

**FORTY-EIGHTH MEETING OF THE
COMMITTEE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF GOVERNMENTS AND ADMINISTRATIONS**
(26–28 June 2018, Noumea, New Caledonia)

AGENDA ITEM No. 3: Pacific Learning and Innovation Hub

(Paper presented by the Secretariat)

Summary

1. This paper presents an update to CRGA on the Secretariat's exploration of the purpose and feasibility of developing a multi-stakeholder Pacific Hub for Learning and Innovation, as directed by the 10th Conference of the Pacific Community in 2017 (Conference Communiqué, paragraph 8).
2. The Pacific Learning and Innovation Hub (the Hub) was envisaged as a potential collaborative platform, designed by Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs), the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP) and other stakeholders to advance novel ideas and solutions to Pacific development challenges.
3. The Secretariat researched the:
 - need for innovation, and documentation and sharing of learning in the Pacific
 - level of CROP interest in a regional partnership in learning and innovation
 - innovation capability in the Secretariat to support the Hub.
4. The need for learning and innovation in development in the region was first explored through a literature review. Despite significant investment and effort, the region continues to face complex and sustained development challenges. Individual efforts do not achieve the impacts that are possible through collective efforts. Without science and evidence, projects are not always adequately designed and efforts may be misdirected. In other cases, efforts are shaped by donor interests and investment, not by country need. There is a need to be more innovative in our approaches to understanding problems, testing ideas and designing scalable solutions for greater development impact.
5. The Secretariat shared the proposal for the Hub with CROP Deputies at their meeting in Auckland in April. The proposal stimulated discussion of how the Hub could be used to generate and share evidence and learning across organisations, encourage innovation by bringing together expertise and experience, and test and trial ideas.
6. However, the meeting did not make a decision to support the proposal for the Hub. Instead, CROP Deputies wished to further explore the utility of such a regional partnership against their agencies' own priorities and plans.

7. The SPC Executive continued researching its own innovation capability through several trial projects. Assessment of applications to a one-off Innovation Fund, feedback from SPC proposals to the DFAT¹ Accelerator Fund, and a preliminary organisational capability assessment demonstrate that there are pockets of capability and readiness for innovation within the Secretariat. However, further assessment is required to identify strengths and weaknesses within the SPC systems and processes that would be required to support the Hub.
8. The research is now at the point where it requires CRGA consideration. With CRGA's encouragement, the Secretariat could further explore innovation opportunities and alternative models to a regional partnership.

Recommendations

9. CRGA is invited to:
 - i. note the early research and assessment work conducted by the Secretariat on the need for a Pacific Hub for Learning and Innovation, and innovation capabilities within the Secretariat to meet that need;
 - ii. note the CROP Deputies' discussion of the Hub and their wish to further consider the utility of a regional platform against their agencies' individual plans and priorities for learning and innovation;
 - iii. consider whether the Secretariat should continue exploring alternative models of partnership and opportunities to support innovation in the region.

¹ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia.

Pacific Learning and Innovation Hub

Purpose

10. This paper presents the outcomes of research on the proposed Pacific Learning and Innovation Hub (the Hub) and the results of consultation with CROP on establishing the Hub as a regional partnership. The paper proposes further exploration of partnership models and opportunities to support learning and innovation in the region.

Background

11. In July 2017, the 10th Conference of the Pacific Community tasked SPC with exploring the purpose and feasibility of developing a multi-stakeholder Pacific Hub for Learning and Innovation (Conference Communiqué, paragraph 8). The Hub would be an action-focused initiative, potentially involving other CROP agencies and partners.
12. The Hub was originally envisaged as a regional partnership to enhance and amplify work under international and regional mechanisms, including the Sustainable Development Goals and Framework for Pacific Regionalism. Based on research of innovation platforms in other regions, the Hub's roles could include the following:
 - Identify and unpack Pacific development challenges, such as Health Security, which require critical and collaborative attention because the issues are complex and systemic.
 - Add impetus to innovative solutions and decision-making based on scientific data.
 - Act as a regional mechanism for collaboration and resourcefulness, using expert knowledge and innovative thinking from the region and beyond to recognise and nurture good ideas and approaches.
 - Support the efforts of CROP agencies to take measured risks, knowing that new, unproven approaches may fail.
 - Take good ideas, test them, and document learning to inform investment and project designs that can be implemented by relevant CROP agencies, development partners, civil society and private sector stakeholders.
13. At their April meeting in Auckland, the Deputy Director Generals of the Pacific Community discussed with CROP Deputies the Conference's proposal for a Pacific Learning and Innovation Hub as a modern and inclusive mechanism to inject scientific enquiry and experiential evidence into Leaders' discussions of regional challenges and approaches.
14. The CROP Deputies were not in a position to endorse the proposal and wished to further discuss it with their respective organisations.

SPC's innovation capability

15. As part of our research efforts, we have sought to better understand SPC's current innovation capability. SPC is a multidisciplinary organisation working in diverse ways to deliver development outcomes with PICTs, using either one-off (project) or repeatable, scalable (programmatic) models. Our processes, policies, systems and values keep the ship moving forward but do not necessarily help us change direction or enable corporate innovation.
16. SPC has been testing its design competency for innovation through a one-off Innovation Fund. In December 2017, SPC called for applications from within SPC for an internal seed or innovation fund.

The criteria for applications included relevance to SPC priorities, and clearly articulated and justified innovation. Sixteen applications were received with just under half demonstrating strong innovation.

17. DFAT launched the Australian Development Accelerator Fund around the same time. SPC submitted proposals to the Fund. Feedback on proposals that were not referred to DFAT Posts indicated that they generally did not represent innovation² as defined by DFAT for the purposes of the Fund.
18. An innovation capability assessment³ provided an indicative analysis of SPC's current innovation performance. The assessment measured SPC against three criteria, with findings as follows:
 1. **Innovation culture:** SPC is making incremental headway in fostering an innovation culture. However, we need to think beyond short-term time frames and empower staff to recognise change as an opportunity for innovation and to understand how their innovation aligns to SPC objectives and priorities.
 2. **Resources for innovation:** The small fund we trialled this year is a good start. However, if we want to develop innovation, we need to consider more human and financial resources so that innovation is not seen as the responsibility of only a few staff.
 3. **Innovation capability:** We have more work to do in understanding how to go about 'achieving' an innovative outcome and incentivising and recognising innovation.
19. The snapshot assessment and our own testing demonstrate that there are pockets of innovation within SPC where new technologies are being designed, tested, trialled and scaled. There are also instances of innovative, people-centred approaches informing project design. However, we need to better understand our organisational capability to nurture, grow and sustain innovation across SPC.
20. SPC is working with Collective Campus, an innovation hub, school and consultancy, to conduct an Innovation Pulse Check and a Discovery Workshop to further test the 'innovation pulse' of SPC to understand 'who and how many at different levels of the organisation' are ready and able to innovate.

Key benefits to continuing with researching alternative partnerships, opportunities and models

21. The Hub has the potential to directly benefit SPC members through:
 - supporting members with scientific expertise, enquiry and experiential evidence in their in-depth exploration, information collection and research to unpack issues that are core to their development needs;
 - bringing a global perspective to their issues, and gathering expertise from a wide range of actors;
 - nurturing, and experimenting with, innovative ideas and solutions that have not yet been proven or tested in the Pacific context or in various Pacific environments;

² DFAT has specific definitions for open innovation, product innovation, process innovation and business model innovation <https://www.irf.net.au/Home/InnovationResources> [accessed 01/05/2018]

³ Innovation Capability Assessment – optimise and leverage existing strengths; diagnose innovation blockers and identify enablers; measure return on investment; build a case for innovation in the Pacific and SPC; and drive a culture change to shift mind-sets and behaviour.

- documenting learning through the innovation cycle and sharing lessons across sectors, governments and partners.

Proposed next steps

22. If CRGA were to support the Secretariat to explore alternative partnerships, opportunities and models, we could facilitate a broader consultation process with members, donor partners, universities and research institutes, the private sector and with existing innovation projects in member countries.
23. The Secretariat will undertake the Innovation Pulse Check and Discovery Workshop mentioned above. These will provide SPC with a set of recommendations to progress organisational readiness and capability for innovation.

Recommendations

24. CRGA is invited to:
 - i. note the early research and assessment work conducted by the Secretariat on the need for a Pacific Hub for Learning and Innovation, and innovation capabilities within the Secretariat to meet that need;
 - ii. note the CROP Deputies' discussion of the Hub and their wish to further consider the utility of a regional platform against their agencies' individual plans and priorities for learning and innovation;
 - iii. consider whether the Secretariat should continue exploring alternative models of partnership and opportunities to support innovation in the region.