



**PACIFIC REGIONAL
STRATEGIC PLAN**

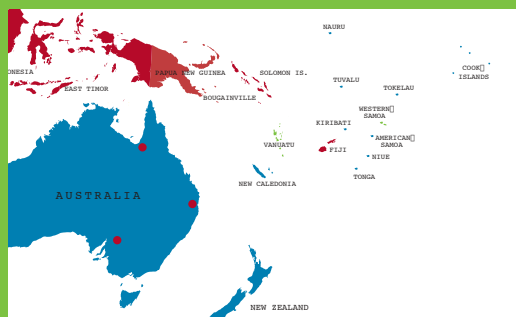
Overview of the Pacific region

The Pacific region comprises 22 island states and territories spread over 30 million square kilometres. It is commonly divided into three sub-regions of Melanesia (west), Micronesia (north) and Polynesia (south-east). The total population of the region is just over 7.5 million, with almost 5 million people living in Papua New Guinea.

Poverty is a significant and growing problem for many states in the Pacific region due to more than two decades of weak economic performance, population growth, urban drift and increasing inequalities. In addition, Pacific island countries are highly vulnerable to sudden economic or environmental changes as a result of their remoteness, geographical dispersion, susceptibility to natural disasters, high degree of economic openness, small internal markets and limited natural resources.¹

The populations of Pacific states are extremely young – over 50 per cent of Pacific islanders are aged 15 or under – which has significant implications for development interventions. Increasing urban drift, changes in traditional roles and responsibilities, and lack of educational infrastructure, support structures and employment opportunities all put young people at increasing risk of vulnerability and marginalisation.

Negotiating the changes brought about by globalisation poses a challenge for Pacific states. The last 100 years have witnessed a transition from traditional to modern systems of governance, the emergence of a cash economy and entry into the global marketplace. As a consequence of all of these factors, the Pacific region is experiencing rapid social change and a restructuring of political, economic, social and cultural relationships. With all of these transformations come inevitable changes in relationships between women and men, particularly in gender roles.



Cover: A woman and child from Aitape, Papua New Guinea. Following the devastating tsunami in 1998, Oxfam Community Aid Abroad provided emergency relief and engaged in ongoing rehabilitation and development work around Aitape. Photo: Jerry Galea/Oxfam CAA

Top right: Children at a village school in the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea. Oxfam New Zealand and Oxfam Community Aid Abroad support ATprojects' work on sanitation and hygiene in schools in the Eastern Highlands. Photo: ATprojects



The Oxfam International Pacific Regional Strategic Plan consists of five Aims derived from Oxfam's rights-based approach to the alleviation of poverty and the creation of a fairer world.

- AIM 1: The right to a sustainable livelihood
- AIM 2: The right to basic social services
- AIM 3: The right to life and security
- AIM 4: The right to be heard – social and political citizenship
- AIM 5: The right to an identity – gender and diversity

Each Aim has Strategic Change Objectives, which are significant and sustained positive changes in the lives of people suffering from poverty, injustice, insecurity and exclusion. These Strategic Change Objectives must occur in order to achieve the five Aims.

Strategic direction

The Oxfam International Pacific Regional Strategic Plan focuses on Melanesia, specifically Papua New Guinea and Bougainville, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Fiji. The reason for this focus is that Melanesian countries suffer the most widespread poverty in the Pacific, and have experienced conflict, civil unrest and difficulties in providing good governance in recent years.

The Pacific Regional Strategic Plan emphasises the creation of links between local interventions and national, regional or global impacts. Oxfam has an integrated approach which includes advocacy to achieve change in policies, laws and institutions. In the Pacific, Oxfam works to build the capacity of civil society to lobby and campaign for changes to policies, laws and structures that will have a long-term impact on poverty and injustice in the region.

Underpinning the Strategic Plan is an emphasis on building more effective partnerships in the

Pacific region, and forming alliances in the following priority areas:

- Livelihood security, particularly in relation to the impacts of trade, environmental change, natural disasters and civil unrest;
- Basic health and social services, particularly in relation to HIV/AIDS, water and sanitation, and education;
- Disaster mitigation and strengthening the capacity of civil society in relation to peace and economic security;
- Achieving and sustaining systems of good governance; and
- Gender equity.

Oxfam Community Aid Abroad (Australia) and Oxfam New Zealand jointly implement the Oxfam International Pacific Regional Strategic Plan. Both Oxfams are committed to developing institutional learning to improve the quality of the regional program and to learning from and with partners and relevant actors.

¹United Nations Development Programme: *Pacific Human Development Report*, 1999.

The right to a sustainable livelihood

Livelihoods and food security in the Pacific region are impacted upon by trade liberalisation, climate change, natural resource exploitation and conflict and displacement.

Natural resource exploitation and extractive industries

The movement towards a cash economy and trade liberalisation in Pacific states has resulted in unregulated natural resource exploitation, as well as a drift from rural to urban settings. Natural resource exploitation has been seen as a solution to many Pacific nations' economic stagnation, with largely negative environmental and social consequences.

Mining operations have had significant detrimental impacts on communities in the Pacific region, including loss of land and livelihoods, environmental contamination, and human rights violations. The social consequences of mining operations can be severe and ongoing and include increased alcohol abuse, community and family violence and decreasing health standards. Further, land disputes related to natural resources have fuelled ethnic tensions in some states.

Trade

Trade liberalisation has many implications and social costs for Pacific states, particularly in relation to livelihoods and food security.

Due to their unique geographic and demographic profiles, Pacific states face specific trade barriers,

including the lack of internal markets, the cost of transporting goods across vast distances, declining prices for major export commodities and the lack of infrastructure. These factors affect their ability to participate effectively in and benefit from a liberalised trade regime.

Climate change

Pacific states are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, such as irregular weather patterns, rising sea levels and damage to coastal ecosystems. In addition, the region receives regular cyclones, tsunamis and earthquakes.

Climate change has a particularly negative impact on livelihoods and food security. Village agriculture remains the main food and livelihood source for most Pacific islanders, and in many countries, rising sea levels and increasing salinity are further decreasing already limited areas of arable land.

The effects of climate change on traditional food production systems are felt increasingly by women, who bear much of the responsibility for subsistence food supplies. Women's traditional roles risk being eroded as it becomes more difficult to fulfil subsistence needs, and there is a growing reliance on processed and imported foods. With this comes an increasing dependence on the cash economy which can lead to urban drift and displacement.

How we work

To help people achieve their right to a sustainable livelihood, Oxfam works towards the following Strategic Change Objectives:

- People living in poverty will achieve food and income security as well as greater protection of, and control over, the natural resources on which they depend.
- People living in poverty will achieve access to secure paid employment, dignified working conditions and labour rights, and be empowered to participate in and benefit from markets.

Top: A couple tends their cottage garden in Kolombangara, Solomon Islands. Kastom Gaden Association, an Oxfam Community Aid Abroad partner in the Solomon Islands, works with rural communities to promote sustainable agriculture and livelihood security. Photo: Kastom Gaden Association

Right: A woman from Goilala District in the Central Province of Papua New Guinea expresses her concerns regarding the Tolukuma gold mine. With the support of Oxfam Community Aid Abroad, the Centre for Environmental Research and Development assists mining-affected communities in Papua New Guinea to raise their concerns with mine operators. Photo: Ingrid Macdonald/Oxfam CAA



To enable people to achieve food and income security, Oxfam Community Aid Abroad assists women and men to maintain and develop sustainable farming systems.

Oxfam Community Aid Abroad supports the Melanesian Farmer First Network, a regional network which assists rural communities to improve their food security and community health. By utilising innovative systems and technologies to complement local knowledge, the network helps farmers and rural communities to progress towards sustainable livelihoods and greater self-reliance. The Melanesian Farmer First Network links community-based organisations in the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu, providing a forum for the exchange of knowledge on sustainable agriculture and livelihood security, and strengthening technical skills and access to information.

To enable people to achieve greater protection of and control over their natural resources, Oxfam Community Aid Abroad assists communities affected by mining to voice their concerns about the environmental and social impacts of mining operations.

Oxfam Community Aid Abroad supports the Centre for Environmental Research and Development (CERD), an organisation which aims to reduce the harmful effects of mining on communities in Papua New Guinea. CERD works to empower communities and raise awareness of their rights in relation to land and natural resources, and undertakes advocacy with mining industry stakeholders to promote thorough impact assessment and negotiation procedures.

The right to basic social services

Access to health care, sanitation and education should be provided to all people in the Pacific, and are crucial to development.

Health standards in the Pacific region have fallen steadily in the last decade, increasing the vulnerability to poverty, particularly for women. This is compounded by a lack of basic services, such as access to water and sanitation. Further, despite repeated international commitments to providing access to free education for all children, this is far from reality in most Melanesian countries. For example, in Papua New Guinea, one third of the adult population is illiterate and many children – especially young girls – are not able to attend primary school.

HIV/AIDS

Over the last decade, there has been a steady increase in the number of reported HIV/AIDS cases in the Pacific, with sharp rises noted in Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Kiribati and Tuvalu. Eighty-five per cent of the reported HIV cases in the Pacific are in Papua New Guinea,² where the prevalence rate denotes a generalised epidemic.

While HIV prevalence in the Pacific region is relatively low by international standards, characteristics such as population mobility, increasing poverty, inadequate health services, civil and personal conflict, gender inequalities and gender-based violence combine to ensure a high vulnerability to the virus.

The main mode of HIV transmission is through heterosexual contact, and risk is increased by the high prevalence of sexually transmitted infections.

In most Pacific states, the response to HIV/AIDS is not yet well developed, and people living with the virus face significant stigma and discrimination, and receive minimal support and care.

Water and sanitation

Lack of access to clean water and sanitation is a growing concern in the Pacific and is one of the key drivers of high infant mortality rates in the region. Predominantly rural populations add to the difficulty of ensuring access to clean water for all.

Although both Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands possess among the largest renewable water resources per capita in the world,³ a third of all Solomon Islanders and three-quarters of the population of Papua New Guinea do not have access to safe water. The magnitude of this problem is relatively new in the region, and in the last 20 years, unsustainable logging and mining have contaminated many previously high quality water supplies.

Meeting the United Nations Millennium Development Goal of halving the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water by 2015 presents a considerable challenge in the Pacific region. Developing the necessary infrastructure and management to support the sustainability of access to clean water and hygiene promotion is an equal challenge.

How we work

To help people achieve their right to basic social services, Oxfam works towards the following Strategic Change Objectives:

- People living in poverty will achieve tangible improvements in their health through increased access to affordable and adequate basic health services, clean water, sanitation and public health services.
- All children living in poverty will achieve their right to good quality basic education, and adults living in poverty will have educational opportunities to assist them to overcome poverty.

To assist people to achieve tangible improvements in their health, Oxfam Community Aid Abroad works to increase awareness of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections.

Oxfam Community Aid Abroad supports a sexual health and HIV/AIDS education project being implemented by HELP Resources, an NGO based in the East Sepik Province of Papua New Guinea. The project is training 400 female village health volunteers in sexual health and HIV/AIDS prevention, and piloting a training program on sex education skills with a group of teachers, vocational trainers and education officials. By increasing awareness of HIV/AIDS prevention and care, the project aims to reduce the impact of HIV/AIDS on women, men and children in East Sepik.

Oxfam New Zealand works to increase people's capacity to analyse water and sanitation issues, and to enable local communities to develop lasting solutions.

Oxfam New Zealand's Water for Survival Program provides cost effective and practical solutions in areas where there is an urgent need for safe water and sanitation. Oxfam New Zealand works with ATprojects in the Eastern Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea, teaching students in community schools the importance of clean water and personal hygiene, and providing adequate and sustainable sanitation facilities.



Top: An 'ATloo' latrine at Asaro School, Papua New Guinea. Oxfam New Zealand supports ATprojects to provide appropriate technology and education in water and sanitation to schools in the Eastern Highlands Province. Photo: ATprojects
Above: Village health volunteers arrive at a mass training workshop on sexual health and HIV/AIDS prevention in Wewak, Papua New Guinea. Oxfam Community Aid Abroad supports HELP Resources' work on sexual health and HIV/AIDS in the East Sepik Province. Photo: HELP Resources

²World Health Organisation (Regional Office for the Western Pacific), *Update on the HIV/AIDS in the Pacific*, March 2003.

³United Nations Economic Social and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), *World Water Development Report*, 2003.

The right to life and security

Armed conflict and natural disasters pose significant threats to security – at national, community and individual levels – and to development in the Pacific region.

Civil unrest

Melanesian countries have experienced considerable conflict and civil unrest in recent decades. This can have serious consequences for people's security, health, livelihoods, education and the delivery of basic services.

- In Bougainville, the armed struggle for autonomy from Papua New Guinea lasted for over eight years. Approximately 20,000 people died and over 20,000 were displaced during the region's most intense and embittered conflict.
- In the Solomon Islands, the 'tension' between 1998 and 2000 led to more than 100 deaths and the displacement of 35,000 people. The breakdown in law and order continued after the signing of a peace agreement in October 2000, crippling the country's economic and social development.
- In the Fiji Islands, the May 2000 coup resulted in a period of political, social and economic instability, and put pressure on relations between indigenous and Indo-Fijians.

Issues related to the ownership of land and resources have contributed to these conflicts, and also to the outbreak of violence at a community level.

Disaster management

Pacific states are vulnerable to natural disasters, which have serious developmental consequences. Tropical cyclones, tsunamis, floods, landslides, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions jeopardise the socio-economic development of Pacific states by destroying food sources and infrastructure, and redirecting scarce government funds away from other areas of need.

Well-developed traditional mechanisms for disaster management exist in many Pacific states, but they are often unable to cope with the increasing number of cyclones, rising sea levels and higher populations. A challenge is to incorporate the relevant aspects of these traditional systems within national and regional disaster management programs.

How we work

To help people achieve their right to life and security, Oxfam works towards the following Strategic Change Objectives:

- A significant reduction in the number of people who die, fall sick and/or suffer deprivation as a direct result of armed conflict or natural disasters.
- A significant reduction in the number of people who suffer personal or communal violence, forced displacement or armed conflict.



Top: An organic garden established by villagers from central Bougainville through an Osi Tanata livelihoods project. With the support of Oxfam New Zealand, Osi Tanata works with communities to build sustainable futures in post-conflict Bougainville. Photo: Jessica Dart/Oxfam NZ

Left: Internally displaced people assist in loading relief supplies onto a boat destined for Tikopia and Anuta. After Cyclones Zoë and Gina hit the Solomon Islands in December 2002 and June 2003, Oxfam Community Aid Abroad assisted in the provision of emergency relief, including food supplies. Photo: Chris Stuart/Oxfam CAA

To reduce the number of people who suffer from armed conflict, forced displacement and other forms of violence, Oxfam works with civil society organisations to build their capacity to prevent and resolve conflicts, promote peace building and reconciliation, and address the causes of conflict.

For five years, Oxfam New Zealand has worked in the area of post-conflict peace building in Bougainville. This work resulted in the creation of Osi Tanata, a local organisation which aims to protect and preserve cultural identity through training, research and advocacy. By working with communities and community leaders to equip people with skills to manage their lives sustainably, Osi Tanata has contributed to building durable peace in Bougainville, and has managed to reach out to communities living in the 'No-Go Zone' around Panguna mine.

From 2001 to 2003, Oxfam Community Aid Abroad implemented a community peace building program in the Solomon Islands, providing small grants for community-based peace building activities and training community-based organisations in conflict resolution. This program supported 122 community projects, reaching an estimated 50,000 people. In July 2003, Oxfam Community Aid Abroad established its Solomon Islands country office and continues to work to strengthen civil society, empower men and women at local, national and regional levels to play a role in peace building and reconciliation, and to address the root causes of conflict.

To reduce the number of people who suffer as a result of natural disasters, Oxfam Community Aid Abroad works with national and local organisations to respond to emergencies caused by natural disasters, and reduce risk to disasters.

In late December 2002, Cyclone Zoë struck the remote islands of Tikopia and Anuta in the Solomon Islands, ravaging 70 homes and destroying most of the islands' food crops and water supplies. Oxfam Community Aid Abroad helped communities to rebuild their lives, distributing relief supplies such as tarpaulins, material and seeds to replace food crops destroyed by the cyclone.

In June 2003, Tikopia was hit by another cyclone, which destroyed recently rebuilt houses and new crops. Oxfam Community Aid Abroad worked with the Solomon Islands National Disaster Management Office to provide urgent food supplies to affected communities.

The right to be heard – social and political citizenship

For people to achieve their economic and social rights, it is necessary to address more than the material aspects of poverty and injustice. Social and political citizenship also has an instrumental relationship with poverty eradication and equitable economic development.

In many Pacific states, people's exclusion from public decision-making processes hinders their ability and opportunities to move out of poverty. Achieving lasting change in governance structures and processes – at community, national and regional levels – can lead to significant impacts on poverty alleviation.

Evidence shows that democracy and civil and political liberties go hand-in-hand with improvements in social services and sustained rates of growth. Further, participation in public decision-making improves the lives of poor people by increasing the fair allocation of resources and reducing the threat of civil conflict.

To promote the achievement of civil and political rights, Oxfam assists people to understand their rights, and access the knowledge and skills to influence decisions affecting their lives.

Oxfam New Zealand supports Famili Blong Serah, a radio drama program produced by Wan Smolbag Theatre in Vanuatu which uses drama to raise awareness of reproductive health and other development issues. The radio program enables awareness-raising messages to target larger numbers of people, including rural and semi-literate populations. Famili Blong Serah has extensive reach, and is aired throughout Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, Bougainville and the Solomon Islands. Oxfam New Zealand also supports Wan Smolbag Theatre to provide training in script writing and theatre and radio production in other Melanesian countries.

In Fiji, Oxfam Community Aid Abroad supports the Social Empowerment and Education Programme (SEEP) implemented by the Ecumenical Centre for Research, Education and Advocacy. SEEP is a process of community empowerment that aims to involve people in the process of influencing or making decisions that directly affect their lives, whether at a local, provincial or national level. Through a network of trained community facilitators, SEEP works with selected rural communities to foster skills in community mobilisation and participation in decision-making processes.

How we work

To help people achieve their right to be heard, Oxfam works towards the following Strategic Change Objective:

- Marginalised people will achieve their civil and political rights; have an effective voice in influencing decisions affecting their lives; and will gain the moral support and skills they need to exercise these rights.



Above: Actors from Wan Smolbag Theatre recording sound effects for Famili Blong Serah, a radio drama program supported by Oxfam New Zealand. Photo: Wan Smolbag Theatre

The right to an identity – gender and diversity

Throughout the Pacific region, large sections of populations are marginalised and excluded from equal participation in local and national life. Marginalised groups include rural populations, women, minority ethnic groups, homosexuals and people living with HIV/AIDS.

Gender inequality is a key issue of concern in Pacific states and women face higher rates of poverty, illiteracy, discrimination, violence, poor health, heavy daily workloads and unemployment than men. In general, women continue to be bypassed as decision-makers in the planning and implementation of development projects, and are vastly under-represented in government and community decision-making bodies. There is a pressing need for mainstream gender awareness in programs and policy at all levels, and to challenge discriminatory attitudes and practices towards women, in particular gender violence.

Right: Participants in a Young Women in Leadership workshop run by Fiji Women's Rights Movement and supported by Oxfam New Zealand. Photo: Fiji Women's Rights Movement

To assist marginalised groups to exercise their rights, it is necessary to increase their economic, social and political participation, and ensure their effective representation at all levels of government and civil society structures.

How we work

To help people achieve their right to gender and diversity, Oxfam works towards the following Strategic Change Objective:

- Women, ethnic and cultural minorities, and other groups oppressed or marginalised because of their identity, will enjoy equal rights and status.



To promote the enjoyment of equal rights and status by marginalised groups, Oxfam supports organisations which advance the rights of women and work towards women's empowerment.

Oxfam Community Aid Abroad and Oxfam New Zealand support the Family Support Centre, an organisation which aims to reduce family violence in the Solomon Islands through raising awareness, and providing counselling and legal advice to victims and perpetrators of violence. The activities supported by Oxfam include a research and awareness-raising project on male violence, a theatre group and a counselling service.

Oxfam New Zealand supports the Young Women in Leadership Project implemented by the Fiji Women's Rights Movement. This project works with young women to raise awareness of their rights and responsibilities and builds their capacity to exercise their rights.



Left: Children from a village in central Bougainville where Oxfam New Zealand and Osi Tanata have worked to promote sustainable livelihoods and durable peace. Photo: Harriet Sewell/Oxfam NZ

Oxfam International is a global confederation of 12 independent non-government organisations dedicated to fighting poverty and injustice around the world. The Oxfams work together to achieve greater impact through their collective efforts.

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