil society from across the region to meet and explore opportunities around engaging with governments, CROP and development partners on avenues for partnerships to deliver on current Leaders’ priorities.
 - Collectively identify opportunities and to develop strategies to strengthen engagement on gender equality and elimination of violence against women and girls
 - Provide a forum for civil society to explore options to develop collective positions on regional policy priorities including status of implementation of gender equality commitments in their engagement with Forum Economic Ministers in May 2019, and Pacific Islands Forum Leaders in August 2019.
 - Determine prospective CSO representation at the Forum Economic Ministers and Pacific Leaders Meetings in 2019.

The expected outcomes of the regional CSO Forum are:

- Enhanced mutual understanding amongst civil society groups in relation to the paradigm between national and regional level advocacy strategies and how to draw relevant linkages between national and regional priorities/issues
- Collective advice and positions around regional policy priorities presented to Economic Ministers and Forum Leaders
- Identified strategies by CSOs to strengthen and sustain high level policy engagements and dialogue with the Forum Economic Ministers and Leaders, and policy makers into the future
- Increased understanding of gender equality and EVAWG commitments at national and regional level.
- Relationship and network development amongst civil society groups.

Format of the Regional CSO Forum 2019

10. The event will be designed in such a way that will facilitate discussions around potential areas of expertise/ contribution towards regional priorities. Participants will elect speakers to present their collective views to Forum Economic Ministers and with Forum Leaders scheduled for the 14th August in Tuvalu. The regional CSO Forum will culminate with a debriefing session and advocacy strategy development for sustained engagement around identified policy issues. It will also include an evaluation of the CSO Forum to capture lessons on the new focus and purpose of the event.

11. The following table presents the series of events prior to and post regional CSO Forum:

i. National policy dialogue and consultations	Each Forum Island Country February – March 2019
ii. Gender Workshop	Suva, Fiji 18-19 March 2019
iii. Regional CSO Forum – Preparatory meeting for FEMM and Forum Leaders	20- 22 March 2019
iv. NSA Development Partners Seminar	22 March 2019
v. CSO Dialogue with Forum Economic Ministers	Suva, Fiji 7 May 2019
vi. CSO Engagement with Forum Leaders	Tuvalu 14 August 2019

12. CSO participants will identify and select issues and topics to be discussed at the regional CSO Forum. The outcome will inform the specific issues to be presented to Forum Economic Ministers and Pacific Island Forum Leaders in 2019. PIFS advice will focus on encouraging and empowering CSOs to seek opportunities for meaningful partnerships with Members, CROP and development partners in the implementation and tracking of current regional priorities. It is anticipated that by forging new partnerships or strengthening existing ones, their engagement with FEMM and Forum Leaders will potentially shift from proposing new issues to opportunities where they could work together with governments, CROP and development partners in delivering on the regional priorities.

13. The CSO Forum will allow representatives to consult on potential issues and initiatives that will be discussed by Leaders at the Pacific Island Forum this year. This will ensure that the engagement with FEMM and Forum Leaders remains relevant, meaningful and productive in that it will focus on topics of immediate priority to the region and provides civil society with an opportunity to present their contribution on the proposed and/ or current priorities.

14. A consultant will be recruited to design and facilitate the regional CSO Forum. An open single stage tender will be used for the recruitment of the consultant.

15. A draft program, will be developed in consultation with civil society representatives.

Participation

16. The Regional CSO Forum will include *up to* 50 CSOs with the following representation:
- 2 CSO Representatives from each Forum Member Country (Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu, French Polynesia, New Caledonia.)
 - 10 CSO Representatives from regionally focused CSOs/INGOs
 - CSOs can nominate up to 4 technical experts to assist in development of their policy/ position statement.
17. A call for applications to participate in the Regional CSO Forum will be distributed widely amongst civil society networks (including the CSO reps who participated at the regional policy consultations series undertaken over the period January-February 2019). A competitive process will be used to select the participants based on their organizations:
- Understanding of regional level issues and how these align to national level interests;
 - Capacity to coordinate and collaborate with their governments and development partners in the implementation and tracking of key regional priorities.
 - Ability to truly represent a constituent group that is impacted by / or interested in regional policy; and
 - Demonstrated commitment to maximize the opportunity to participate in this event for the benefit of the region / Pacific peoples
18. A selection panel comprising members of the PIFS Internal NSA Working Group and an external observer including a gender expert will select the participants. Selection will be based around the merits of their application with a view to ensuring the composition of the participants is truly representative of the country's perspective, as well as including regional organizations that focus on thematic issues. The panel will also ensure gender balance amongst participants.

ENDS.