HOW TO COLLABORATE
WITH PACIFIC CHURCHES
FOR DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH

Guidance for effective approaches to collaborations with Churches, for development research in the Pacific.

Presenters: Rebekah Cochrane and Philippa Smales
The RDI Network

We support production and use of evidence to improve development impact

The Research for Development Impact (RDI) Network is a network of practitioners, researchers and evaluators working in international development and global social justice

The Network exists to lead, stimulate and support:
• Effective, ethical development research practice
• Cross-sector partnerships and linkages
• Uptake and use of evidence in policy and practice

Funded through DFAT and the Australian aid program
Methodology

• Desk-based research.

• **22 interviews**, conducted with individuals representing Pacific Churches and/or Pacific Church research collaborations.

• **Case studies** represent research collaborations with organisations and institutions based in Vanuatu, Fiji, Samoa, PNG, New Zealand and Australia.

• **A Steering group** with representatives from academia and NGO’s supported the research process.
Why collaborate with Pacific Churches for development?

Christian adherence in the Pacific Islands is over 80% (with the exception of Fiji).

Table 4: Percentage of Christian adherence in Pacific nations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>% of Christians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Samoa</td>
<td>98.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook Islands</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federated States of Micronesia</td>
<td>95.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>64.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kiribati</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marshall Islands</td>
<td>97.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nauru</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Caledonia</td>
<td>85.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niue</td>
<td>96.4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>% of Christians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Palau</td>
<td>86.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papua New Guinea</td>
<td>99.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samoa</td>
<td>96.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solomon Islands</td>
<td>97.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tokelau</td>
<td>99.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonga</td>
<td>98.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuvalu</td>
<td>96.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanuatu</td>
<td>93.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wallis and Futuna</td>
<td>97.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Why collaborate with Pacific Churches for development research?

- Churches hold ‘dense’ networks, have extensive local knowledge and hold the trust of citizens (Marshall 2013: 38-39).
- Working in partnership for development has become increasingly common.
- Humanitarian & community development emphasis on participation and localisation - applies to including local, influential structures such as the Church.
- Shared values: In support of social justice and improved well-being for communities.
Main components of research:

- Why Collaborate?
- How to prepare for collaboration;
- How to manage a collaboration;
- Pacific research methodologies;
- Case Studies.

Christianity, and Church structures influence the “how” in each stage.
Do Pacific Churches want to collaborate for development/research?

“It depends”

“YES” if:
1) It reflects local church and regional priorities: gender & family violence, poverty, climate change, disaster preparedness, environmental protection of land, sustainable agriculture and the impact of international investment on small business.
2) The activities are funded by international partners.
3) There is opportunity to partner with international experts for specific learning/capacity building purposes.

“NO”:
1) Potential for activities to be colonised; devaluing local priorities, beliefs, values, customs and research expertise.
2) Concerns that the Church would be used as a commodity for Western agendas, without regard for the Church’s priorities, ownership of knowledge, autonomy or values.
“Pacific values” should influence behaviour and practice throughout all stages of the project.

- Find out dress codes, cultural protocols.
- Use correct titles for people e.g. ‘Reverend’.
- Acknowledge Pacific communities as knowledge holders and experts.
- Demonstrate respect and courtesy for older people.
- Practise humility in conversation.

- Provide food/drink in meetings and interviews. Where possible, eat the food that you are offered. Sharing food and meals is important in Pacific cultures.
- Find out the research priorities of the country and Church group you will be working in.
- Include emerging Pacific researchers to build capacity.
- Give back in time, knowledge or gifts.

- Give time to building genuine relationships.
- Don’t rush conversations.
- Share about yourself on a personal level and get to know your Pacific colleagues.
- Maintain ongoing relationships after the project is completed.

- Take part in your team’s lives as invited-attend family gatherings, church services. Present your whole self to the relationship rather than keeping a professional boundary.
- Make space for prayers and devotions in team meetings, as led by your Church colleagues.
- Try to understand and acknowledge the interconnectedness of the spiritual, social, cultural and physical aspects of the research.
1) How to prepare for a collaboration with a Pacific Church

- Emphasis on the preparation phase (so that church can be understood and respected).
- Find mutual values/priorities for research/development agenda;
- Consult widely in this phase – for opinions on local priorities, permissions, cultural context & to understand individual denomination;
- Invest time to establish positive relationships & team dynamics;
- Prayer before/after meetings
- Western partners should remove themselves from seat of power and control;
- Identify opportunities for long-term capacity building
- Define support systems for local church staff;
- Define procedure for handling grievances, together (there are biblical protocols);
Seek all necessary permissions (as led by local staff).
3) Pacific Research Methodologies
(relevant to any context where information is being shared)

Data Collection, Monitoring & Evaluation:
• Find the most appropriate method of collecting data according to context e.g. CAN DO have a template used on mobile phones, and train volunteers accordingly. (Also train about including ‘vulnerable’ groups (and their families) in data collection, using biblical resources.

• Traditional qualitative interviews are generally not useful. Rather semi-structured, relaxed conversations, while ‘doing’ something are preferred.

• Talanoa: a conversation, discussion, story telling.

Vaioleti—“a personal encounter where people story their issues, their realities and aspirations.”
4) Case Study - The CAN DO Ambae Volcano Response

**KEY STRENGTHS IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION**

Church networks provide localized humanitarian action through:

- **REACH**
  The combined networks of church partners are extensive.

- **DEPTH**
  Churches are influential messengers across society, especially in the Pacific region.

- **LONG-ESTABLISHED RELATIONSHIPS**
  The power of the church is in its reach and relationships as part of the community.
Connect with us…

E: rdi@acfid.asn.au
W: rdinetwork.org.au
@RDINetwork

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